

Taking in the Good Course

CLASS 1: Engaging Your Mind

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Themes

Introducing taking in the good

Laying a foundation for the course, helping people feel comfortable

Engaging your mind in an active way

Distinguishing between *being with* and *working with* the mind

Fundamental perspectives and skills with the mind

What we mean by "positive," "negative," "good," and "bad"

The focus of this course, installing resources into neural structure, turning positive states into positive traits

The negativity bias

Introducing peace, happiness, and love

For the coming week: focus on having physically pleasurable experiences

Logistics List

[This list applies to each class.]

Nametags

Chimes or bell

Extra handouts

Welcome (25)

Welcome participants (1)

Introduce yourself (1)

Participants say their names (3)

Summarize purpose, rationale for the course (2)

The aim of this course is to teach you how to turn fleeting experiences into lasting inner resources. In other words, it is about the skills of converting momentary mental *states* into enduring neural *traits*. Grounded in neuroscience, this course is about how to use your mind to change your brain to change your mind for the better.

Potential inner resources you could build up in your brain include mindfulness, strength, emotional balance, calm, gratitude, happiness, confidence, feeling cared about, compassion, and love. We all need resources like these for managing stress, dealing with life's challenges, and having more to offer others.

While the course draws on a recognition of positive facts and an appreciation of positive states of mind, it is about something other than "positive thinking." It is primarily about getting good at the process of transforming positive *states* of mind into underlying, enduring neural *structures*.

Context and Cautions (2)

I presume you have read the Overview, including its sections on Cautions and Limits to Confidentiality.

Did you have any questions about what you read?

This is an *educational* program focused on teaching a fundamental psychological skill: the conversion of positive experiences - positive mental states - into underlying neural traits.

I believe that this skill is very useful for everyday well-being and functioning, and for personal growth and - if it is of interest to you - spiritual practice.

This skill could also be useful for dealing with anxiety, depressed mood, and other psychological issues. But this course is not psychotherapy, nor a psychological or medical treatment. In particular, this course is not appropriate for someone with severe depression.

While the course is not a psychotherapy, as with any psychologically oriented course or workshop, things may get stirred up. Even if our primary focus is on experiences that feel good and build up good resources inside. Know that things may come up for you that feel new or uncomfortable, and that you will need to take care of yourself.

I am happy to talk with you about things that come up, but obviously there are many participants and only one teacher. Primarily, you need to draw on your own resources, both inside yourself and in your life, to manage any challenging experiences in this course. If you do not feel you can do this on your own, you should not take this course, and I will be happy to give you a full refund at the end of this class.

Explain logistics and answer Qs (3)

Reminder of when and where we'll be meeting

Nametags

Who to make checks out to

Please turn off cellphones

Limits to Confidentiality in the Course (3)

I personally will not communicate any identifying information about course participants to anyone not in the course.

But I cannot control what other participants say. I cannot guarantee your confidentiality.

I do ask everyone here to agree not to communicate any identifying information about course participants to anyone not in the course. Could we all agree to this? Could you raise your hand if you agree?

Great.

Sharing course materials (1)

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.

Any questions about this?

Do you all agree to this?

Thank you.

Set up experiential practices (3)

This course is first and foremost about your *experience*, the moment to moment flow of thoughts, feelings, sounds and sights, memories images, desires, tastes and smells and touches, behavioral inclinations . . . the whole stream of consciousness.

Again and again, we will explore the *having* of a useful experience, the *extending* of this experience so it lasts and is big in your mind, and the sense of *absorbing* it, of really registering the experience so that it is more likely to be encoded into neural structure, more likely to be *installed* into your brain.

As such, while we will have presentations and discussions, the heart of this course is its guided experiential practices - and then how you engage these practices yourself outside of the classes.

We'll also have some activities in pairs in which you can talk about your experiences with others. The format of these will be one person mainly speaking while one person mainly listens, then switching roles. As a listener, it's good to be supportive and alright to ask questions if something isn't clear to you, but please don't offer advice.

As you'll see, in any experiential practice, including the pairs, two things are going on: your attempts at the practice itself, and the things that happen as a result. Sometimes a practice works, and sometimes it's like trying to light a fire with wet wood: nothing ignites. Either result is OK, though naturally people prefer the fire!

Try to have an attitude of interest, curiosity, and acceptance about your own mind, both if a practice works for you and if it does not.

Also, unless something arises for you that is particularly valuable, I suggest continually returning to the practice you are attempting. That way you will become more skillful with it, and gradually work through any obstructions to it.

Now, when you do a practice, take care of yourself. If you start feeling uncomfortable or upset, it is perfectly alright to pull your attention out of the practice and move it to something else.

The Plan for This Class (2)

Shortly we'll do a series of brief practices that will give you a taste of taking in the good, and how to start doing it in a variety of ways.

Then after some discussion and a break, we'll do another round of taking in the good. After discussing this practice and going over some skills with taking in the good, we will create a foundation for taking in the good by exploring different ways to engage the mind. This foundation will create a framework, a context, for the rest of this course, plus give you a number of important skills and understandings that we will draw upon for taking in the good.

Then we will do take in the good again - lots of good to take in! - set up the week to come, and finish with one last practice of taking in the good.

A Taste of Taking in the Good (20)

Introduction (4)

As we will explore many times in the weeks to come, there are three basic steps to taking in the good:

1. Have a positive experience.
2. Extend it
3. Absorb it

Number 1 is *activation*, and numbers 2 and 3 are *installation*.

The fundamental aim, the point, of these three steps is to deliberately help a positive experience to *get into your brain*.

Let's try this three times, in different ways, a few minutes each.

In actual practice in everyday life, you will move through the three steps fairly quickly, and they can sometimes blend together - all of which is fine. But here, learning this method, we will unpack the steps to make them distinct, and take our time with them.

Also in daily life, you will usually *already* be having a positive experience, and then you extend and absorb it. But in this setting, we need to be more active than that, and look for or think about different things to bring up a positive experience. So it might feel a little artificial - just know that in "real life," much of the time you will already be having a positive experience.

Additionally, it is actually a very important psychological skill to develop, to be able to self-activate a positive experience - especially those experiences, those states of mind that are especially useful in certain situations. [Give personal example.]

As we do these three brief practices, in the beginning I will give pretty detailed suggestions, but by the third round my suggestions will be pretty minimal as you take charge of this practice yourself.

Round 1 (4)

Alright get settled, eyes open or closed.

First step, *having* a positive experience, see if you can find **something pleasant or beneficial in your experience right now**. Perhaps a relaxed sense of breathing, or warmhearted good wishes toward others, or some gladness about good things in your life.

Not straining or stressing to make something positive happen - rather, opening to something positive already present in your experience. There may also be unpleasant, uncomfortable aspects to your experience, and that's alright. Simply find and become aware of one thing that is positive.

[pause]

Second step, when you find something positive, *extend* your experience of it. Stay with it. Help it last. Keep your attention on it. Return attention to it if it wanders.

Open to it in your body, let it become a full experience.

Positive experiences can be mild or subtle, and still pervade the mind.

[pause]

And third step, which overlaps the second one: *absorb* this experience, intend and sense that it is sinking into you. Like water into a sponge, or a jewel into the treasure chest of your heart. Or simply knowing that this experience is becoming a part of you.

Receiving it, letting it in.

[pause]

And noticing how you feel right now.

Round 2 (4)

OK, let's try this again.

First step, *having* a positive experience, this time think of something in your life these days - an ongoing condition or a recent event - that you feel **glad or grateful about**. It could be a seemingly small or simple thing. Maybe something nice happened recently, or you have enough food, or you have a friend who likes you, or a nice pet, or you recently accomplished or completed something.

Once you identify what this is, see if you can let the knowing of this good fact become a positive experience. Something, even if it's subtle, that has an aspect of emotion or body sensations to it.

[pause]

Second step, when you start having a positive experience, even a mild one, *extend* it. Stay with it. Help it last. Keep your attention on it.

Open to it in your body, let it become a full experience.

Without stress or strain, see if you can help it become even fuller, even more intense.

[pause]

And third step, which overlaps the second one: *absorb* the experience, intend and sense that it is sinking into you.

Receiving it, letting it in.

As you are sinking into it, it is sinking into you.

[pause]

And noticing how you feel right now.

Round 3 (4)

OK, let's try this again.

First step, having a positive experience, this time think of **someone who you know that cares about you**. It could be a person, a pet, or a spiritual being or force. The relationship does not need to be perfect. But in at least one slice of the relationship pie, you know you are cared about.

Being cared about has different aspects, any one of which is OK. It could be someone that makes you feel seen, understood . . . or included, liked, appreciated, or even loved. And it could be knowing that you are cared about by a group of people.

If other thoughts come up, of not being liked and so forth, notice them and then bring attention back to someone, or to a group, that you know cares about you.

And then let the knowing of this fact that you are cared about become a feeling of being cared about.

[pause]

Second step, when you start having an experience of feeling cared about, even a mild one, *extend* it. Stay with it. Help it last. Keep your attention on it.

Open to it in your body, let it become a full experience.

Without stress or strain, see if you can help it become even fuller, even more intense.

[pause]

And third step, which overlaps the second one: *absorb* the experience, intend and sense that it is sinking into you.

Receiving it, letting it in.

As you are sinking into it, it is sinking into you.

[pause]

And noticing how you feel right now.

45 MINUTES SO FAR

Discussion (20)

OK, let's talk about this.

- Distinguish among the steps.
- Distinguish between *finding* a positive experience in the first round and *creating* one in the second and third rounds.
- Reinforce the distinction between activation and installation.
- See what came up for people about feeling glad and grateful . . . and cared about.

This idea, of registering, of getting a sense of, a useful experience, skill, state of mind, idea, action, etc. so that you can draw upon it again and again is very central to this course. We will return to this idea many times in the weeks ahead.

→ Ask how it was to be relatively active in the mind, to be working with it. And to be deliberately increasing the positive in it. Use this as the segue into the material that follows.

(1) Sometimes we experience a constraint, barrier, limitation, inhibition in doing something for ourselves that actually we know rationally is perfectly alright, appropriate, and often good for others as well for us to do this for ourselves. In general, I will refer to such things as an *obstruction*.

What makes sense to do if we encounter such a barrier?

Definitely be aware of it, holding it in the simple accepting, non-judgmental, non-self-critical awareness of things appearing in the mind, in awareness, that we explored in the first practice today.

Then there is a kind of choice. Either remain attentive to the obstruction - perhaps exploring it some, curious about what it's like, maybe curious about what else could be related to it in the mind - or try to shift attention back to the practice you were doing: in this case, letting go in your body.

If you are trying to shift attention back to a practice, away from an obstruction, you could use one or more things to help this happen, such as reminding yourself why the practice is worth doing or why it would be alright for you to do it.

Generally, unless you discover an obstruction that would be very valuable to explore right now, I recommend trying to do the practice itself if you can while it is our focus in this class. Then if you like, you can explore the obstruction later on.

65 MINUTES SO FAR

Break (20)

This will be a 15 minute break.

[Say where the bathrooms are.]

Please be back by _____. We'll start on time.

Relaxation (20)

The Practice (10)

OK, let's try another practice.

As before, get settled, coming into a sense of presence with yourself.

OK, the first step, *having* a positive experience - See if there is any sense of **relaxation** in your body . . . perhaps a sense of resting, letting go . . . just being . . . stress or tension draining out of you abiding at ease . . .

Once you have found this positive experience, then in Step 2 you *extend* it, staying with it.

Hold another distractions at bay.

Create a kind of sanctuary for this positive experience, this relaxation. Give yourself over to it.

Open to it, let yourself become absorbed in it. See if you can stay with it, sustain the experience of it.

Know what this is like, to sustain, to extend a positive experience.

Meanwhile, in Step 3, you are *absorbing* this sense of relaxation. Letting it sink into you as you sink into it.

QUIET FOR A MINUTE

OK, come on back.

Pairs (10)

In a moment I'll ask you to pick a partner and take turns, two minutes at a time, saying whatever you like about two questions:

- What did you experience in the relaxation practice we just did?
- What's it been like for you so far in this class to try to take in the good?

I'll give instructions as we go through it, but the format is this:

- When you get with your partner, pick an A and a B. A's will go first.
- One partner will mainly speak while the other will mainly listen. It's good to be supportive if you are a listener, and fine to ask questions if something is unclear. Please don't offer any advice.
- A's will start on the first question – which I will repeat - while B's listen. I'll give time signals. Please switch when I ask you to, and B's will talk about the first question while A's listen.

- Then it will be time for the second question, which I will repeat: A's will start while B's listen. I'll give time signals. Please switch when I ask you to, and B's will talk about the second question while A's listen.

Like any practice in this course, it's OK to sit this out, no worries at all.

Any questions about format?

OK, let's begin.

→ Do the practice.

105 MINUTES SO FAR

Discussion (20)

(Key questions are bulleted, teaching points are numbered)

- (1) By "positive," we mean *pragmatically* positive: in other words, what leads to well-being and welfare for yourself and perhaps others.

Sometimes what is pragmatically positive does not feel pleasant. For example, a sense of fierce will to survive in the body when in a tough situation (e.g., swimming in the ocean and caught in a big wave) may feel neutral or even unpleasant, but not positive.

And not all pleasant experiences are pragmatically positive. For example, eating three cookies in a row may be pleasant in the mouth, but not pragmatically positive for the rest of the body!

This said, as we will see - and won't get into talking about right now - most pragmatically positive experiences do indeed feel pleasant. And that is really nice experientially. And a good way to motivate ourselves to open to and receive pragmatically positive experiences.

(2) By the way, this point applies to “negative.” When I use that word I mean *pragmatically* negative: something that leads to suffering and harm for yourself and perhaps others.

Note that something that is pragmatically negative may feel pleasant, like those three cookies.

By definition, unpleasant experiences contain suffering - broadly defined. And often these experiences are harmful as well; for example, in terms of stress and its long-term negative effects on physical and mental health; or in terms of firing us up - like anger does - so that we end up hurting others.

As we will see - and won't say any more about right now - wisdom is not to fight with or repress your negative experiences, because that just adds negative to negative. The art, as we'll see again and again, is to bring awareness to the negative experience for sure; sometimes this is enough. And often, on the foundation of the first step, awareness of the negative experience, the art is to gently let the experience go, and sometimes replace it with something positive. This is all I'll say about this right now, and this is a theme, a process, that we will return to many times in this course.

(3) When we encounter a hiccup, hitch, speed bump or other obstruction in the mind, it helps to have a gentle yet persistent spirit of exploration. Keep looking.

If you can't find something in your mind, maybe you can find it or it will arise a moment later, perhaps in another place in the vast territory of the mind.

(4) As you have probably noticed, any moment of experience is like a big mosaic with many tiles.

Even one aspect of your experience - such as body sensations - is like smaller mosaic, though still one with multiple tiles.

It is interesting and useful to appreciate the complex, the *compounded*, nature of our experience. It has many parts, doesn't it?

The Focus of this Course (20)

The Three Ways to Engage the Mind (3)

There are three fundamental ways to engage the mind:

1. Be with what's there
2. Release, decrease what's (pragmatically) negative
3. Receive, increase what's (pragmatically) positive

If we think of the mind like a garden, these three 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.**

Growing Flowers (2)

This course is about the third of these great practices: building up the positive in your mind and your life.

Growing these "flowers" feels good in the moment, it inclines you toward skillful and beneficial actions toward others and the world, and it crowd out the "weeds" in the mind and prevents them from coming back.

Of course, when you make deliberate efforts to increase the positive (or to decrease the negative) that is not the same as simply *being with* the mind - the first of the fundamental ways to engage the mind. In effect, you are *working with* your mind, not just *being with* it.

States and Traits (1)

Building up the positive means essentially two things:

- Increasing positive *states* - moments of experience
- Increasing positive *traits* - stable, enduring perspectives, reservoirs of emotion and mood, expectations, tendencies, behavioral patterns, capabilities, and virtues

The Primacy of Traits (2)

While both of these - states and traits - are important, there is a key difference between them: states are fleeting and quite affected by external circumstances, while traits are more enduring and less affected by external circumstances.

If you build up your positive *traits*, your peacefulness, happiness, and love are deeply rooted. You take them with you wherever you go.

Therefore, this course particularly focuses on how to build up positive traits. These are the supplies you have in your pack as you walk down the long and twisting road of life. In a way, this course is about a single question:

How do you get those supplies into your pack?

Remarkably, the primary way to build up positive traits is through the skillful use of positive *states* - most of which feel pleasant.

With repetition, states become traits. For example, moments of gratitude - *states* - gradually increase general well-being: a *trait*.

Experience-Dependent Neuroplasticity (4)

This works because mental activity is based on underlying neural activity - and repeated patterns of neural activity build lasting neural structure. In the famous saying from neuroscience, "neurons that fire together, wire together."

The details of this process - whereby mental states become neural traits - are explored in *Buddha's Brain* and related books. For our very practical purposes here, what's useful to know is that - in the traditional saying - your mind takes the shape of whatever it

rests upon. Or in the modern update: your brain gradually takes its shape from whatever your mind rests upon - for better or worse.

Rest your mind repeatedly on regrets, resentments, self-criticism, negative ruminations, over-reactions, pointless worries, grumbling cases against others . . . well, your brain will gradually take a shape of growing sensitivity, vulnerability to anxiety and depressed mood, narrow focus on threats and losses, inclinations toward anger and sadness and feelings of inadequacy, and an underlying sense of running on empty.

On the other hand, rest your mind repeatedly on little good things in daily life (flowers are blooming, chocolate tastes good, you have shelter), on bad things that did not happen, on accomplishments, nice moments with others, pleasant feelings, wholesome qualities in your character . . . well, your brain will gradually take a different shape, one with strength and resilience hard-wired into it, with good regulation of your emotions and impulses, a realistically optimistic outlook, a sense of worth, and a cup brimming over with more to offer others and even the whole wide world.

This, in essence, is what we mean by "taking in the good."

Explicit and Implicit Benefits (2)

Taking in the good brings in two kinds of benefits:

- Explicit - the particular content, "supply" that is activated and installed (e.g., relaxation, strength, gladness, love)
- Implicit - the stance, perspective, and activity embedded in taking in the good. This includes:
 - Being active rather than passive in your mind, a hammer instead of a nail; good in its own right, plus helps protect against "learned helplessness"
 - Treating yourself like you matter; good in its own right, especially helpful if you have a history of feeling like you haven't mattered enough to others

Countering the Negativity Bias (5)

By "tilting" toward the positive, you also level the playing field by compensating for what scientists call the brain's negativity bias.

We evolved this bias because our ancestors had to react more intensely to “sticks” than to “carrots.” If you fail to get a carrot today, you’ll have another chance tomorrow; but if you fail to avoid a stick today - whap - no more carrots forever.

The negativity bias shows up in lots of ways:

- We remember something negative about another person better than we remember something positive.
- People are generally more motivated to avoid pain than to approach pleasure.
- Happy, lasting relationships need at least a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative interactions.
- It is very easy to acquire a sense of helplessness - of entrapment, futility, and defeat - but very hard to undo.
- Negative experiences get fast-tracked into emotional memory systems: once burned, twice shy.

But unless they are million-dollar moments, positive experiences use standard issue memory systems: these need information - the positive experience in this case - to be held in short-term memory buffers for many seconds in a row to transfer to long-term storage. How often do we actually do this?!

Consequently, most positive experiences flow through the mind like water through a sieve - while negative ones get caught every time. In effect, the brain is like Velcro for negative experiences but Teflon for positive ones.

This course is about reversing this, and making your brain more like Velcro for the positive and Teflon for the negative.

150 MINUTES SO FAR

Noticing a Useful Thought (15)

The Practice (5)

Let's try taking in the good one last time in this class, this time with another element in the ongoing stream of your experience, thought.

Since you are getting familiar with the three steps of taking in the good, I'll offer fewer and fewer suggestions.

Step 1: *Have* a positive experience - Notice or create a useful thought.

"Thoughts" include perspectives, beliefs, ideas, recognitions, and insights. "Useful," means true and beneficial to yourself and perhaps others.

Potentially useful thoughts might be: "I could be nicer to myself," "I've been wasting a lot of positive moments," "It would be good to slow down," or "I want to be more active with my mind."

Decide for yourself what you consider to be useful.

When you've got the useful thought, move on to the next step.

Step 2: *Extend* the experience - Stay with your useful thought. Reflect on it. See how it's true.

See if you can get a sense of how this useful thought connects to some body sensations or emotions. See if you can ground the thought in your body.

Step 3: *Absorb* the experience - Meanwhile, get a sense that the useful thought is becoming part of you.

Let confidence, conviction, grow in you about this useful thought. Give yourself over to it as a useful perspective.

Alright. Come on back

Discussion (10)

How was that for you?

Could you see that you can internalize thoughts, like other kinds of experience?

Wrapping Up (15)

OK, we covered a lot of ground. I really appreciated your presence and attention.

Logistics (1)

[Cover any necessary logistics, like payments or a room change for next class.]

The Week ahead (5)

I suggest that you:

- Reflect on the difference - and the time and the place - for *being with* your mind without trying to influence it, for *releasing* what's negative, and for *receiving* what's positive.
- Observe the negativity bias at work in yourself, others, and the wider world
- Engage this theme for the coming week: enjoying physical pleasures. These are pleasant sights, sounds, tastes, touches, and smells. Enjoy pleasures when you are already having them, and look for ways to increase your pleasures, such as particularly be aware of beauty around yourself, or make yourself a nice meal rather than wolfing down a bagel and diet cola, or listen to a song all the way through.
- Draw on these physical pleasures in the flow of your day to practice the three basic steps of taking in the good: Activating; Extending; Absorbing.

And also look for other opportunities to take in the good, such as a sense of rest when the day's tasks are done, or the good feeling you get when someone is friendly toward you.

- In particular, try to set aside a few minutes each day for very specifically taking in positive experiences.

You could combine this with any current formal practice of meditation, prayer, yoga, or the like. For example, at the end of a formal practice, you could add a few minutes to consciously internalize the positive states of mind that emerged in the practice, or any other positive states of mind you'd like to explore.

Or you could set aside a few minutes in the morning, or just before bed - or even both!

The more, the better. The more neurons you get firing together, the more that will wire together - weaving resources like positive emotions and outlooks, and inner strengths, into the fabric of your brain and your being.

[Mention any forms, like a daily positive events list.]

Peace, Happiness, and Love (9)

And let's finish with a brief practice that we will return to again and again.

The state of mind in this practice – a basic sense of peacefulness (not afraid or angry), of happiness (not frustrated or dissatisfied), and of love (not lonely or mean), even if physical or emotional discomfort is also present – is a powerful resource and a central theme in this course.

OK, here we go.

Relaxing and coming into a sense of presence with yourself.

Opening to, finding, a sense of calm, relaxation, alrightness right now, a feeling of being unthreatened, protected, strong, and safe . . . not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of *peace*.

Staying with the sense of peace, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Opening to, finding, a sense of gratitude, gladness, enoughness in this moment, a sense of fullness . . . not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of *happiness*.

Staying with the sense of happiness, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Opening to, finding, a sense of connection, a sense of inclusion with others, of friendship, camaraderie, being liked, cared about, appreciated, respected, a sense of your own caring for others, your compassion, kindness not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of loving and being loved . . . a sense of being *love*.

Staying with the sense of love, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Getting a sense of peace, happiness, and love all present together in your mind . . . perhaps a sense of coming home . . . resting in peace, happiness, and love all present together . . .

[pause]

OK, come on back.

It's OK to keep feeling a sense of peace, happiness, and love.

See you next week, when we will get into the details of this practice, and how to do it most effectively.

Thank you, and take care.

180 MINUTES

Taking in the Good Course

CLASS 2: Activating Positive Experiences

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Themes

The difference between finding and creating a positive state of mind

Many ways to create a positive state of mind

Components of experience: different things you can take in

Appreciating the many good facts in one's life

Welcome (5)

Welcome participants (1)

Deal with any logistics (2)

The Plan for This Class (5)

This class is about exploring many ways to have, to *activate*, a positive state of mind. Remember from last week that mental states become neural traits. To build up inner resources like resilience, emotional balance, happiness, mindfulness, or compassion - to build up these traits - we need to *start* with positive mental states.

This is the first of the three basic steps of taking in the good - *having, activating* a pragmatically positive experience - and we will explore this step in many brief experiential practices, and discussions.

We will finish with a practice that uses all three steps of taking in the good.

And next week we will get into the details of the second and third steps of taking in the good, in which you *extend* and *absorb* a positive experience to really *install* it into your brain.

Also, as is described in the Overview for the course, it can be helpful to have a “buddy” with whom you can, as you like, discuss and deepen what you’re learning; it is also fine not to have a buddy in this course. It is also fine 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. This is an optional aspect of the course that is entirely up to you. If you would like a buddy, during this class, including its break, you could reach out to others as you choose. You could also connect with someone as a buddy at a later class if you want. Any questions about the buddy? DON’T GET BOGGED DOWN HERE.

Follow up on Homework (10)

So, how was the last week, in terms of this course?

Did you have any reflections on the difference between *being with* the mind and *working with* it? Or reflections on *pulling weeds* and *planting flowers* in the garden of the mind?

[Stay out of intellectualizations here. Keep bringing it down to participants’ experience and to practical implications.]

How about the negativity bias? How did you see it in action?

And what happened when you practiced taking in the good, either in the flow of life or during a few minutes of formal practice each day?

→ Keep clarifying the three steps and make sure participants are clear about them.

→ Without being a nag, as needed point out the simple fact that there is a relationship between efforts and results: the brain is a physical system that, like a muscle, responds to the amount of “exercise” you give it; the more that you practice taking in the good, the more good that you will weave into your being.

Personal Introductions (15)

Introduction (1)

Since we will be working and learning together in this class for six weeks total, five to go, I thought it would be good if we briefly introduced ourselves to each other. I tend to be shy about this myself when I am in your chair, as it were, so I am sympathetic and will keep this simple.

Knowing that you can say as little as you want, and keeping this under half a minute per person, let’s go around the room and say your name and one thing you hope to get out of this course.

If you like, you can take in the sense that you survived this experience!

Introductions (14)

→ Keep it moving, don’t let it bog down. Don’t comment on what anyone says unless absolutely necessary.

30 MINUTES SO FAR

Noticing a Positive State (35)

Alright. Let’s do a practice, and explore different ways to have a positive state of mind.

Noticing a Pleasant Emotion (5)

To begin with, get settled, coming into a sense of your body.

Alright.

In your mind right now, in your experiencing, can you find a pleasant *emotion* that is already here, in the mosaic of your experience? It could be very subtle or mild, and that's fine; it still feels nice.

This pleasant emotion could already be in the foreground of awareness, under the spotlight as it were of focused attention.

Or it could be more in the background, still on the "stage" of awareness, but more off to the side, not under the spotlight.

In either case – in the foreground of attention or in the background - when you find a pleasant feeling, see if you can explore it some, for at least a few seconds. Notice what it is like as an experience.

The word "emotion" includes many things. In the flow of your experience right now, you might find a sense of comfort . . . or some soft happiness . . . or an air of calm . . . or perhaps some gratitude or gladness . . . some appreciation or thanks . . . or simply a basic sense of well-being.

You are not trying to remember or to think about things to trigger, stimulate, evoke, or bring up a pleasant emotion. You are exploring your mind as it streams along to find something that feels nice, feels enjoyable.

And when you find it, see if you can stay with it.

There may be neutral or unpleasant contents of mind alongside one or more pleasant emotions, and this is alright. Just bring your attention back to the pleasant feeling, or keep looking for one.

I'll be quiet for half a minute or so as you explore what it is like to find a pleasant feeling and stay with it.

OK.

Discussion (10)

(Key questions are bulleted, teaching points are numbered)

- So how was this for you?

- What happened when you attempted to find a pleasant emotion?

→ As appropriate, repeat or elaborate on these points already covered:

(1) Experience has many parts to it.

(2) It is alright and beneficial to be active and resourceful inside your own mind.

(3) Sometimes when we try to find something positive in the mind, negative things call to us louder than ever. This is normal - just be aware that this is happening, and then bring your attention back to the positive.

- Can you see the distinction between finding a pleasant feeling in your experience compared to deliberately, actively creating one?

→ Keep it simple here, avoid metaphysics or semantic tangles. Keep bringing it down to earth, down to participants' experience. The central point is that right now, in this moment, there are pleasant aspects to be found in the experience of everyone. Even if you are depressed or in great pain, at least linked to awareness itself is a sense of untroubled peacefulness.

(4) It can feel comforting to recognize, to realize, that in almost every moment, already present in your experience, are positive emotions, thoughts, desires/intentions, and sensory experiences. It's as if you already carry around with you a bag of jewels - and you can notice its contents any time you want. You can take refuge and find relief and refueling and strength in these already present, already existent, positive aspects to your experience.

(5) You might even notice that awareness itself - the space that holds the contents of mind - can have a pleasant feeling associated with it . . . a feeling of ease, of being untroubled, of a certain peacefulness or tranquility. Even if you are depressed, in pain, or both, you can always find a pleasant feeling related to the awareness that holds, that is the container for depression, pain, and other unpleasant contents of mind.

Creating a Pleasant Emotion (20)

Now let's try this again, but this time the focus will be on *deliberately* stimulating, triggering, a pleasant emotion. This practice will be a little longer than the previous one since we will be exploring a variety of good ways to create a positive experience.

When we create a positive experience this, we bring attention to some stimulus and then let the *knowing* of this stimulus - which could be conceptual or abstract - become an *experience*, in this case an emotion.

Refer to the handout on From Knowing to Experiencing.

To recap the key points in the handout, some good ways to help conceptual knowing of a good fact become an embodied good *experience* are:

- Bring awareness to your body.
- Soften and open yourself, 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 feeling good, ranging from distancing from your body to feeling you don't deserve to feel good. For example, when trying to think of something to appreciate in your life, you might find yourself thinking about things that are not going so well. This is normal - simply notice that this is happening, and then bring your attention back to the positive thing you are trying to focus on.
- Try to have an attitude of kindness toward yourself, an encouraging sense of "go ahead, it's alright to have a good experience here, there is nothing wrong with, it is good for you."

As always with a practice, you're both attempting to do something and observing how it goes when you do.

Alright, get settled into this moment, relaxing.

Now see if you can deliberately focus your attention on one or more things that naturally encourage a pleasant emotion. As in the practice we just did, this pleasant feeling could be very subtle or mild.

I will give you some prompts, about 2 or 3 minutes each.

1) Be aware of your *current situation* – being in this room – to find one or more things that call forth a pleasant emotion for you. Perhaps a sight or sound that brings a sense of well-being, gratitude, peacefulness, happiness, or love. Perhaps someone in this room that gives you a good feeling. Perhaps a pleasant emotion related to being in this course, maybe a sense of gladness about it.

[pause]

Be aware of this process, of looking for and finding a stimulus, and then letting or encouraging the knowing of it to become a pleasant emotion.

[pause]

2) Now consider one or more recent *events* that bring up a pleasant emotion.

Perhaps you got something done, even as simple as a load of dishes or some emails. Perhaps someone was nice to you. Perhaps something that could have gone badly didn't. Perhaps it felt good to relax after a long day, or watch a favorite TV show, or get some exercise, or walk your dog.

[pause]

Be aware of this process, of looking for and finding a stimulus, and then letting or encouraging the knowing of it to become a pleasant emotion.

[pause]

3) Now consider one or more *conditions* in your life these days, things that are stably true, and not passing events.

For example, an ongoing condition that brings up a pleasant emotion - such as gratitude, ease, or well-being - could be the fact that you have enough air to breathe or water to drink, or that you have food and shelter, or that there are people who wish you well.

Other conditions that could evoke a pleasant feeling include the beauty in this world . . . advances in science and medicine . . . flowers are blooming . . . children are laughing . . . middle school is behind you . . . you ain't dead yet.

Recognizing the existence of conditions that bring a pleasant emotion does not mean dismissing or minimizing conditions that bring unpleasant feelings. For this practice, you are simply shining the spotlight of your attention on conditions that give you a good feeling.

[pause]

4) Now consider one or more *personal qualities* – characteristics in your own personality, your character, your mind as a whole – that it would be appropriate to have a pleasant feeling about.

For example, you might recognize the fact that you are basically fair . . . or the fact that you wish someone in your life well . . . or that you are intelligent, or capable in some way such as cooking . . . or that you've had the inner strength to get through, to survive, tough times . . . or that most fundamentally, you truly are a good person . . .

No halo is needed to have good qualities as a person, such as a basic decency. If your friend had good qualities, could you recognize them in him or her?

If these same good qualities are present in you, can you recognize them in yourself? Recognizing them in yourself, can you let that recognition become a pleasant emotion, such as gladness, ease, confidence in having strengths inside, or a sense of worth?

[pause]

If negative thoughts and feelings tug at you, such as the idea that you don't have many good qualities, that's normal - just be aware that this is happening, and bring your attention back to the many *facts* of good qualities in your personality and character, good qualities present in you just like they are present in other people.

[pause]

And be aware of this process, of looking for and finding a stimulus - in this case, positive qualities in yourself, and then letting or encouraging the knowing of these to become a pleasant emotion.

OK. Come on back.

Break (20)

We'll go into a break from here, and then talk about this practice you just did when we come back.

This will be a 15 minute break.

[Say where the bathrooms are.]

Please be back by _____. We'll start on time.

85 MINUTES SO FAR

Discussion of Creating a Positive Experience (20)

General Discussion (15)

- So how was this for you?
 - In particular, how was it to deliberately look for or think about stimuli, prompts, facts, in order to trigger or evoke pleasant emotions?
- (1) Be clear about the difference between the *idea* of something - perhaps a person in this room, or an event or condition in your life, or a quality in your personality - and the *feeling* that idea generates.
- (2) Notice that we are engaging *facts* here: the facts of this situation, the facts of the events and conditions of your life, and the facts of your own character. We are not making things up. There are other facts to be sure, facts that naturally evoke unpleasant feelings, facts of loss or limitation or tragedies for oneself or others.

We are not denying those other facts, nor are we making up imaginary worlds. We are simply focusing on the facts that encourage a positive experience.

Technically, facts are just facts, neither good nor bad. But for simplicity, I'll refer to facts that can be the basis of positive experiences as good ones. They are *pragmatically* good, in that they support the happiness and welfare of oneself and perhaps others.

- How was it for you to recognize good facts about yourself?

(3) Recognizing good facts about one's own character is often a challenge.

Refer to the handout on Seeing the Good in Yourself.

Consider the friend test: if your friend had some factually positive qualities - no halo required, but basic decency, grit, goodheartedness, talent, warmth, etc. - would you recognize these in your friend? 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 recognize it in yourself?

In psychology, this is called "negative grandiosity," the idea that one is so uniquely special that the principles of fairness, kindness, and justice that apply to 7 billion people . . . just don't apply to oneself.

The Components of Experience (5)

Now I'd like to step back a bit and cover a few other points.

Refer to the Class 2 Key Points.

In the practices we just did, we focused on *emotions*. And in last week's class, we focused on *sensory* experience, particularly that of sensation; other sensory experiences includes sights, sounds, tastes, and smells.

Of course, these are just two - emotions and sensory experiences - of the major components of our experience.

Other components include *images* (sometimes these come in the form of memories), *thoughts* (including beliefs, perspectives, expectations), *attitudes* (a blend of emotions and thoughts), *desires*, and *behaviors*.

Each of these components of experience can be present in or at the center of a mental *state*. Therefore, each of these components of experience can become internalized as a *trait*.

For example, you could internalize a *feeling* of calm, a *sensation* of strength in your body, an *image* of yourself as attractive to others, a *thought* that getting buzzed on drugs or alcohol always makes you feel bad about yourself the day after, an *attitude* of acceptance, or a *behavior* of staying centered and not interrupting others who are talking.

In classes to come, we will explore other components of experience - besides emotions and sensory material - as valuable states and traits.

105 MINUTES SO FAR

More Ways to Create a Positive Experience (25)

Introduction (4)

So far, we have explored two ways to *notice* positive aspects already present in your experience - in the foreground and in the background of awareness - and four ways to deliberately *create* a positive experience:

3. Look for good facts in your *immediate situation*
4. Look for good facts in *current events* in your life
5. Look for good facts in enduring, relatively stable *conditions* in your life
6. Look for good facts in your own *character*

That gives you six ways right there to *have*, to *activate*, a positive experience.

Now let's explore eight other ways to deliberately create a positive experience. After we practice taking in the good with seven of these, I will show you one more way to create a positive experience, for a total of 15 altogether.

We'll go through the three steps for these ways to create a positive experience, a minute or so each. I'll say a bit about the first step for each one, to help you bring it to mind, to create, but I won't say much about the second and third steps of TG - extending and absorbing - since you are getting pretty familiar with them.

Here we go.

Practice (16)

→ Take participants through the three TG steps for #7-14, about 90 seconds each.

7. Look for good facts in your *past*.

These include events, conditions, and qualities in yourself that were present in the past.

For example, a good event could have been a fun time with friends, or an accomplishment. A good condition could have been growing up in a caring family or having access to a decent education. A good quality in yourself could have been the compassion and kindness you drew upon to stick your neck out for someone else.

8. Anticipate good facts in *future* events. (By the way, this is a good way to motivate yourself, that we will explore more in future classes. In effect, you are associating in your brain a positive experience – a reward, in effect – with a particular behavior (the one you are going to do in the future). With repetition, this association will make your brain more and more inclined toward the positive behavior.

9. *Reframe* facts to see what is good about them.

For example, look for what is good about things that may seem neutral, such as cement or gravity. Even try to see what is *genuinely* (not pie in the sky, not rose-colored glasses) good about something that you have thought was bad, such as how you grew through a tough experience.

Of course, this is not to suggest that the tough experience was any less painful, nor that it is alright for people to mistreat you. This point about reframing is simply that facts often have multiple aspects - some good, some bad, and some neutral - and that we can be aware of the good aspects of a fact in addition to its negative ones.

10. Be glad about good facts *in the lives of others*. This is sometimes called altruistic or sympathetic joy, happiness at the welfare or well-being of others. Besides being kind to others, this kind of gladness gives you unlimited possibilities for happiness since there are always some good facts out there that are happening for someone else even if they aren't happening for you.

11. *Imagine* good facts that you know never happened.

For example, I've known people who truly never had loving caregiving while growing up. It was a powerful, healing experience for them to imagine being held by a loving parent over and over again. They did not make up a happy childhood; they never lost touch with the truth of their upbringing. But they were resourceful on their own behalf, finding ways to give themselves at least some aspects of an important and nurturing experience.

As we will explore in future classes, this illustrates two important points:

- (1) Deep down in the brain, it doesn't matter so much what the source of an experience is - whether it is based on a stimulus "out there" in the world or "in here" within your mind.
- (2) Even if you can't have *all* of a positive experience - such as the whole experience of being lovingly and skillfully cared for as a child, at least you can have some key parts of it - a slice of the pie if not the whole pie.

12. *Care about others*, wish them well, make contributions to them. Studies show that thinking well of others or being generous or helpful to them increases positive emotions. You can be happy planning and anticipating some act or thought or word of kindness, happy while doing it, and happy while remembering it. And it could well happen that your kindness to others will evoke kindness in turn to you.

13. *Directly evoke* a positive experience. With practice, you can simply call up a positive feeling or sensation or overall state of being. In effect, these states are like somatic memories, and you are activating them much like you would activate a recollection about your childhood, or what it felt like one time at the beach, or the knowledge that $2+2=4$. One of the benefits of repeatedly taking in the good is that it becomes easier and easier to activate positive states of mind at will - which is a great resource for everyday well-being and functioning.

14. *Produce* good facts.

This one is very important.

Lots of ways to produce good facts.

Shift your body if it feels tense. Smell the coffee. Be nice to someone. Plant flowers. Take up a craft, an exercise, meditation. Arrange to go for a walk with a friend. Make a nice meal. Stick your neck out at work. Invite the cat up into your lap. Turn on some nice music. Pay a bill. Balance your checkbook. Hang up your clothes. Don't yell at the kids. Learn something new. Don't drink too much. Etc.

OK, come on back.

In a moment, I'll ask you to find a partner, and to take turns telling each other about about about some facts in your life. As you do this, the 15th way to have a positive experience, see if you can open to it and let the good feelings sink in.

15. *Share* about good facts and your experience of them with other people. Lots of studies show that this process of sharing intensifies the sense of the good experience –

in part because interactions with others are very rich with stimulation, and we evolved (as we'll see in future classes) to be highly social animals.

OK, please find a partner and choose an A and a B. A's will go first.

Alright, B's listen while A's talk for a minute or so - I'll give time signals - about one or more good facts in your life. Ready, begin.

Alright. Switch roles.

OK, come on back.

130 MINUTES SO FAR

Discussion (20)

So, to summarize, there are two ways to *have* - to *activate* - a positive state of mind: *notice* one that is already occurring, or *create* one.

Under these two general headings - noticing or creating a positive experience, there are 15 specific ways to have a positive experiences, giving you lots of good options:

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

Altogether, this gives you 14 paths to *having*, to *activating* a positive state of mind. Pretty good!

Discussion (Key questions are bulleted, teaching points are numbered)

- What are some good facts in your life?
- Encourage participants to call these out in an informal way.
- How do you feel about becoming more aware of the good facts in your life?
 - How do you feel about having many ways to activate a positive state of mind?
- (1) When you start to look at the world in this way, you see that you are surrounded by, awash and afloat in a sea of opportunities for a positive experience.

It's like walking down the path of life that's actually strewn with pearls and diamonds, emeralds and rubies. So commonly, we walk down the path hardly noticing the jewels. Or if we do, we rarely *feel* anything about it.

Instead, you can take the opportunity, literally dozens of times a day, a few seconds at a time, to notice a good fact that naturally leads to a good experience.

This is an incredibly important point!

(2) Of course, to balance this awareness of the positive, it is important also to cultivate the capacity to accept your experience as it is – to *be with it*, as we discussed in the first class.

I want to highlight an important point in passing: the experience of *acceptance* is itself a state of mind that can be activated and progressively installed. There is lots of new

research on the value of acceptance in mental health. Being able to access an increasingly installed sense of acceptance is an important resource for you.

(3) Then, when appropriate – not based on aversion or grasping, at the “Goldilocks” place of just right, not too tall nor too short, but time to *work with* the mind after being with it – you can be *active*, resourceful in the mind to cause useful things to arise and persist within it.

You have a lot of influence inside your own mind; not perfect control to be sure, but still, you can make some real differences there.

(4) Stepping back to reflect, with this power over the mind comes, let’s face it, some responsibility. It is up to each one of us to use that power - or not. No one else can reach into my mind or yours and lead me or you to be with its contents in open awareness, or to let go of what’s negative, or to let in what’s positive.

No one but you can notice or create a positive experience for yourself and thus activate a positive state inside your mind.

150 MINUTES SO FAR

Wrapping Up (20)

OK, we covered a lot of ground. I really appreciated your presence and attention.

The Week ahead (5)

This week, I suggest that you:

- Engage this theme for the coming week: each day, notice some of the many good events and conditions in your life, and some of the many good qualities in yourself.

Then, when you find these good facts in the flow of your day to practice the three steps of taking in the good: Activating; Extending; Absorbing.

- Like last week, and every week from now on, set aside a few minutes each day for very specifically taking in positive experiences.

The more, the better. The more neurons you get firing together, the more that will wire together - weaving resources like positive emotions and outlooks, and inner strengths, into the fabric of your brain and your being.

[Mention any forms, like a daily positive events list.]

- Also look for opportunities to find or create opportunities to recognize good qualities in yourself.

When you have - when you activate - these experiences, really take them in (really install them).

And notice any obstructions to the sense of your own good qualities, like a feeling that it's just not true - if people only knew the real truth about you.

Be Aware of Obstructions (2)

This leads to a larger point about obstructions.

As you may have noticed already, when we focus on the good, often what pops up into awareness is the bad (pragmatically speaking) - thoughts of negative material - or other obstructions, such as distractibility, or a sense that you don't deserve to feel good, or even a general reluctance toward openness and receiving.

Try to notice these obstructions. They're perfectly normal. If you like, you can explore on your own how to help yourself regarding them. And we will talk about obstructions and how to work with them in the next class.

Peace, Happiness, and Love (10)

And let's finish with the practice that we used at the end of the last class.

Relaxing and coming into a sense of presence with yourself.

Opening to, finding, a sense of calm, relaxation, alrightness right now, a feeling of being unthreatened, protected, strong, and safe . . . not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of *peace*.

Staying with the sense of peace, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Opening to, finding, a sense of gratitude, gladness, enoughness in this moment, a sense of fullness . . . not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of *happiness*.

Staying with the sense of happiness, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Opening to, finding, a sense of connection, a sense of inclusion with others, of friendship, camaraderie, being liked, cared about, appreciated, respected, a sense of your own caring for others, your compassion, kindness not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of loving and being loved . . . a sense of being *love*.

Staying with the sense of love, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Getting a sense of peace, happiness, and love all present together in your mind . . . perhaps a sense of coming home . . . resting in peace, happiness, and love all present together . . .

[pause]

OK, come on back.

It's OK to keep feeling a sense of peace, happiness, and love.

See you next week, when we will get into the details of this practice, and how to do it most effectively.

Thank you, and take care.

170 MINUTES

Taking in the Good Course

CLASS 3:

Installing Positive Experiences

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Themes

Blocks

Installation: extending and absorbing positive experiences

The attitude of care, concern, and good wishes toward oneself; a sense of strength on one's behalf

Creating good experiences by finding good facts on your past.

The three fundamental needs

The two settings of the brain

Key resource experiences

Welcome (5)

Welcome participants (1)

Deal with any logistics (1)

Did you get the handouts via email?

→ Pass out any that are needed.

The Plan for This Class (2)

This class is about the details of the second and third steps of taking in the good: *extending* and *absorbing* the experience; this is the *installation* phase of TG, the one that really converts mental states to neural traits.

We will also explore common blocks to taking in the good and how to deal with them.

And we will relate taking in the good to the evolution of the brain and discuss how this practice can really help bring us home to the brain's resting state, its default when it's not disturbed, in which we feel a basic sense of peace, happiness, and love.

Follow up on Homework (10)

So, how was the last week, in terms of this course?

Did you have any reflections on:

- The difference between *finding* and *creating* a positive state of mind (the two approaches to the activation phase)
- The many good facts in your life, and thus many ways to create a positive state of mind
- Recognizing good qualities in yourself

And what happened when you practiced taking in the good, either in the flow of life or during a few minutes of formal practice each day?

→ Keep clarifying the three steps and make sure participants are clear about them.

Blocks (25)

Pairs (10)

In a moment I'll ask you to pick a partner and take turns, two minutes at a time, speaking to two questions:

- What's it been like for you to take in the good during the last two weeks of this course?
- Other than just being busy or not thinking about it, what has gotten in the way of taking in the good when you try to do it? Maybe common *blocks* like your mind skittering around when you try to extend the positive experience, or thinking somehow somewhere that you don't deserve to feel good.

I'll give instructions as we go through it, but the format is this:

- When you get with your partner, pick an A and a B. A's will go first.
- One partner will mainly speak while the other will mainly listen. It's good to be supportive if you are a listener, and fine to ask questions if something is unclear. Please don't offer any advice.
- A's will start on the first question – which I will repeat - while B's listen. I'll give time signals. Please switch when I ask you to, and B's will talk about the first question while A's listen.
- Then it will be time for the second question, which I will repeat: A's will start while B's listen. I'll give time signals. Please switch when I ask you to, and B's will talk about the second question while A's listen.

Like any practice in this course, it's OK to sit this out, no worries at all.

Any questions about format?

OK, let's begin.

→ Do the practice.

Discussion (15)

OK, how was that for you?

→ Be quick here.

We've already talked a fair amount about the first question – what it's like for you to take in the good – so I will focus now on blocks to TG.

What did you come up with in your pairs just now, about blocks? What are some difficulties or barriers in taking in the good?

[Get examples. Normalize them.]

This is all really normal.

→ Use the handout to focus on the blocks participants name, plus some other key ones, to explore what we can do about them. Be sure to speak to these blocks:

- That one does not deserve to feel good
- That one's own happiness will somehow reduce that of others
- That TG reinforces the craving that leads to suffering

Be aware of these blocks - and how to work with them - as we do a series of practices on installing positive traits.

40 MINUTES SO FAR

Installing a Positive Trait (45)

Introduction (5)

Now let's move from *activating* positive states to *installing* positive traits.

Installation involves two things:

1. Extending an experience so you get lots of neurons firing together and thus lots of wiring together

Ways to extend an experience include:

- Staying with it so it lasts longer

- Opening to it in your body so it is as multi-sensory and embodied and rich as possible
 - Encouraging it to become as intense as possible
2. Making your brain's memory systems more absorbent by intending and sensing that the experience is sinking into you

This gives us the three basic steps of taking in the good:

1. Have a positive experience.
2. Extend it
3. Absorb it

Number 1 is *activation*, and numbers 2 and 3 are *installation*.

Let's try this a few times, in different ways.

In actual practice in everyday life, you will move through the three steps fairly quickly, and they can sometimes blend together - all of which is fine. But here, learning this method, we will unpack the steps to make them distinct, and take our time with them.

Noticing a Positive Experience (20)

OK, come into a sense of being present here, and now.

[About five minutes for the practice itself]

Alright, step 1, activation, having a positive experience: look into your own experience right now, and see if you can find any quality of *care and concern and good wishes for yourself* in it.

Not self-pity, not exaggerating or glorifying your troubles, just simply a basic sense of some good wishes for your own welfare . . . some sense of being for yourself, not

against others but on your own side . . . finding here and now in your body the innate ever-present will to keep breathing, the desire for your heart to keep beating, the wish to keep living . . . finding in this moment an underlying warmth for yourself, a knowledge of your softness and vulnerability inside . . . finding a natural built-in desire to be safe rather than threatened, at ease and happy rather than frustrated . . .

In whatever way you get here, and however soft or subtle or mild it is, you are finding your way into an experience of care and concern and good wishes for yourself.

Next, step 2, extending this experience: helping it last, staying with it, resting your attention in it . . . returning to this experience if your attention wanders . . . giving over to a sense of care and concern and good wishes for yourself, letting this experience fill your body and mind . . . aware of different aspects of this experience, perhaps sensations in the body . . . emotions . . . thoughts, beliefs . . . images, memories . . . desires . . . inclinations toward action . . .

[pause]

sinking into this experience . . . if you can, gently helping it, encouraging it to becoming richer, as intense as possible . . .

[pause]

Then, step 3, absorbing this experience of care and concern and good wishes for yourself, letting it sink into you as you sink into it . . . intending and sensing that this experience is sifting down into you like soft golden dust or a gentle rain . . . soaking into you like a water into a sponge, or like the warmth of a cup of hot cocoa into your hands . . . becoming part of you like a jewel in the treasure chest of your heart . . . like a golden balm soothing you . . . or however you do this yourself, finding your own ways that work for you, intending and sensing that this experience become a part of you, a resource inside you can take with you wherever you go. . . Letting yourself be changed by your positive practices . . .

[pause]

OK, come on back.

It's fine to keep having a sense of care and concern and good wishes for yourself.

Discussion (Key questions are bulleted, teaching points are numbered)

[About 15 minutes for the discussion]

- How was that for you?

(1) It's interesting to realize the degree to which a basic sense of care and concern and good wishes for oneself is actually present, innate, and implicit in our experience here and now.

(2) It can help to appreciate the ways in which a stance of support, of care and concern and warmth, toward yourself is actually good for others.

Much research has shown that it is when your own cup runneth over that you have the most to offer others.

Recognizing this is important - especially if you have raised or otherwise influenced to think that it is inappropriate, or vain or selfish or sinful, or not what your gender is supposed to do . . . to treat yourself like you matter, to be for yourself, on your own side.

(3) If it was hard for you to find that sense of care and concern and good wishes, that is pretty common. Just keep coming back to this and it will become more stable for you.

- Do you have any questions about any of the steps?

→ As appropriate, highlight these distinctions:

(4) Between *noticing* a positive experience in step 1 - the approach in the practice just completed - and *creating* a positive experience (which we will do next)

(5) Among the various components of an experience (e.g., sensate, emotional, thoughts)

(6) Among the three steps: Have, Extend, and Absorb an experience.

- What helped you to *extend* the positive experience? What were your favorite methods?

→ A key point about step 2, Extending:

(7) There is no clear science yet about how long it takes to transfer a positive experience into underlying long-term emotional, “implicit” memory stores. At a minimum, there is a “dosing” effect: the more, the better. From the science on how long it takes to transfer conceptual, “cognitive” information from short-term buffers into long-term memory stores, there could be a kind of threshold effect in which staying focused on a single experience for 10-20 seconds in a row has a particularly powerful impact.

- **What helped you to *absorb* the positive experience? What were your favorite methods?**

→ Also, make the general point:

(8) This experience, this trait, of care and concern and good wishes toward oneself is of course very related to the point we discussed in previous classes, about the power you have with your own mind. If you do not have a basic stance of being for yourself, not against others but on your own side, well, you won’t be motivated to use this power for your own welfare.

Have you heard the lame but profound joke: “How many therapists does it take to change a light bulb?” “Only one . . . But the lightbulb has to want to change itself.”

As Rabbi Hillel wrote a long time ago, “If you are not for yourself, who will be? If not now, when?”

Cultivating a sense of care and concern and good wishes for oneself - a sense of being on one’s own side, a sense that one’s experience, one’s life *matters* - is absolutely fundamental to any good steps on your own behalf.

Any discussion about this?

Creating a Positive Experience (20)

Alright, let’s do one more round, this time creating a positive experience during step 1, the activation step.

OK, come into a sense of being present here, and now.

[Around 5 minutes for the practice]

Alright, step 1, activation, having a positive experience: look for a time in your past when you were *strong* on your own behalf . . . a time perhaps when you stuck up for yourself . . . or stayed steady to get something done even though parts of you wanted to do other things . . . or maybe stopped yourself from doing something harmful, such as drinking or eating too much or lashing out at someone else . . . or it could be a time when you made yourself do something good for yourself such as exercising or meditating . . .

Calling up a sense of *strength*, of muscularity for yourself, of being an advocate for yourself is another aspect of being on your own side, being for yourself.

Let the *knowing* of this time (or perhaps more than one time) activate an *experience* of strength for yourself, a kind of body memory of it, with related emotions . . . body sensations . . . thoughts . . . images or memories . . . desires . . . or inclinations toward action . . .

Next, step 2, extending this experience: helping it last, staying with it, resting your attention in it . . . returning to this experience if your attention wanders . . . giving over to a sense of strength on your own behalf, letting this experience fill your body and mind . . . aware of different aspects of this experience, perhaps sensations in the body . . . emotions . . . thoughts, beliefs . . . images, memories . . . desires . . . inclinations toward action . . .

[pause]

sinking into this experience . . . if you can, gently helping it, encouraging it to becoming richer, as intense as possible . . .

[pause]

Then, step 3, absorbing this experience of strength on your own behalf, letting it sink into you as you sink into it . . . intending and sensing that this experience is sifting down into you like soft golden dust or a gentle rain . . . soaking into you like a water into a sponge, or like the warmth of a cup of hot cocoa into your hands . . . becoming part of you like a jewel in the treasure chest of your heart . . . like a golden balm soothing you . . .

. or however you do this yourself, finding your own ways that work for you, intending and sensing that this experience become a part of you, a resource inside you can take with you wherever your go.

[pause]

OK, come on back.

It's fine to keep having a sense of strength on your own behalf.

[About 15 minutes for the discussion]

Discussion (Key questions are bulleted, teaching points are numbered)

- How was that for you?
- In step 1, activation, could you find a time in your past when there was a sense of strength on your own behalf?

By the way, note that we used one of the ways to *create* a positive experience, by looking for good facts in the *past*. Past is a treasure chest of good facts and related experiences that you can draw upon as resources for life these days.

Anyone want to share an example of using a past experience of strength to call up a sense of strength today?

(1) You can see that many of our memories of the past have a strongly *embodied* quality to them. These rich, embodied states are good resources for us. When you take in the good, you build up these resources. Then, later on you can re-activate them at will.

It's like the brain is an iPod - a jukebox (old school). Basically, it has negative songs and positive songs, and a set of controls. In terms of this metaphor:

- Do you have an abundance of negative songs? Or not many positive ones?
- Are some negative songs stuck on a repeating loop? You can't turn them off?
- Is it hard to get positive songs to play?

In this metaphor, this course is about getting more control over the iPod, activating many more positive songs, installing them into the iPod, and gradually clearing out the negative ones.

- Do you have any questions about any of the steps?
- In particular, how was it for you to do step 2, to extend the experience? What helped you do this?

(2) It is probably most effective - in terms of transferring a particular mental state, a particular experience, into neural structure - to stay with one particular experience rather than bouncing around to multiple positive experiences.

You can be aware of different aspects of a single, particular experience - such as the body sensations, emotions, thoughts, images, desires, inclinations - associated with it, but these are ways to deepen a single, relatively coherent, particular experience to that it leaves the maximum trace in neural structure.

- And what happened for you in step 3, when you were absorbing the experience?

(3) If you are extending an experience, it is naturally being installed, since neurons that are firing together automatically wire together.

Still, as research on memory shows, you can "prime" memory systems - ready them and help them get maximally sensitive - through intending and then sensing that an experience is really being registered.

Break (20)

We'll go into a break from here, and then talk about this practice you just did when we come back.

This will be a 15 minute break.

[Say where the bathrooms are.]

Please be back by _____. We'll start on time.

105 MINUTES SO FAR

3 Needs, 2 Settings (25)

Presentation (10)

Now I'd like to zoom back and put these practices of internalizing positive experiences into the context of the evolution of the brain.

Refer to Key Points handout.

To simplify, three stages of brain evolution:

- Reptile
- Mammal
- Primate/human

Three basic needs:

- Avoid harms
- Approach rewards
- Attach to others

The brain works *as a whole today* to meet these needs – though we are still influenced by the often ancient systems that originally evolved to address them.

When we experience that these needs are met, the brain defaults to its Responsive mode. This is our home base, the *homeostatic* resting state of the brain, in which the body refuels and repairs itself, and the mind is in a basic state of peace, happiness, and love.

On the other hand, we also evolved a second setting of the brain, its Reactive mode. We enter this when we experience being disturbed. In this allostatic mode, the body burns resources and the mind is full of hatred, greed, and heartache . . . to use traditional terms [translate].

The natural rhythm is for Reactive bursts to be followed by long periods of recovery in the Responsive mode. In the wild, most episodes of intense stress are resolved quickly . . . one way or another.

These deep needs - Avoiding, Approaching, and Attaching - are innate, and there is no shame in them. Our - in some senses of this languaging - reptilian, mammalian, primate, and Stone Age capabilities and tendencies are innate, and there is no shame in them. There may be a place for short-term, as-needed Reactive activation. But there is always a cost. And these days, low to moderate chronic stress with little chance for recovery in the Responsive mode has become a kind of chronic inner homelessness. Chronic Reactive mode arousal is not good for you, your relationships, or the planet.

Taking in the good is often a rapid and effective way to pull yourself out of the Reactive mode and start the natural process of recovery in the Responsive mode. Biologically, the key internal signals that begin the movement into the Responsive, recovery phase are a sense of safety (Avoiding), pleasure or pleasant emotions (Approaching), and connection with others (Attaching). TG naturally activates these positive states of mind, initiating the Responsive recovery phase.

Additionally, TG stimulates and therefore strengthens the neural substrates of the Responsive mode. It increases an internalized sense of your needs having been met, so there is less and less basis for the craving that leads to suffering, and less and less basis for the Reactive mode. It's like deepening the keel of a sailboat: the deeper the keel - through repeatedly taking in the good - the more that the winds of life can blow without tipping over the boat. And if a really strong gust does come and knock you hard, you will recover more quickly.

Discussion (15)

What are examples in your own life of the three core needs (Avoiding, Approaching, Attaching)?

What are examples of pursuing these needs from a Reactive place?

What are examples of pursuing these needs from a Responsive place?

What sort of experiences help you stay in a Responsive place regarding:

- Avoiding harms?
- Approaching rewards?
- Attaching to others?

To preview a point we will start getting into next week, it is possible to address key needs in each of these three major motivational systems: *Avoid* harms, *Approach* rewards, and *Attach* to others. [give examples] [Refer to the Key Resource Experiences handout]

In the remaining three classes, we will focus on taking in key resource experiences related to each of these three systems. If you like, you can start reflecting on the kinds of key experiences that would help you in terms of each of these systems.

Understanding Resource Experiences (35)

Introduction (5)

In a few moments, you will find a partner, choose an A and a B - A's go first, B's mainly listen, then I will give time signals and you will switch roles - and talk about one or more experiences you do have, or have had, or could have, that could help you stay in the Responsive mode regarding some issue you are dealing with these days. I'll call this a "resource experience."

Don't get any more personal than you want to be.

You don't need to find the perfect resource experience. This is an inquiry that is helpful in general: What is the answer to this question: What would be useful these days to have more of inside you? Maybe more confidence, more strength, more sense of worth, more feeling loved, more feeling loving, etc.

Whatever the answer is, that would be a good resource for you.

Then, working backward, how could you activate an experience of this resource, inside your mind? For example, to what extent is this resource already present in your awareness, but in the background, and you are not particularly noticing it? Also, how could you create this experience more often for yourself? Could you bring up the sense of it from your past? What good facts could you look for that would naturally activate this experience? Or what good facts could you create?

In other words, how could you have more experiences that are the natural building blocks of this resource, and then install them in your brain?

So I will guide you to explore two questions: What would be a good inner resource to have more of these days? And how could you activate an experience of this resource more often?

→ Make sure participants understand these two questions.

Dyads (13)

OK, find a partner.

You'll do 5 minutes, 3 on the first question and 2 on the second one, and then switch roles. I'll give time signals.

There is no right answer here. Just relax and see what you come up with.

Begin.

→ Give time signals.

OK, switch roles.

→ Give time signals.

OK, wrap it up. Come on back.

Let's talk about this.

Discussion (12)

What did you see about the idea of resource experiences?

→ Make sure the ideas are clear:

- Inner resources
 - Resources that it would be useful to have more of
 - Ways to experience those resources more often - and thus begin the process of installing them more deeply in the brain
- Also look for examples related to each of the motivational systems, to highlight and differentiate these systems.

TG Resource Experience (5)

We have talked about this a lot, now let's try an experience.

As best you can, right now, see if you can call to mind an experience of your resource. In the first step of TG, think of things that could call up a sense of this resource. . . or recall a time you felt it in the past . . . or maybe imagine yourself in situations that would naturally call upon this resource so you would have an experience of it . . .

If you just can't access a sense of this resource, it's OK. Just do the best you can.

And then if you do get a sense of the resource, try to extend and absorb this sense, to install the resource more in your brain.

OK.

Discussion (5)

How was that for you?

We will explore resource experiences in many ways in the next three weeks, as they apply to the three core motivations (Avoiding, Approaching, Attaching). It is fine if this idea of resource experiences is still fuzzy. It will get clearer and more real for you.

165 MINUTES SO FAR

Wrapping Up (15)

OK, we covered a lot of ground. I really appreciated your presence and attention.

The Week ahead (5)

This week, I suggest that you:

- Engage this theme for the coming week: focus on experiences of being on your own side: care and concern and good wishes for yourself; a sense of strength on your own behalf. Look for opportunities to take in this sense.
- Use experiences of being on your own side to explore, again and again, what works for you in *extending* and *absorbing* positive experiences.
- As usual, try to set aside a few minutes each day for very specifically taking in positive experiences.

→ We will email you a sheet to support you in your home practice . . . as soon as we create it!

Peace, Happiness, and Love (10)

And let's finish with the practice that we used at the end of the last class.

In particular, I will say less about *activating* each of these positive states of mind - peace, happiness, and love - and more about *installing* it, the focus of today's class.

Relaxing and coming into a sense of presence with yourself.

Opening to, finding, a sense of calm, relaxation, alrightness right now, a feeling of being unthreatened, protected, strong, and safe . . . not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of *peace*.

Staying with the sense of peace, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Opening to, finding, a sense of gratitude, gladness, enoughness in this moment, a sense of fullness . . . not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of *happiness*.

Staying with the sense of happiness, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Opening to, finding, a sense of connection, a sense of inclusion with others, of friendship, camaraderie, being liked, cared about, appreciated, respected, a sense of your own caring for others, your compassion, kindness not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of loving and being loved . . . a sense of being *love*.

Staying with the sense of love, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Getting a sense of peace, happiness, and love all present together in your mind . . . perhaps a sense of coming home . . . resting in peace, happiness, and love all present together . . .

[pause]

OK, come on back.

It's OK to keep feeling a sense of peace, happiness, and love.

See you next week!

Thank you, and take care.

Taking in the Good Course

CLASS 4: Being Peace

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Themes

Focus on the Avoiding system

"Paper tiger paranoia" – needless, unreasonable anxiety

The possibility of dealing with real pain and threat from the Responsive, not Reactive, mode

Key resource experiences

TG resources supporting:

- Decreasing needless anxiety
- Responsive approaches to real pain and threat

Welcome (5)

Welcome participants (1)

Deal with any logistics (1)

The Plan for This Class (3)

This class is about the Avoiding system of the brain, the one that evolved to help us deal with pains and threats.

Beginning with this class, we are:

- Continuing to deepen your understanding of the TG methods
- Applying these methods increasingly toward specific challenges in your life

In this class we'll explore:

- Much of the time the Avoiding system activates needlessly or excessively – Then we feel unnecessary, unreasonable, over the top worry, apprehension, dread, anxiety, or fear.
- The differences between the Reactive and Responsive approaches to real pains and threats
- How to take in key resource experiences that will help (A) reduce needless or excessive anxiety and (B) handle real pains and threats from the Responsive mode.
- This class has a good deal of material in it, so to repeat something said before: it is really OK to not remember or understand everything. The important parts will naturally sink in, and as you practice with the methods in this class, and other classes, they will become more down-to-earth and real for you.

Follow up on Homework (10)

So, how was the last week, in terms of this course?

Do you have any thoughts about the attitude of care, concern, and good wishes toward yourself; a sense of strength on your behalf?

Do you have any thoughts about what particularly helps you to extend or absorb positive experiences?

Any thoughts about the model I presented at the last class, about the brain's three fundamental motivational systems – Avoiding, Approaching, and Attaching – and its two settings, or modes, for meeting those needs: the Responsive home base, and the Reactive disturbance of a sustainable equilibrium for immediate survival purposes?

Pairs about Anxiety and Resources (20)

Introduction (3)

In a few minutes, we'll do a paired exercise as an entry into the topics of this class. I'll ask you to pick a partner and take turns, two minutes at a time, speaking to two questions:

- In what ways do you experience worry, apprehension, unease, fear – or other forms of anxiety? To answer this question, it can help to pick one or two key situations that are particularly anxiety-provoking for you. And by "In what ways do you experience," I mean how does anxiety show up for you in terms of the components of experience we have discussed before, such as sensations, emotions, thoughts, and behavioral inclinations.
- What resources inside you – what factors in your mind, what thoughts, feelings, sensations, etc. - help you feel less anxiety? (As best you can, try to focus on the inner resources – not the external settings or events – that help counter anxiety.)

As with any practice we do, you can opt out, which is fine.

I'll give instructions as we go through it, but the format is this:

- For your partner, I suggest another person besides the one you paired with last class if possible, just to get to know more people in this class and create more of a sense of safety here.
- When you get with your partner, pick an A and a B. A's always first.
- One partner will mainly speak while the other will mainly listen. It's good to be supportive if you are a listener, and fine to ask questions if something is unclear. But please don't offer any advice.

- A's will start on the first question – which I will repeat - while B's listen. I'll give time signals. Please switch when I ask you to, and B's will talk about the first question while A's listen.
- Then it will be time for the second question, which I will repeat: A's will start while B's listen. I'll give time signals. Please switch when I ask you to, and B's will talk about the second question while A's listen.

Any questions about format?

The practice (10)

OK, let's begin.

→ Do the practice.

Discussion (7)

OK, how was that for you?

(1) Normalize anxiety. Make the point that the Avoiding system is fundamental. For example, safety is the foundation of any healthy relationships.

→ Look for an opportunity to segue into the presentation on threat reactivity.

Threat Reactivity (30)

Introduction (1)

I'm going to take a bit of time to explore the roots of needless or excessive anxiety because rational understanding of these roots will help guide you in dealing with them, and because you can *take in* that understanding – remember that thoughts (views, perspectives, insights) are one of the components of experience that we can internalize – to help reduce any needless or excessive anxiety.

Overview (10)

The human brain is naturally *threat reactive* for two kinds of reasons.

First, it is a “novelty detection device” that particularly reacts to and remembers (including in implicit, “emotional” memory) *fresh or unexpected* stimuli (both internal and external). In the wild and in life today, most moments on most days for most animals/humans are either neutral or positive. (Obviously, there are many important and sometimes tragic exceptions to this general tendency.) In terms of novelty, this has several implications:

- Positive and neutral events are usually not novel, so they get relatively little encoding in memory.
- Negative events that do not happen are not novel, so we usually do not recognize the many bad things that could have occurred but didn’t.
- Negative events that do occur are relatively novel, thus much more memorable.

Second, as our ancestors evolved, they needed to avoid two mistakes:

- Thinking there is a tiger in the bushes when there isn’t one.
- Thinking there is no tiger in the bushes when there is one.

The cost of the first mistake is needless anxiety, but the cost of the second mistake could be death – and no more gene copies.

Rule #1 in the wild is, “Eat lunch today – don’t *be* lunch today.” So we evolved a brain that’s inclined toward making the first mistake a thousand times over to avoid making the second mistake even once.

Mother Nature has even given us an ongoing background trickle of anxiety – in some people, more of a stream, even sometimes a flood – in order to keep us vigilant, always looking over our shoulder.

Animals back in evolution that were real chill, feeling real safe, going all Zen with the light coming through the leaves . . . CHOMP got eaten! Because they didn’t notice the shadow overhead or the slither in the brush nearby. The ones who passed on their genes were nervous, anxious, vigilant, and highly, highly threat reactive.

Threat reactivity is a key example of the negativity bias, what I call “paper tiger paranoia” – thinking that there is a real tiger when there is only a paper one, or a baby one, or one securely locked up, or one you could readily deal with.

This generic tendency toward irrational fear is intensified by temperament, personal history, culture, and politics.

Threat reactivity affects individuals, couples, families, organizations, nations, and the world as a whole.

While it is tempting to explore threat reactivity in terms of national politics and international affairs, for our purposes here let’s stay focused on how threat reactivity affects you individually, and in your relationships.

False Alarms (4)

While there are laboratory studies of people underestimating risks and overestimating opportunities, in real-life most people tend to:

- Overestimate threats
- Underestimate opportunities
- Underestimate inner and outer resources for dealing with threats and fulfilling opportunities

Then we update these distorted appraisals with information that confirms them; we ignore, devalue, or alter information that doesn’t.

Thus we end up with views of ourselves, others, and the world that are selective, biased, or simply wrong.

→ Give a personal example. Ask for others.

Costs (4)

Feeling threatened feels anxious, fearful, apprehensive, uneasy: in a word, bad.

It triggers Reactive stress cascades, that are bad for long-term physical and mental health.

We over-invest in threat protection, such as walls and defenses between ourselves and others.

"The boy who cried tiger" – When you flood awareness with paper tigers, it's harder to see the real ones. For example, getting over-wrought about financial concerns makes it harder to focus on improving your health practices.

Acting while feeling threatened leads to over-reactions, makes others feel threatened, and creates vicious cycles. This is a huge, common issue in relationships.

The Approaching system is inhibited, so we play small, don't pursue opportunities, or give up too soon.

In the Attaching system, we bond tighter to "us," with more fear and anger toward "them."

Discussion (10)

What do you see about any tendencies in your mind toward "paper tiger paranoia," toward needless or excessive anxiety?

(1) Note the fear some people have about not being fearful. Relate this to the block to TG that's about concerns you'll lower your guard if you feel good.

What specific experiences either do or could help you to move out of needless or excessive fear?

65 MINUTES SO FAR

TG Protected Setting (20)

Introduction (2)

So let's take a few minutes to do a practice on one of the key resource experiences that you can draw on to reduce unreasonable anxiety: recognizing that you are in a protected setting.

You are getting experienced at the three steps of TG, so I will go through them with fewer and fewer suggestions. Here we go.

Practice (5)

[The TG instructions in the scripts of these classes will become increasingly schematic.]

1. **Having** – Be aware of any sense already present in awareness – in the foreground or the background – of being in a protected setting . . .

You can also *create* a positive experience by focusing on good facts in your immediate setting: Bring to mind an awareness of being in a protected setting . . . the door is closed, this building is staffed and safe . . . I am looking out for you . . . you are among good people . . .

However you do it, *activate* a positive experience of feeling protected, relatively safe . . .

2. **Extending** – Once you have this experience, stay with it so you can *install* it in your brain. Help it last in your mind. Help your body relax . . . releasing any unnecessary guarding or bracing . . . softening and opening as you feel safer and safer . . . letting a sense of protection fill your body, giving over to it, opening to it . . . letting this sense of safety fill your mind . . . letting it be strong in your mind and pervading . . . unnecessary anxiety, needless fear, falling away . . .

[→ 20 seconds of quiet

3. **Absorbing** – Meanwhile, overlapping the *extending* of this experience, you can intend and sense that this experience of protection and safety is sinking into you as you sink into it . . . like water into a sponge . . . or simply knowing that this is becoming part of you, a resource you can take with you wherever you go . . .

→ A minute of quiet

OK, come on back.

Discussion (10)

How was that?

What was it like to look for good facts in your immediate setting?

What if any blocks did you encounter to feeling protected?

How did you handle these blocks?

→ This is an important consideration, take some time with it. How we handle internal blocks is consequential.

You can continue to have this sense of protection – even as we move into a break momentarily.

See what it could be like to stand up with a sense of safety and protection, to walk across the room, to go out to the bathroom, to speak with others.

Try *re-activating* of the sense of protection and safety multiple times over the course of the break. Explore what this key skill is like for you: deliberately reactivating a key resource experience.

85 MINUTES SO FAR

Break (15)

This will be a 10 minute break.

[Say where the bathrooms are.]

Please be back by _____. We'll start on time.

100 MINUTES SO FAR

Discussion of TG Feeling Protected (10)

Was anyone able to explore the sense of being protected on the break? Any observations or lessons from that?

→ Offer comments as appropriate.

Key Resource Experiences (30)

Presentation (15)

This experience you just had highlights one of the key themes of this whole course:

Certain key resource experiences are particularly powerful for certain needs or issues.

Toward the end of last week's class, we explored this topic in general terms. You considered two questions:

- What would be useful these days to have more of inside you? Maybe more confidence, more strength, more sense of worth, more feeling loved, more feeling loving, etc.
- Then, working backward, how could you activate an experience of this resource, inside your mind?

Now, I'd like to connect this general idea of resource experiences to specific needs – especially related to the Avoiding system (our focus this week). In effect, certain resource experiences are the missing supplies that would make a big difference for a particular problem, or would help remedy a major lack or wound in the past. These **key resource experiences** are like the medicine you need, like an antidote for an ailment, or like a vitamin you have been needing.

For example, as you probably got some sense of, feeling protected is a key factor in feeling safer – especially if you are caught in some paper tiger paranoia, some needless or excessive anxiety based on overestimating the threats around you and underestimating the protections you have.

This illustrates the larger point: Almost everyone has *specific* issues related to one or more of the three core needs – Avoiding, Approaching, and Attaching – and those issues can be really helped by taking in equally specific key resources. It is normal to have these issues or needs. It is abnormal *not* to have them! So there is no shame or disrespect in acknowledging them.

While all positive experiences have benefits by definition, certain targeted key resource experiences have a particular power. It's like having anemia: you need iron. Or if you have scurvy, you need vitamin C. Reasonable amounts of iron are good – but they won't heal scurvy.

→ Give a personal example.

Taking in *targeted* positive experiences – your own vitamin C – will generally have more impact than non-specific experiences. For example, gratitude is nice – related to the Approaching system – but it usually won't make you feel less worried about something (Avoiding system) or less lonely (Attaching system).

In other words, what would be the key resources inside you that would help you best deal with a particular issue? Once you know the answer to this question, you can look for every opportunity to activate and install this resource into your brain. This is and incredibly powerful, fundamental method for healing, well-being, effectiveness, and spiritual practice.

Suppose that you are anxious in your natural temperament. This is an issue of the Avoiding harms system. To deal with this, you could emphasize opportunities to have key resource experiences of feeling protected, strong, relaxed, alright right now, calm, or safe.

Or suppose that you have had a disappointment or loss recently; perhaps you didn't get a project you wanted at work, or you were recently laid off, or your children have grown up and left home.

(And notice that I am now shifting from a normal quality of temperament - that could nonetheless benefit from resourcing, regardless of its normalcy - to a recent event that's challenging).

This is an issue of the Approaching rewards system. To help yourself with it, you could focus on key resource experiences of physical pleasure, gladness, gratitude, the enoughness and fullness of this moment, and available experiences of accomplishment. These won't replace the loss, of course, but they could help it sting less, and help you work through it in an authentic and adaptive way, and move on.

Or suppose that in your childhood you felt like an outsider much of the time, not seen, included, or valued. The rich stew of normal relational supplies that everyone needs was in this case more like a thin soup.

This is an issue of the Attaching system. To address and compensate for this shortfall, this deficit, you could 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. Again, this may not be a complete healing, but at least it will bring in some long overdue supplies to your heart.

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).

Discussion (15)

What do you think of this idea, of identifying particular resource experiences for particular issues, and then really getting on your own side to look for opportunities to internalize these?

What might be some of the specific applications to you?

→ Have participants call out one or more examples of a personal challenge, issue, need, or wound – and then the group brainstorms some key resource experiences for it, and how to create them.

(1) When you know what your key issues are, then you can work backwards . . . to identify the key resources inside you that would best remedy them . . . then identify

experiences you could have or create (= activate) that would install these resources in your brain . . . then really do it, and take in these experiences again and again. This is a beautiful, effective path of healing and growth that is also intrinsically rewarding and satisfying.

→ Really make sure that participants start getting a clear sense of this idea of key resource experiences.

140 MINUTES SO FAR

Reactive and Responsive Approaches to Pains and Threats (25)

Presentation (4)

Now let's apply this idea of key resource experiences – your personal “vitamins” – to helping yourself approach real pains and threats from the Responsive setting of your brain rather than from the Reactive one.

First, a comparison [DON'T GET BOGGED DOWN HERE]:

- The Reactive approach to real pains and threats involves: disturbing and depleting bodily systems; overestimating threats and underestimating resources; often a fear of some kind of contamination; experiences of fear and anger; behaviors of fight, flight, and freeze; typically, a strong sense of I-me-mine; and creating vicious cycles of threat-reaction-retaliation with others (at all scales, individual up to nation). Maybe this approach is sometimes necessary, but there are always costs – which, when sustained, usually outweigh the benefits. Consider all the relationships – and nations – in which a potentially brief Reactive approach to attack or threat became the new normal.
- In contrast, the Responsive approach to real pains and threats involves: a sustainable outflow, intensity, and pace; a general feeling of remaining centered, grounded, in balance; any internal experiences of fear and anger contained in a larger space of mindfulness, calm, strength, and acceptance; perhaps positive emotions or experiences of vigor, energy, enthusiastic (not grim) determination, joy in living, even zest; clarity of plans; a sense of being judicious and thoughtful rather than reactive and impulsive; taking the long view; typically, less sense of self, of I-me-mine, of taking things personally; you stick up for yourself without getting so caught up in your *self* taking preventive action early on; never panicking; clear-eyed about real threats but not exaggerating them; a sense of your own goodness and innate health, that you are not

contaminated; appropriately cautious but not cowed or intimidated; an internal sense of having allies and other resources; steering clear of contentiousness, resentment, and retaliation.

It is possible to approach real pains and threats from a Responsive, not Reactive, place. Just this idea that you can deal with difficulties in a Responsive way is wonderfully reassuring

TG Being Responsive toward a Challenge (15)

Now let's try this in a more general way.

Pick a challenge in your life these days, something that tends to draw you into fear or anger. Not an overwhelming challenge, but a real one.

In a moment I will suggest that you imagine yourself engaging this challenge in Responsive ways – and that you take in this sense, these ideas of staying Responsive.

To begin with, settling into yourself, bring to mind the challenge . . . observing as if from a bird's-eye view any ways that you have approached or might approach this challenge from a Reactive place – in other words, from a place of fear and anger, or frustration and drivenness, or envy or inadequacy . . . from a place of fight or flight or freeze . . . reflecting on the costs to you and others of going to the Reactive mode for this challenge . . .

Then imagine Responsive ways to engage this challenge . . . on a basis of feeling already strong and peaceful . . . already fed and grateful, already grounded in a basic well-being . . . already feeling connected, cared about, loved and loving . . . holding any negative thoughts or feelings or sensations in a larger context of basic peace, happiness, and love . . . On this basis, imagine how you would approach this challenge in a Responsive way . . .

I'll offer some possibilities, with quiet to reflect and explore between them. As you explore possible Responsive approaches to this challenge, keep in mind the three steps of taking in the good: (1) let the idea of an appropriate and Responsive approach become an experience of it in your body, (2) extend this experience for a dozen seconds or so, and (3) absorb it, letting it sink into you, giving yourself over to it so that it becomes your approach in the days ahead.

For example, imagine how you might find a sense of being on your own side related to this challenge . . . of caring for yourself . . . of having compassion for what you are suffering here . . . of deepening a sense of strength and determination to deal with the challenge . . .

Imagine being grounded in a sense of feeling protected in some ways . . . staying as relaxed as you can in your body even as you deal with things . . . noticing again and again that you are basically alright right now . . . staying in control of yourself . . . being reasonably calm even if you need to be firm . . . not being contentious, not getting tangled up with others or situations . . . not going to war with anyone or anything . . . staying peaceful . . .

Imagine being grounded in feeling grateful and glad for the larger whole of your life . . . aware of some of the many many things that are still going fine . . . feeling fed by the fullness of each moment . . . focusing on what is within your power to influence regarding this challenge . . . beginning to make plans for what is possible for you to do . . . helping yourself accept the limits of your influence . . . focusing on your successes at accomplishing what is within your power to accomplish . . . noticing some of the many other ways in your life you can be and feel accomplished and successful . . . approaching this challenge from a place of feeling already contented and fulfilled . . . staying grounded in well-being, staying happy . . .

Imagine being grounded in a sense of being cared about by others as you engage this challenge . . . having friends and perhaps family . . . encouraged by them, with compassion and sympathy and support from them . . . love from them flowing to you, into you, filling your heart . . . caring and friendliness and love flowing out from you . . . perhaps even toward aspects of the challenge, including perhaps other people . . . lifted and carried by warmheartedness . . . dealing with tough things from a place of compassion for yourself and others . . . wishing yourself and others well . . . staying loved and loving . . .

Imagine, in summary, being grounded in an overall sense of being already peaceful, happy, loved and loving as you deal with this challenge . . .

Imagine some of the good results, for you and others . . .

Let the knowing and appreciating of these good results motivate you to bring a Responsive approach to this challenge in the days ahead

Discussion (6)

OK.

How was that for you?

What did you learn?

165 MINUTES SO FAR

Wrapping Up (15)

OK, we covered a lot of ground. I really appreciated your presence and attention.

The Week ahead (5)

This week, I suggest that you:

- Consider what your own specific issues could be in terms of the Avoiding harms system. For example, are you nervous by temperament, do you have significant worries, is there any history in which you've been attacked or traumatized, have you felt significantly unprotected, weak, small, or outnumbered?

Don't let yourself get overwhelmed by this consideration, hold it lightly and in passing if you like.

And in particular, consider what could be key resource experiences for you regarding these particular issues. For example, as I said just a little while ago, experiences of feeling protected, strong, relaxed, alright right now, calm, or safe. If you like, you could focus on these experiences during the coming week, really take them in, and see what the results are for you.

- As usual, try to set aside a few minutes each day for very specifically taking in positive experiences.

→ Pass out the sheet for home practice.

Peace, Happiness, and Love (10)

And let's finish with the practice that we used at the end of the last class.

Relaxing and coming into a sense of presence with yourself.

Opening to, finding, a sense of calm, relaxation, alrightness right now, a feeling of being unthreatened, protected, strong, and safe . . . not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of *peace*.

Staying with the sense of peace, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Opening to, finding, a sense of gratitude, gladness, enoughness in this moment, a sense of fullness . . . not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of *happiness*.

Staying with the sense of happiness, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Opening to, finding, a sense of connection, a sense of inclusion with others, of friendship, camaraderie, being liked, cared about, appreciated, respected, a sense of your own caring for others, your compassion, kindness not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of loving and being loved . . . a sense of being *love*.

Staying with the sense of love, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Getting a sense of peace, happiness, and love all present together in your mind . . .
perhaps a sense of coming home . . . resting in peace, happiness, and love all present
together . . .

[pause]

OK, come on back.

It's OK to keep feeling a sense of peace, happiness, and love.

See you next week, when we will get into the details of this practice, and how to do it
most effectively.

Thank you, and take care.

Taking in the Good Course

CLASS 5: Being Happiness

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Themes

Focus on the Approaching system

The hedonic or feeling tone

Liking and wanting: enjoying rewards without grasping, tolerating discomfort without aversion, feeling related without clinging. How this supports the Responsive mode

The 4th step of TG, pairing positive and negative

TG resources supporting:

- Feeling glad and grateful
- Feeling the enoughness, the fullness of this moment
- Feeling accomplished, arrived
- Choosing wholesome rewards over unwholesome ones

Welcome (5)

Welcome participants (1)

Deal with any logistics (1)

Reminder that as of this class we are 2 ½ hours long, ending at 11:30.

The Plan for This Class (3)

This class is about the Approaching system of the brain, the one that evolved to help us pursue pleasure and other rewards.

We'll explore:

- How to experience the hedonic ("feeling") tone of experience without chasing pleasure, resisting pain, or clinging to others
- The optional 4th step of TG: pairing positive and negative material in awareness to soothe and if possible replace the negative material over time

This 4th step is a very important addition to your toolbox of ways to work with positive experiences.

- Key resource experiences of gladness and accomplishment

Follow up on Homework (10)

So, how was the last week, in terms of this course?

Did you have any experiences with feeling protected or resourced that you'd like to share?

Did you explore any key resource experiences?

Gladness and Gratitude (20)

Introduction (2)

To get into the subject of this class, let's practice taking in the good of experiences related to gladness and gratitude.

Gladness means feeling pleased, delighted, or happy about something. Gratitude means feeling thankful or appreciative about a benefit one has been given. Gratitude implies that we have received a gift; we are on the receiving end of some generosity; it's not a matter of a reciprocal exchange; we don't feel grateful for our boss giving us a paycheck. Gladness is more general. Both are, of course, beautiful feelings.

I'll suggest a variety of prompts that you can use to notice or create an experience of gladness or gratitude in step 1 - *having*, activating, a positive experience. Then with fewer and fewer suggestions, I'll encourage you to do the second and third steps of TG: *extending* and *absorbing* the experience (the installation phase).

The Practice (15)

Alright, coming into a sense of yourself, being here, eyes open or closed.

[About 2 minutes for each of the prompts, except 3 minutes for the last one, plus an extra 1 minute for explanations]

1. **Having** – Be aware of any sense already present in awareness – in the foreground or the background – of already feeling glad or grateful about something . . .

If there is no sense of this, that's fine, you can also *create* a positive experience: Just bring to mind something present here and now that you feel glad about or grateful for . . . perhaps the chance to learn new things, or one or more people here, or a sense of your own capacities, or life itself . . . or whatever is meaningful to you . . .

However you do it, *activate* a positive experience of feeling glad or grateful, or a blend of the two . . .

2. **Extending** – Once you *have* this experience, stay with it so you can *install* it in your brain. Help it last . . . open to it . . . let it fill you . . . let it become as strong a feeling as possible . . .

[→ 20 seconds of quiet]

3. **Absorbing** – Meanwhile, overlapping the *extending* of this experience, you are absorbing it. Intend and sense that this experience of gladness or gratitude is sinking into you as you sink into it . . . like water into a sponge . . . or simply knowing that this is becoming part of you, a resource you can take with you wherever you go . . .

→ 20 seconds of quiet

OK.

Now let's try this some more times, with me suggesting different kinds of things to feel glad or grateful about; I'll begin with gladness and move to gratitude. Obviously, this will come under the heading of you *creating*, not just *noticing*, a positive experience in the first step of TG.

Then my suggestions about the three steps themselves will be pretty minimal.

It's natural for multiple good things to come to mind and that's fine if they are closely related and produce essentially the same experience, the same emotions and sensations and feelings; otherwise, you'll probably have the greatest impact on your brain if you stay with one kind of experience at a time, 10-20 seconds in a row.

Here we go.

For the 1st step of TG, *having* a positive experience, think of something in your life these days that you feel glad about, that gives you a sense of happiness. . . . Let the knowing of this good fact become a good experience of gladness, of feeling pleased, rewarded, some kind of happiness . . . Then in the 2nd step of TG, *extend* this positive experience for 10-20 seconds or so . . . while also, in the 3rd step of TG, *absorbing* it, intending and sensing that it sinks into you as you sink into it . . .

→ 20 seconds of quiet

OK. Let's try another prompt.

This time, for the 1st step, think about something in your past you feel glad about, and let this evoke a positive experience for you . . . It could be a little thing, maybe a special memory of a place, or something good that happened . . . And once you *have* the positive experience, do the 2nd and 3rd steps of *extending* and *absorbing* it

→ 20 seconds of quiet

OK. Let's try another prompt.

For the 1st step, think about something in your life these days you feel grateful for . . . something you have been given . . . someone has been generous to you . . . you feel thankful and appreciative . . . Once you *have* the positive experience, do the 2nd and 3rd steps of *extending* and *absorbing* it

→ 20 seconds of quiet

OK. Let's try another prompt.

For the 1st step, think about something in your past you feel grateful for . . . something you were given . . . someone was generous to you . . . you feel thankful and appreciative . . . Once you *have* the positive experience, do the 2nd and 3rd steps of *extending* and *absorbing* it

→ 20 seconds of quiet

OK. Last prompt. This one is more subtle. You could think of it as a kind of experiment with your own mind.

[About 3 minutes for this one]

For the 1st step, get some sense of the amazing number of things appearing moment to moment in the stream of consciousness . . . sounds, sights (even the shadings or textures if your eyes are closed), tastes, smells, and touches . . . thoughts and feelings, images and desires . . . some sense of so many little things appearing and passing away in each moment of awareness . . . focusing on the arriving in awareness each moment of

so many stimuli . . . landing, filling you, giving to you, almost overwhelming so many things coming to you . . . feeling so *filled* by this moment, feeling its *enoughness* . . . so reason to reach for more, filled already . . . a growing sense of *contentment* with this moment as it is, no need for it to be anything other than what it is, no desire for it to change . . .

Letting this sense of enoughness, of contentment, *extend* and fill your mind and body . . .

Letting the sense of enoughness, ease, contentment, of no basis for craving, sink into you, being *absorbed* into you . . .

→ 60 seconds of quiet

OK. Come on back.

35 MINUTES SO FAR

Pairs about Gladness, Gratitude, and Contentment (20)

Introduction (2)

Alright.

In a format that is getting familiar to you by now, in a minute I'll ask you to find a partner and talk about the practice you just did.

As usual, there will be an A and a B. A's go first, three minutes, while B's mainly listen, then switch roles, I'll give time instructions. Just share how that was for you and anything you learned from it. And it's fine to sit this out. OK?

Find a partner, preferably someone new as a partner if that is possible.

The practice (8)

OK, let's begin.

→ Do the practice.

Discussion (10)

OK, come on back.

How was the taking in the good practice for you?

What did you experience? What did you learn?

How was that experiment for you, of opening to the fullness, the enoughness of this moment? And thus opening to contentment?

(1) It's kind of amazing that available to us in each moment is a direct experience of fullness, enoughness, and contentment.

55 MINUTES SO FAR

Break (15)

Even though it is a little early, I'd like to take a break now so we can do the next section of this class in a continuous way.

This will be a 10 minute break.

[Say where the bathrooms are.]

Please be back by _____. We'll start on time.

70 MINUTES SO FAR

Explaining TG 4th Step: Pairing Positive and Negative (60)

Introduction (2)

In the first three steps, you focus only on positive facts and experiences – even if in the back of your mind is the knowledge that you are internalizing a key resource experience for some psychological need or issue.

In the optional 4th step of TG, you take this a step further, and hold both positive and negative material in your awareness. In a nutshell, you keep the positive material more prominent and intense, and sense it connecting with and gradually soothing, perhaps even replacing, the negative material.

Let me explain first why this method works, and second give you some suggestions for how to use it effectively. I need to take some time with this since this 4th step is very powerful, and like all powerful interventions, needs to be understood and used wisely.

Then we'll practice it in this class for other experiences – besides gladness, gratitude, and contentment – related to the Approaching rewards system.

Rationale (17)

(1) 1. As we've talked about before in this course, there is a place for unpleasant experiences. Sorrow can tenderize the heart, hardship can make us stronger, etc.

The point is not to be aversive to unpleasant experiences. If you go negative on the negative, you just have more negative.

But when unpleasant experiences become pragmatically negative structures in the brain – which is what I mean by "negative material" – that is not good for you or others you affect.

(3) 2. It's normal to have "negative material," by which I mean:

- Residues built up in emotional memory of past experiences with negative sensations, feelings, beliefs, or desires
- Deficits, shortfalls, thin soup of psychological "supplies" that everyone needs. [Give examples, such as a child's normal needs for feeling understood, wanted, appreciated, liked, loved.]

And depending on your temperament, your biologically based constitutional nature, some people naturally have greater needs than others do for these supplies. These needs are not personal failings, they are just in your DNA-given nature. The sort of family environment, peer group experiences, and support from work and love relationships in adulthood that were not great but wear adequate for some people would not be at all adequate for others.

- Wounds (not just deficits). In other words, the presence of harmful things, not just the absence of beneficial things.

This includes trauma – and I want to make a very important point here. This class, and this course altogether, is not about healing trauma. You may find resources here – perspectives and practices – that are helpful to you personally, or to those you work with, regarding traumas, but the course itself is not set up to treat trauma. It is an educational training, not psychotherapy. So please take care of yourself here. Do not go into any territory that you cannot get out of on your own. I'm happy to talk with you after the class or refer you to resources. But I am not functioning here as a therapist.

Any questions about this?

Not trying to scare or alarm you, just be clear about the situation we are in, in this class.

(2) 3. This negative material could be due to ongoing, current conditions, as well as to the past.

Much negative material is left over from the past since:

- The brain is the learning organ, it forms structures as we've discussed from lived experience.
- There is more time in the past than in current situations, more opportunities for the slings and arrows of life to add up
- The brain is especially absorbent in childhood, so experiences during the first 5 years or so have especially large impacts.
- The negativity bias, which makes the brain very efficient at turning past negative experiences into negative structures.

→ People sometimes feel embarrassed by being affected by their past. They say to themselves – or other people tell them – things like “I (or you) should be over this by now.” But it is perfectly normal. Of course we are affected by the past. If the brain did not carry the learning from the past we’d all be idiots!

So try to be fair and compassionate and kind to yourself about the ways you are still affected by your past.

(2) 4. This negative material has lots of negative consequences:

- Darkens mood, increases anxiety and irritability
- Gives you a background sense of falling short, of inadequacy, of “no one would want me”
- Tilts expectations and biases in a pessimistic direction
- Installs beliefs, “shoulds” that harm us and others
- Embeds desires and inclinations that take us in bad directions
- Primes us to over-react
- Inhibits us from appropriate, fuller self-expression
- Tilts us toward the Reactive mode
- Creates self-organizing, vicious cycles in our own behavior and in relations with others
- For all the reasons above, negative material increases stress experiences, which feel bad in the moment, wear down long-term mental and physical health, and thus shorten the lifespan.

You can see why it is worth figuring out how to reduce negative material – even to the point of clearing some of it entirely.

So let's take this down to the level of the brain. Understanding something of the machinery of how negative material is activated and then placed back into storage suggests ways to actually *change* it. Which is very good news.

(2) 5. Negative material becomes active in your mind in two ways:

- Explicit – You remember a particular episode, maybe from childhood, or there is a thought in the foreground of awareness, such as “men don’t cry.”
- Implicit – A general feeling comes over you such as prickliness or apprehension or glumness; or there’s a sense in the body of heaviness, weariness, agitation, restlessness, drive, lassitude; or a kind of perspective, or frame of reference becomes present in the mind; or strong desires for one thing or another, including a desire that something not happen or go away; inclinations tilt your actions in one direction or another.

Implicit activations are often most apparent in retrospect. For example, looking back on how an argument got started and then sort of snowballed, you might realize that going into the interaction you were hungry and already irritable, then when your partner said that particular thing, it zapped you right in your history with each other and really riled you up.

(2) 6. In whatever way the negative material appears – and often it is a blend of explicit and implicit – it is usually *not* activated the way a file or picture or song is on a computer. Unless it is a “flashbulb memory” with every detail stored, is not retrieved *in toto* but *constructed* from underlying seeds.

The brain does this so quickly it seems like the whole record is pulled up effectively instantly, but actually it is a gradual, active process of vast coalitions of synapses forming – probably millions of them if not more – over a second or two, even longer.

Then, when the negative material is no longer active in awareness, it becomes gradually *reconsolidated* in memory structures. Reconsolidation is a process that involves neural steps, such as protein synthesis, that take time, and are amenable to intervention.

(2) 7. So, here’s the point I’ve been driving at, the key takeaway:

While negative material is active in the mind, its neural substrates start associating with the neural substrates of whatever else is in awareness; "neurons that fire together, wire together." Then, when it gets reconsolidated back in storage, it takes with it some of these associations.

Therefore, we can infuse the negative material pain with positive associations – and thus soothe, ease, heal, and gradually replace the negative material with positive material. Which gives us an incredible tool for reducing and clearing negative material. Not just planting flowers in the garden of the mind, not just using flowers to prevent the growth of new weeds, but using flowers to pull weeds and replace them with flowers.

(3) 8. In effect, we are pairing positive and negative material.

[Everyday examples of the power of this pairing: talking with a friend about something painful, turning something over to God, surfacing hard stuff in the unconditional positive regard of a therapist, positive self-talk during an upset.

As you can see, this pairing of positive and negative material has been used in many many ways by many many people.

In a little bit we'll explore how to do this as effectively as possible: this is the 4th step of TG.

Discussion (10)

But first, how about we take a breath, lean back, and talk about up the points I've presented so far.

What do you think?

How have you used the method of pairing, perhaps informally, on your own?

→ Normalize the 4th step.

→ Try not to get into topics that you will be speaking to further on.

Skills for Doing the 4th Step (19)

(2) *Prerequisites.* To pair positive and negative material effectively, there are three requirements:

- Divided awareness, holding two things in mind at once. Not possible for young children, or adults with seriously impaired executive functions (e.g., demented, drunk).
- Not hijacked by the negative material. Cautions for using this method with trauma.
- Positive material remains more prominent. Otherwise, the negative material could infuse it with negativity.

→ If the negative material hijacks your attention, or stays more prominent than the positive material, drop it and go back to only positive material in awareness.

(5) *Key antidote experiences.* Building on the idea in the last class of key resource experiences, some positive material is particularly helpful for certain negative material. For example:

Avoiding Harms

Strength, efficacy --> Weakness, helplessness, pessimism

Safety, security --> Alarm, anxiety

Compassion for oneself and others --> Resentment, anger

Approaching Rewards

Satisfaction, fulfillment --> Frustration, disappointment

Gladness, gratitude --> Sadness, discontentment, "blues"

Attaching to Others

Attunement, inclusion --> Not seen, rejected, left out

Recognition, acknowledgement --> Inadequacy, shame

Friendship, love --> Abandonment, feeling unloved or unlovable

Discussion: What could be some key antidote experiences for your own needs?

(3) *Ways to hold two things in mind.* There is a range of ways to hold positive and negative material in awareness:

- Simply having the idea of the negative material, but otherwise immersing yourself in the positive
- Holding the positive material center stage, as it were, in the mind, under the spotlight, with the negative material in the background, in the wings
- Imagining or sensing the positive material making contact with the negative material. For example: sifting down into it like a warm, gentle, and continuing rain; touching and soothing places inside that feel raw, hurt, bruised, or cut like a golden balm; filling up old hollows; giving younger versions of yourself or younger layers in your psyche things they always needed; imagery like nurturing adult parts of you holding and comforting young parts of you in your lap. Or simply a knowing that the positive material is connecting with and working its way into the negative.

(4) *Sequence.* You can start with positive or negative.

Starting with the positive:

1. Have the positive experience, either noticing you are already having an antidote experience or creating one
2. Extend it
3. Absorb it, stabilize yourself in the positive material.
4. When you are ready, bring the negative material into awareness, keeping it in the background, dim, small, and mild – while the positive material is in the foreground, bright, big, and intense.

Explore various ways to have the positive connect with and infuse the negative.

Be on your own side. Help yourself. If it's useful, imagine allies with you, supporting you, strengthening you, cheering you on.

If the negative gets too strong, drop it.

As a bonus, if it's real for you, you could explore the sense of receiving the positive material into the negative. Like feeling some sense of being soothed. Or a sense of young parts of you receiving and taking in at least a little of what they've longed for.

Then drop the negative material entirely, and spend a few seconds, or few dozen seconds, marinating in only the positive.

Overall, this gives us the four steps, with an acronym:

1. **H**ave a good experience.
2. **E**xtend the good experience.
3. **A**bsorb the good experience.
4. **P**air a good experience with negative material.

"HEAP"

(5) Starting with the negative:

Something has gotten reactivated, whatever it is.

In terms of our first class and the handout on Engaging the Mind, you start with the first great way to engage the mind: *being with* what's there. You step back from it to observe it. You accept that it is what it is even if it feels bad. You explore it if you can. You hold it in a large space of awareness, ideally with qualities of compassion for yourself.

Then, maybe, at some point it feels like you are at the Goldilocks point, at least for right now, and it would be helpful to shift into the second great way to engage the mind: *releasing* what's there. So you try to relax the body a little, maybe vent, maybe cry, maybe get something off your chest to someone, maybe try to let go of some harmful thoughts.

Then, at some point, it feels right to shift into the third great way to engage the mind, cultivating resources – in this case, *replacing* the negative you’ve released with something positive.

Then you do the four steps as above.

[Extended example: my story.]

Usually you will do the 4th step informally, on the fly, typically when you notice you are having or could legitimately have an antidote experience that gives you an opportunity for the 4th step.

But sometimes it is powerful to do it in a formal way, such as during therapy or in a specific time of reflection such as at the end of meditation, or in a class, such as we will do in little while.

Discussion (10)

Whew, this was a lot of material.

What do you think?

Want to try it?

130 MINUTES SO FAR

Practice of the 4th Step of TG (30)

Introduction (7)

In this setting, we will start with a positive experience, not a negative one.

In particular, I suggest that you use a positive experience that is a kind of “antidote” to negative material related to being unable to attain a goal, such as feelings of frustration,

disappointment, failure, or inadequacy. [Give an example of negative material.] Key resource experiences that could soothe and eventually replace this negative material could be feelings of attainment, arriving, satisfaction, being praised and valued, etc. related to succeeding at one or more things. [Give an example of how positive material related to success could antidote negative material related to failure.]

So to do this practice, you need to know both what the negative material is that you are trying to ease and even heal, and what its positive “antidote” is. Just this clarity for yourself is a major step in a good direction for you.

I suggest you pick negative material that is mild to moderate in its intensity for you. And to repeat what I’ve said before, if you find yourself getting sucked into the negative material, drop it and go back to only positive material in awareness. And then once you stabilize in the positive, if you want, go back into the 4th step.

Could we open it up and make sure that everyone here is clear about (A) the negative material and (B) the key resource experience for it? Don’t be any more revealed than you want to be.

[Discussion as needed to make sure that everyone knows their (A) and (B). But don’t get bogged down with any person.]

OK, let’s try this. Think of it as an experiment. Yes we are doing this formally, out of the blue rather than in the flow of life, but it will still be real when you get into it.

Practice (7)

Come into a sense of being here, centered and present.

Finding a basic sense of goodwill for yourself . . . a sense of strength in being on your own side, wishing yourself well . . .

Without getting complicated about it, knowing what your positive material is as well as the negative material it is aimed at.

OK, here we go.

1. **Having** – Bringing to mind one or more facts of goals attained . . . Perhaps a major accomplishment, or a series of tasks done, or a kind of speeded up movie of your life that quickly notes numerous milestones reached, things learned or finished or otherwise succeeded at . . . goals of many kinds attained . . .

Let these knowings become an experience, or a cluster of related experiences, of succeeding, attaining, accomplishing, contributing, completing things, adding value, arriving . . . being of worth, being adequate, being more than adequate, being a succeder

2. **Extending** – Stay with this experience. Let it grow. Sink into it. Help it become big in your mind.

3. **Absorbing** – Intend and sense that this experience is sinking into you.

→ 30-60 seconds of quiet

4. Alright, and now let's try the 4th step: in the background of awareness, bring to mind some knowing of the negative material . . . maybe just the idea of it known in passing, or a quick survey of it, or a passing sense of how it feels in your body, or a noting of a memory of something that happened . . . and then intending and sensing that the positive material is prominent in awareness in addition to this negative material . . . holding both in awareness at the same time, perhaps like two things on stage at once, the positive material in the front, under the spotlight, with the negative material dim and in the wings . . .

You could also get a sense of the positive material connecting with the negative material . . . going into it somehow . . . infusing it, sinking into it . . . like a warm golden salve soothing hurt places inside . . . or like good dust sifting down into difficult places, or light moving into shadows, or healthy fluid filling up hollows inside . . . beautiful bricks or jewels or whatever gradually filling your own hole in the heart

Perhaps a sense of younger parts or layers of yourself being touched and given what they've longed for . . . maybe imagery of something nurturing and kind holding a young image of yourself, or giving something to it . . .

If you get too drawn into the negative, try to make the positive more prominent in awareness, big in the front of your mind . . . and if the negative is still too powerful, drop it and recenter in the positive, and then if you want, bring the negative material up into the background of awareness again . . .

I'll be quiet for a minute or so while you explore this 4th step on your own.

As a kind of bonus, if it's real for you, see if you can get a sense of *receiving* the positive material. . . of it sinking into vulnerable, or young, or bruised, or hungry, needy, or longing places inside . . .

Then let go of the negative material altogether, and stay just with the positive . . .

[Pause 30 seconds]

Alright, start coming back.

Coming back into this room, maybe rubbing your feet on the floor, hands on your thighs. Stretching a bit.

Discussion (16)

OK, let's talk about this. How was this for you?

[Focus on making sure the method of the 4th step is clear.]

160 MINUTES SO FAR

Wrapping Up (15)

OK, we covered a lot of ground. I really appreciated your presence and attention.

The Week ahead (5)

This week, I suggest that you:

- Focus on internalizing resource experiences related to the Approaching rewards system of your brain.

For example, these experiences include gladness, gratitude, enoughness/fullness, contentment, success in attaining goals, satisfaction, and fulfillment.

- And as you feel comfortable with it, try the 4th step. If you like it and are OK with it, try it multiple times. You can use it for “antidote” experiences for either the Avoiding harms system – such as feelings protected, strong, safe, and alright right now – or the Approaching rewards system. At our next class, we will focus on the Attaching to others system, including how to use the 4th step for issues there, and you are welcome to “skip ahead” with the 4th step if that works for you,
- As usual, try to set aside a few minutes each day for very specifically taking in positive experiences.

→ Pass out the sheet for home practice.

Peace, Happiness, and Love (10)

And let’s finish with the practice that we used at the end of the last class.

Relaxing and coming into a sense of presence with yourself.

Opening to, finding, a sense of calm, relaxation, alrightness right now, a feeling of being unthreatened, protected, strong, and safe . . . not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of *peace*.

Staying with the sense of peace, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Opening to, finding, a sense of gratitude, gladness, enoughness in this moment, a sense of fullness . . . not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of *happiness*.

Staying with the sense of happiness, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Opening to, finding, a sense of connection, a sense of inclusion with others, of friendship, camaraderie, being liked, cared about, appreciated, respected, a sense of your own caring for others, your compassion, kindness not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of loving and being loved . . . a sense of being *love*.

Staying with the sense of love, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Getting a sense of peace, happiness, and love all present together in your mind . . . perhaps a sense of coming home . . . resting in peace, happiness, and love all present together . . .

[pause]

OK, come on back.

It's OK to keep feeling a sense of peace, happiness, and love.

See you next week – our last class, boo-hoo!

Thank you, and take care.

Taking in the Good Course

CLASS 6: Being Love

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Themes

Focus on the Attaching system

The 4th step of TG, pairing positive and negative

Welcome (5)

Welcome participants (1)

Deal with any logistics (1)

Reminder that as of this class we are 2 ½ hours long, ending at 11:30.

The Plan for This Class (3)

This class is about the Attaching system of the brain, the one that evolved to help us pursue with pleasure and other rewards.

We'll explore:

- More practice with the optional 4th step of TG: pairing positive and negative material in awareness to soothe and if possible replace the negative material over time
- Key resource experiences of feeling included, appreciated, loved, and loving

And as you know, this will be the last class in the course, so it is a special opportunity to “take in” experiences of connection, support, friendship, empathy, and caring *for* and *from* others in this course.

Follow up on Homework (10)

So, how was the last week, in terms of this course?

Did you have any experiences with gladness, gratitude, the fullness and enoughness of this moment, or accomplishment that you’d like to share?

Did you have any experiences with or insights into the notion of key resource experiences, your personal “vitamin C?”

Did you have any experiences with trying the 4th step, pairing, that you’d like to share?

→ Focus on skills related to key resource experiences and the 4th step.

Feeling Cared About (25)

Introduction (3)

To get into the subject of this class, let’s practice taking in the good of experiences related to feeling cared about.

Feeling cared about includes a range of experiences, from feeling connected, seen (empathized with), included, appreciated/respected, and liked to feeling cherished and loved.

I’ll suggest a variety of prompts that you can use to notice or create an experience of gladness or gratitude in step 1 - *having*, activating, a positive experience. Then with fewer and fewer suggestions, I’ll encourage you to do the second and third steps of TG: *extending* and *absorbing* the experience (the installation phase).

As we move into experiences of feeling appreciated, liked, and loved, you can explore the 4th step and sense that these positive experiences are connecting with, soothing, and healing places inside that did not get enough of these important experiences or

were wounded around them. And as you know, if you find yourself sucked into negative material doing the 4th step, drop the negative and just rest your mind in the positive.

The Practice (20)

Alright, coming into a sense of yourself, being here, eyes open or closed.

[About 2 minutes for the first three prompts, and 4 minutes for the last three, plus an extra 1 minute for explanations]

#1 1. Having – *Notice* any sense already present in awareness – in the foreground or the background – of already feeling cared about, in any way this is present for you . . .

If there is no sense of this, that's fine, you can also *create* a positive experience: Just bring to mind something present here and now that gives you a feeling of connection, of inclusion, or of friendship with others . . . perhaps a sense of camaraderie or fellowship with others in this class, or with one person in particular, perhaps a sense of closeness with someone . . .

However you do it, *activate* a positive experience of feeling cared about in one way or another . . .

2. **Extending** – Once you *have* this experience, stay with it so you can *install* it in your brain. Help it last . . . open to it . . . let it fill you . . . let it become as strong a feeling as possible . . .

[→ 20 seconds of quiet

3. **Absorbing** – Meanwhile, overlapping the *extending* of this experience, you are absorbing it. Intend and sense that this experience of already feeling cared about is sinking into you as you sink into it . . . like water into a sponge . . . or simply knowing that this is becoming part of you, a resource you can take with you wherever you go . . .

→ 20 seconds of quiet

OK.

Now let's try this some more times, with me suggesting different aspects of feeling cared about. Obviously, this will come under the heading of you *creating*, not just *noticing*, a positive experience in the first step of TG.

Then my suggestions about the three steps themselves will be increasingly minimal.

It's natural for multiple good things to come to mind and that's fine if they are closely related and produce essentially the same experience, the same emotions and sensations and feelings; otherwise, you'll probably have the greatest impact on your brain if you stay with one kind of experience at a time, 10-20 seconds in a row.

#2 Here we go.

For the 1st step of TG, *having* a positive experience, bring to mind something that gives you a sense of being seen, understood, empathized with by another person, either someone in your life today or in your past . . . Let the knowing that you've been seen become an experience of feeling seen, known, with a related experience that the other person wants to understand you . . .

Then in the 2nd step of TG, *extend* this positive experience for 10-20 seconds or so . . .

While also, in the 3rd step of TG, *absorbing* it, intending and sensing that it sinks into you as you sink into it . . .

→ 40 seconds of quiet

#3 OK. Let's try another prompt.

This time, for the 1st step, think about one or more times you have been included, a part of a family or group, or having a friend or intimate partner . . . perhaps situations in your life these days or in your past . . . and let this knowing evoke a positive experience for you . . . There may be multiple examples of being included, which is fine, and let these different examples become a single powerful experience of feeling included . . .

Once you *have* the experience of feeling included, do the 2nd and 3rd steps of *extending* and *absorbing* it

→ 40 seconds of quiet

#4 OK. Let's try another prompt.

For the 1st step, think about think about one or more times you have been appreciated, recognized, respected, valued, praised, or prized . . . perhaps situations in your life these days or in your past . . . and let this knowing evoke a positive experience for you . . . There may be multiple examples of being appreciated, which is fine, and let these different examples become a single powerful experience of feeling appreciated . . .

Once you *have* the experience of feeling appreciated, do the 2nd and 3rd steps of *extending* and *absorbing* it

→ 40 seconds of quiet

And then if you like, explore the 4th step of taking in the good, in which you hold in awareness both the positive material of feeling appreciated and negative material of feeling not appreciated or valued . . . Remembering to keep the positive material bigger, more prominent, in the foreground of awareness, with the negative material dimmer and in the background . . . Dropping the negative if it gets too powerful and resting only in the positive . . . When both positive and negative are present, exploring ways to sense the positive making contact with the negative, going into it, like supplies sifting down into hollow places inside . . . like a soothing balm easing and healing places of pain . . . like nurturance and valuing reaching into young places inside . . .

I'll be quiet for a minute or so as you explore this.

→ 50 seconds of quiet

And as a kind of bonus, perhaps a sense inside of receiving the feelings of being appreciated, valued, coming into you . . .

→ 20 seconds of quiet

Now letting go of any negative material. Only positive material present in your mind . . . Including perhaps a new perspective or insight, and if not, that's fine . . .

→ 20 seconds of quiet

#5 OK. Let's try another prompt.

For the 1st step, think about one or more times you have been liked, had warmth or friendship sent your way . . . perhaps situations in your life these days or in your past . . . it could be casual experiences, such as being liked by acquaintances at work, or more meaningful ones like a long-time good friend . . . letting this knowing evoke a positive experience for you of feeling liked . . . There may be multiple examples of being liked, which is fine, and let these different examples become a single powerful experience of feeling liked . . .

Once you *have* the experience of feeling liked, do the 2nd and 3rd steps of *extending* and *absorbing* it . . .

→ 40 seconds of quiet

And then if you like, explore the 4th step of taking in the good, in which you hold in awareness both the positive material of feeling liked and negative material of not feeling you were getting the liking you wanted, or even that you were disliked . . . Remembering to keep the positive material bigger, more prominent, in the foreground of awareness, with the negative material dimmer and in the background . . . Dropping the negative if it gets too powerful and resting only in the positive . . . When both positive and negative are present, exploring ways to sense the positive making contact with the negative, going into it, like supplies sifting down into hollow places inside . . . like a soothing balm easing and healing places of pain . . . like nurturance and valuing reaching into young places inside . . .

I'll be quiet for a minute or so as you explore this.

→ 60 seconds of quiet

And as a kind of bonus, perhaps a sense inside of receiving the feelings of being liked coming into you . . .

→ 20 seconds of quiet

Now letting go of any negative material. Only positive material present in your mind . . . Including perhaps a new perspective or insight, and if not, that's fine . . .

→ 20 seconds of quiet

#6 OK. Let's try the last prompt.

For the 1st step, think about one or more times you have been loved, perhaps in a family setting, or by a friend, or by a romantic partner . . . perhaps situations in your life these days or in your past . . . it is fine if doing this brings up feelings of not getting love, just be aware of this, let it be, and then bring the spotlight of your attention back to experiences of being loved . . . letting this knowing evoke a positive experience for you of feeling loved . . . There may be multiple examples of being loved, which is fine, and let these different examples become a single powerful experience of feeling loved . . .

Once you *have* the experience of feeling loved, do the 2nd and 3rd steps of *extending* and *absorbing* it

→ 40 seconds of quiet

And then if you like, explore the 4th step of taking in the good, in which you hold in awareness both the positive material of feeling loved and negative material of not feeling you were getting the love you wanted . . . Remembering to keep the positive material bigger, more prominent, in the foreground of awareness, with the negative material dimmer and in the background . . . Dropping the negative if it gets too powerful and resting only in the positive . . . When both positive and negative are present, exploring ways to sense the positive making contact with the negative, going into it, like supplies sifting down into hollow places inside . . . like a soothing balm easing and healing places of pain . . . like nurturance and valuing reaching into young places inside . . .

I'll be quiet for a minute or so as you explore this.

→ 60 seconds of quiet

And as a kind of bonus, perhaps a sense inside of receiving the feelings of being loved coming into you . . .

→ 40 seconds of quiet

Now letting go of any negative material. Only positive material present in your mind . . . Including perhaps a new perspective or insight, and if not, that's fine . . .

→ 20 seconds of quiet

OK. Come on back.

40 MINUTES SO FAR

Pairs about Feeling Cared About (35)

Introduction (2)

Alright.

In a format that is getting familiar to you by now, in a minute I'll ask you to find a partner and talk about the practice you just did. Talk about what you want to take away from it. Explain any background as you need to, but I suggest you mainly focus on what you want to really register or learn from the experience you just had.

As usual, there will be an A and a B. A's go first, five minutes (a little longer this time), while B's mainly listen, then switch roles, I'll give time instructions. Just share how that was for you and anything you learned from it. And it's fine to sit this out. OK?

Find a partner, preferably someone new as a partner if that is possible.

The practice (15)

OK, let's begin.

→ Do A's sharing.

OK, wrap it up A's.

Now please listen for a moment. A's, this is an opportunity to take in an important experience, of feeling listened to, seen, and even cared about by your partner. Let's be quiet for a few moments while, with your eyes open or closed, you let this, you help this sense of being listened to really sink in . . .

→ 20 seconds of quiet

Alright, thank you.

Now B's, it's your turn to talk while A's mainly listen.

→ Do B's sharing.

OK, wrap it up B's.

Now please listen for a moment. B's, this is an opportunity to take in an important experience, of feeling listened to, seen, and even cared about by your partner. Let's be quiet for a few moments while, with your eyes open or closed, you let this, you help this sense of being listened to really sink in . . .

→ 20 seconds of quiet

Discussion (15)

OK, come on back.

How was this practice for you?

What did you experience? What did you learn?

In particular, any questions or comments about the 4th step, connecting positive experiences of feeling cared about with negative material?

(1) Note that it's possible to have these positive feelings, of various aspects of feeling cared about, even in relationships that are not perfect. You are focusing on the slice of the relationship pie in which you are truly cared about, you matter to the other person.

75 MINUTES SO FAR

Break (15)

This will be a 10 minute break.

[Say where the bathrooms are.]

Please be back by _____. We'll start on time.

90 MINUTES SO FAR

TG Giving Caring (30)

Introduction (2)

In this course we've focused mainly on the experience of *receiving* positives, such as protection, the gifts of life, and the caring of others. As we head toward the end it's appropriate to focus some on the experience of *expressing* positives. In other words the sense of *giving* good things – making contributions to a team, supporting a friend, being affectionate, tidying up at home, etc. – can also be taken in.

This is particularly helpful if you are trying to reinforce some particular positive behavior or stance, or if you are trying to help yourself register that you do actually make contributions.

Let's try this with five prompts and then discuss it.

The practice (15)

OK, you know the drill by now.

Coming into a sense of being here, being present with yourself . . .

→ About two minutes for the first four prompts, and five minutes or so for the last one.

#1 For the 1st step of TG, *having* a positive experience, bring to mind someone you naturally have *compassion* for, you easily wish that they *not suffer*, with feelings of sympathetic concern . . . Let this knowing become an experience of compassion . . .

Then in the 2nd step of TG, *extend* this positive experience . . . letting compassion fill you, perhaps a warmth in your heart . . . perhaps strengthening it with soft thoughts in the back of your mind like “May you not suffer” or something specific like “May you find work” or “May you not worry so much about your son”

While also, in the 3rd step of TG, *absorbing* this sense of compassion, intending and sensing that it sinks into you as you sink into it . . .

→ 40 seconds of quiet

#2 OK. Let’s try another prompt.

For the 1st step, bring to mind someone you naturally have *kindness* for, you easily wish that they be *happy* . . . Let this knowing become an experience of kindness, of warmth for the person and good wishes . . . It is natural for this experience to overlap with compassion, but see if you can focus on the aspect of wanting happiness, which does not presuppose any suffering . . .

Then in the 2nd step of TG, *extend* this positive experience . . . letting kindness fill you, perhaps a warmth in your heart . . . perhaps strengthening it with soft thoughts in the back of your mind like “May you be happy” or something specific like “May you really enjoy your work” or “May you know how much people like and love you”

While also, in the 3rd step of TG, *absorbing* this sense of kindness, intending and sensing that it sinks into you as you sink into it . . .

→ 40 seconds of quiet

#3 OK. Let’s try another prompt.

For the 1st step, bring to mind *someone whose good fortune makes you happy* . . . you feel glad that good things are happening for them . . . perhaps someone who has come through a hard time and is alright . . . or someone who has earned recognition or success . . . or someone who has friends, perhaps a loving mate . . .

Let this knowing become an experience of what's called *altruistic joy* – happiness at the happiness of others . . .

Then in the 2nd step of TG, *extend* this positive experience . . . letting altruistic joy fill you, perhaps a warmth in your heart . . . perhaps strengthening it with soft thoughts in the back of your mind like “May the causes of your good fortune continue” or something specific like “May you really enjoy the success you so deserve” or “May your new promotion be wonderful for you” . . .

While also, in the 3rd step of TG, *absorbing* this sense of altruistic joy, intending and sensing that it sinks into you as you sink into it . . .

→ 40 seconds of quiet

#4 OK. Let's try another prompt.

For the 1st step, bring to mind someone you naturally feel *love* for, you easily cherish them and have very strong feelings of caring for them. . . Let this knowing become an experience of love . . .

Then in the 2nd step of TG, *extend* this positive experience . . . Your heart overflowing, feeling love in your body . . . perhaps strengthening it with soft thoughts in the back of your mind like “I love you” . . .

While also, in the 3rd step of TG, *absorbing* this sense of kindness, intending and sensing that it sinks into you as you sink into it . . .

→ 40 seconds of quiet

#5 OK. Let's try the last prompt.

For the 1st step, find a sense of good wishes for beings in general, perhaps starting with the people in this course . . . There could be a general, non-specific sense of warmth for people, a sense of compassion or kindness for them even if you don't know them well . . . even if you wish they would act differently . . .

As you find this general sense of wishing well, in the 2nd step of TG, *extend* this positive experience . . . Staying with this, letting these good wishes fill your mind and heart and body . . .

While also, in the 3rd step of TG, *absorbing* this sense of general well-wishing, intending and sensing that it sinks into you as you sink into it . . .

A sense of this general good wishing extending out from you to include friends and family . . . acquaintances . . . people you see or know of but don't know personally . . . neutral people and difficult people alike, wishing them well, wishing that they not suffer, wishing that they be truly happy . . . if it is hard to wish someone well, you could think that if they were deep down happy they might act differently . . . or imagine the little child deep down inside everyone, including difficult people, and wish that little child well . . .

Extending this good wishing wider and wider, to include this whole city . . . state . . . region . . . country . . . world . . .

If you lose focus, it's alright, just come back. Waves of good wishes radiating out from you, your heart open and warm, wishing the best to others . . .

If you like, including all life in your good wishes . . . all the creatures great and small, seen and unseen, known and unknown, omitting none . . . in the land, in the sea, and in the air . . .

Wishing all well . . .

→ 60 seconds of quiet

Discussion (13)

OK, come on back.

How was this practice for you?

What do you get about some of the possibilities of broadening the sense of taking in to include registering any kind of useful experience, including experiences of feeling caring toward others?

(1) You can also do this internalization of a resource experience with experiences of healthy boundaries, such as imagining you are like a strongly rooted tree through which the “winds” of other people’s emotions or criticism or desires blow; you can receive their communications without resistance yet not be pushed around or toppled over.

120 MINUTES SO FAR

Pairs about Takeaways from the Course (30)

Introduction (2)

In a couple of minutes, we’ll break into pairs again in the familiar format of A’s and B’s.

I’ll ask you to share with your partner what have been some of the key benefits or takeaways from this course, and your key intentions for the weeks and months and years ahead. Try to stay focused on these questions: what are the key benefits and what are your key intentions?

As usual, A’s go first, five minutes (longer than usual), while B’s mainly listen, then switch roles. I’ll repeat the questions and give time instructions.

As you share, try to let in two things – and you might like to pause for a few seconds or more from time to time to do so (a good practice for life in general). First, let in the sense of the key benefits and intentions, so your mind is increasingly inclined in their direction. Second, let in the sense of being understood by your partner, appreciated, encouraged, cheered on, validated, and any other warm feelings.

OK?

The practice (12)

OK, let's begin. Find a partner, anyone you want. Pick an A and a B.

→ Do A's sharing.

OK, wrap it up A's.

Now please listen for a moment. A's, this is an opportunity to take in an important experience, of feeling listened to, seen, and even cared about by your partner. Let's be quiet for a few moments while, with your eyes open or closed, you let this, you help this sense of being listened to really sink in . . .

→ 20 seconds of quiet

Alright, thank you.

Now B's, it's your turn to talk while A's mainly listen.

→ Do B's sharing.

OK, wrap it up B's.

Now please listen for a moment. B's, this is an opportunity to take in an important experience, of feeling listened to, seen, and even cared about by your partner. Let's be quiet for a few moments while, with your eyes open or closed, you let this, you help this sense of being listened to really sink in . . .

→ 20 seconds of quiet

Discussion (15)

OK, come on back.

What have been key personal benefits or takeaways for you related to this course?

What are your key intentions for the days ahead?

→ Be concise in your own responses, clearing time for them to share. Emphasize takeaways and intentions.

150 MINUTES SO FAR

Wrapping Up (25)

Well, we are moving toward an end here, not just for this class but for this course as a whole.

The Days Ahead (15)

→ Pass out the sheet for Being Love home practice.

This is the sheet for this class's theme, Being Love. It covers that material and is good to work with, alongside the other home practice sheets.

→ Pass out the sheet for the course in general home practice.

This is a sheet for the whole course. It includes a blank column for anything in particular you want to focus on yourself (and you can divide that blank column into two columns if you like).

In the days ahead, I really encourage you to stick with the perspectives and intentions that you shared about with your partner and we just discussed.

In particular:

- Five or ten times a day, on the fly or by creating a positive experience, take those dozen seconds or more to really register that positive experience, to bring it into you.
- At the end of any formal practice you do – such as meditation, psychotherapy, Pilates, yoga, even walking the dog – take a few moments to help its hard-won fruits sink into you, rather than washing through your brain as if they never happened.
- Know what your current “vitamin C” is, the key resource experience you are focused on activating and installing into your brain. Look for opportunities to notice or

create that experience. This is your personal gold, and when you get those nuggets, don't waste them!

Any comments or questions?

Peace, Happiness, and Love (10)

And let's finish with the practice that we used at the end of first several classes.

Relaxing and coming into a sense of presence with yourself.

Opening to, finding, a sense of calm, relaxation, alrightness right now, a feeling of being unthreatened, protected, strong, and safe . . . not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of *peace*.

Staying with the sense of peace, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Opening to, finding, a sense of gratitude, gladness, enoughness in this moment, a sense of fullness . . . not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of *happiness*.

Staying with the sense of happiness, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Opening to, finding, a sense of connection, a sense of inclusion with others, of friendship, camaraderie, being liked, cared about, appreciated, respected, a sense of your own caring for others, your compassion, kindness not straining, not efforting, simply allowing, uncovering . . . a sense of loving and being loved . . . a sense of being *love*.

Staying with the sense of love, extending it and absorbing it, sinking into it as it sinks into you.

[pause]

Getting a sense of peace, happiness, and love all present together in your mind . . . perhaps a sense of coming home . . . resting in peace, happiness, and love all present together . . .

[pause]

OK, come on back.

It's OK to keep feeling a sense of peace, happiness, and love.

Well, I have really appreciated this chance to be with you and get to know you. I have gotten a lot out of this round of this course myself. You can take it in that you have truly contributed to me. And that I am very grateful for this.

→ Pause.

And like all things, this too has come to an end. An end that does not erase or negate the many positive things you earned for yourself during it. You can know that these will stay with you in the days to come. And that they will continue to ripple out from you, benefiting others and our whole wide world.

May you and I and all beings turn to the good and live from the good that is so vastly present in us and around us.

Thank you.