



Dr. Elise Bialylew, founder of Mindful in May (mindfulinmay.org) and The Mind Life Project (www.mindlifeproject.com) and author of The Happiness Plan, interviews Rick Hanson.

RICK HANSON

Rick Hanson, Ph.D., is a neuropsychologist and New York Times best-selling author. His books include Hardwiring Happiness, Buddha's Brain, Just One Thing and Mother Nurture. Founder of the Wellspring Institute for Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom and on the Advisory Board of the Greater Good Science Centre at UC Berkley, he's been an invited speaker at Oxford, Stanford, and Harvard, and taught in meditation centres worldwide.

Elise: Rick, welcome to the program, it is such a pleasure. We had a conversation four years ago now, for a previous Mindful in May and I'm just really excited to have you here to talk about many things but specifically resilience, which is the topic of your new book. So, thank you!

Rick Hanson: Oh, thank you, Elise, truly. It's been great, it's great to be here.

Elise: So, Rick, just for the listeners that may not be aware of your work, if you wouldn't mind giving a short background about you and particularly any experiences which have informed the work that you do in the world.

Rick Hanson: Professionally I'm a clinical psychologist; I have a lot of interest in the brain and neuroscience. And I also have a lot of background in contemplative practice – I started meditating in 1974. And along the way, my wife and I've been married a lot of years, we have two adult kids. I've been in business so I'm grounded in the real world. Fundamentally what I try to do is offer useful methods and ideas for people that they can tap into and draw upon in the flow of their ordinary life. That's kind of what I do. And then – gosh - experiences. There are so many to say but I'll tell you one that's been kind of haunting me in a sense more and more, and that is thinking about what people knew when they were little kids. Maybe they couldn't put it into words, but they knew things. One of the things that is really central – going back to my earliest memories – is this poignant wistful feeling that there was so much unnecessary unhappiness. It wasn't horrible, I didn't grow up in poverty or a war zone, there wasn't flagrant abuse in my family, you know, normal bickering. But I was really struck as a little kid by this sense that people create a lot of unnecessary arguing, hassling, stressing, etc. And I didn't know what to do about it but I had a longing to help and

a longing to understand, to understand and to help. And that is, I think looking back now, sixty somewhat years later, that has been a defining impulse and longing and aim, I guess, all along my journey. And it makes me think with other people how important it is to reflect back on the core of your being and the youngest layers of your being and the kinds of things you knew and you cared about, even back then, even if you could have not put it into words back then.

Elise: Beautiful. It's a really interesting perspective, and I think just thinking about all the books that you've written over the years, that really makes sense, your story there. "Buddha's Brain", "Hardwiring Happiness". They're all kind of about helping people to strip back and get into the fundamentals, reduce suffering in life and live from a place of wholeness and tap into our inner resources.

Rick Hanson: Yes, and if I could just mention, I mean, not that there's anything special about me: it's more like I just cared about it. You kind of do what you care about. My very first book was about mothers, because it seemed to me that if you care about children – and that's very close to my heart – the best way to take good care of kids is to take care of their mothers, and the best way to take care of their mothers, generally is to support the relationship with their partner and their community all together. Right? And so that engaged me in my very first book "Mother Nurture". But you're right. There's that desire to get to the heart of things, to see if they will be helpful.

Elise: And one thing I just want to name before we dive into your new book is that I've really appreciated over the years the way that you bring your insight from psychology and the brain and human relationships and you integrate that with the experience that you've had in meditation and sort of familiarity with the mind and the inner world.

Rick Hanson: Yes. Well, thanks for saying that, and I just started to realise that I'm talking with a therapist here. You. And I'd say you're right and to put it a certain way... there's a lot of power in combining what's called a first person perspective where we're observing our experience directly, combining that with a third person perspective that's sort of the scientific or objective outside in, way of looking. And what's quite useful is to grow on our understanding of what the hardware is doing, including especially our brain, that's the third person perspective and then use that understanding in real time to help yourself become more mindful of and insightful about and free in your relationship to the stream of consciousness. Partly because you understand some of the kind of the gushy gooey, molecular arbitrary processes that are driving a lot of that stuff and then being able to move back and forth. That's very powerful, to move back and forth from that third person perspective and first person perspective.

Elise: So, your latest book "*Resilient: How to Grow an Unshakable Core of Calm, Strength, and Happiness*". I mean, who wouldn't want that, right?

Rick Hanson: I want more of that.

Elise: Yes, we all want more of that. I wonder if you could just share your perspective first on resilience and what that means to you, what that actually is.

Rick Hanson: Well, the word is kind of fancy and people are starting to use it more, it really simply means the capacity to keep on going when things are hard. And we need it to recover from adversity and we also need to be resilient just to manage the ups and downs of daily living. Issues with our boss, traffic jams, physical pain, getting older, worried about politics, and what's going on in the world, and so forth. So, we need to be resilient to kind of ride the river. And what strikes me about resilience – as someone who's been involved in my case in human potential, positive psychology, mindfulness and clinical psychology for a long time now – is oftentimes people present these various practices which are good, like mindfulness or gratitude or self-compassion, they get presented as - I think of it as - a magic carpet ride. Just do this thing. Do this mantra, do this yoga, do this meditation, write these affirmations, and - whoosh - you'll be transported to this happy place. Right? Ok so there's a place for those methods but it leaves out so much what's down to earth, which you've got to deal with, you've got to cope. You've got to manage real stuff and that's where resilience really comes into play. To have any kind of sustained well-being, we need to have resilience. Resilience is an absolute necessity for a sustained well-being for ourselves or those we care about. And, finishing here, what's really neat in a positive cycle that I came to realise is that while we need resilience to have well-being, we grow resilience and we gain resilience by internalising experience as a well-being, broadly defined, which gives you then this positive upward spiral. And that's what that book's about, how to grow resilience inside yourself through internalising beneficial experiences in the flow of your everyday life. That's fantastic, power of everyday life. Internalise those beneficial experiences, usually mild and always authentic ones, usually mild and fairly brief ones and then through internalising them, you build up inner strengths, build up those inner muscles, that help you be resilient and then you get that nice positive upward spiral. Pretty good?

Elise: Yes. So, for the audience: when you say internalise, first of all I wanted to ask you is there a neuroscientific basis to what you're saying in terms of this concept of internalising these positive experiences in order to build more inner resilience and well-being? How did you kind of work that out or what is that based on?

Rick Hanson: Well, it's like neuroscience 101, that for any kind of learning to occur, so a child learns to walk instead of crawl, or an adult learns to navigate a tricky conversation, or someone learns with their own mind how to kind of step back from angry reactions or hurt reactions, step back from them and witness them and then maybe nudge them gently and wisely to a better place. All that's learning, broadly defined. So, you and I are in the learning business. Lots of people are in a broad sense in the learning business, parents, teachers, therapists, coaches, human resources trainers, spiritual teachers – we're in the learning business. Learning must involve an underlying change in the body. Otherwise we're left with magic. And I believe in magic, I think there's a supernatural transcendental, that said – whoosh - but we're going to stay inside the scientific frame here. Inside that scientific frame, the brain has to change for people to grow in any way. So, if you want to grow gratitude or grow mindfulness or grow regret or grow compassion or grow self-compassion, or any other factor, secure attachment, executive functions, impulse control, self-regulation, familiar notions in psychology or character virtues like generosity or patience, real old school, boy scout – I was a boy scout -,

you know, kind of classic virtues, you want to grow those, that means you got to change your brain. And at this point there's a tremendous evidence in both human and especially non-human animal studies that the experiences of the living organism with a nervous system the experiences we are having are changing our nervous system. So, for example, tomorrow, you'll remember and I'll remember that we had this conversation. That must involve some change of neurostructural function. More generally, if after this conversation I feel a little more confident and a little more capable in part through experiencing your kindness to me and respect for me, if that happens, if I get a little bit of gain, a little bit of value from this experience that means necessarily that something had to change inside my brain. Otherwise, we're left with momentarily pleasant or useful experiences that wash through us like water through a sieve. So, at this point, to be concrete, there's tremendous evidence for how the skilful use of experiences can leave lasting changes behind in the ways that existing connections between neurons get more sensitive or active. Also, our experiences can cause new connections to grow, new synapses to form. Our experiences can increase blood flow over time to parts of the brain that do particular things. So, for example, if you're doing mindfulness meditation routinely and using top down regulation of attention, then portions of your brain that do that top down regulation get more blood flow and they become measurably thicker. We can change the absent flows of neurotransmitters in our brains based on the experiences we're having. And there are – not to be boring here or more boring – there are many other mechanisms as well, including changes in the expression of our genes. Literally, alterations in the unpacking or packing of little strips of atoms in the twisted up molecule of DNA – wow - based on whether or not let's say a person is practicing relaxation again and again. So, the take away point is that based on totally hard core science it's crystal clear that we have the opportunity many, many times a day to engage the two-step process of change and use it for positive change, positive healing or a new development. Two steps: we first have to experience what we want to grow, if you want to grow gratitude, you want to start by experiencing gratitude, if you want to grow compassion or loving kindness, you have to start by experiencing it. And then necessarily, if you want to have any lasting benefit, you have to help that experience, so that experience rather has to lead to a lasting change of neurostructural function. And what's wonderful is the things you can do to help yourself have these beneficial experiences in the first place as the first step and then there are things you can do inside your own mind to help them produce lasting changes in your brain. Wow! And then, you're in charge of your growth process. And the worse things are out there, the more we need to build muscles in here. Isn't that just for a yuppies in yoga camp – nothing wrong with that - but the more that the cavalry is not coming from the outside, the harder your life is, the more important it is to develop self-reliance from the inside out.

Elise: That's wonderful, and I think it's so helpful for the listeners to understand that what you're talking about in this book in particular is really based on hard core science. So, this idea of turning passing experience into lasting change which you talk about in the book, it's so exciting and I think the fact that people don't know about it is just a bit of a tragedy. So, hopefully this interview will reach a lot of people. So, can you give us a practical example of how we can do this and what this actually means turning passing experience into lasting change?

Rick Hanson: Yes, it's interesting that it seems like such a radical idea but actually it's been under our noses all along. If we have any interest in helping people heal or we ourselves are trying to develop or grow, that must involve some kind of change. So how does the change process happen? And you're right, getting good at getting good is the magic super pill. I don't know, I think of learning as the superpower of superpowers because this is the one that grows the rest of them. So as a practical example, there's a famous saying in neuroscience: neurons that fire together, wire together. So, deep in the bowels of the brain, deep in the basement of the brain is pretty mechanical. The longer those neurons are firing, the more they're going to tend to be wiring. In other words, the longer you sustain an experience, the more likely it is to change you. And when I say experience, I mean, for example feeling cared about by somebody. Or feeling like you don't totally suck, you actually have some good qualities, feeling it, or your body calming as you exhale or maybe there's an idea, like a new perspective, an insight you get maybe from your mindfulness practice or more generally. In my 20's I had this important insight that growing up I'd been a nerd but not a wimp. And that's an important insight for me. And so, maybe that's the idea. Okay. So, you start with that experience and then as I was saying the longer that the neuro—pattern underlying that experience is sustained, the more that your brain is going to tend to change. So, stay with it. And by the way I don't feel like I invented any of the methods I'm talking about, almost all of them can be found naturally with excellent therapists, excellent teachers, excellent psychiatrists, just excellent parents. Right? But what I have tried to do is extract them systematically, apply them comprehensively and shine a bright light on the second necessary stage of learning, the internalisation stage. Cause the activation stage, simply having experience is pretty straightforward and easy. It's pretty easy to have beneficial experiences or to induce them in yourself or in other people. That's straightforward. Most people forget the second stage, the internalisation stage, where you help that experience change you for the better a little bit. I'm a leading expert on this territory. I forget it all day long. Probably cause we live in a culture that's always chasing the next shiny object. To make it concrete for someone, let's say that you're having some kind of experience that seems useful to you, half a dozen times a day. Stay with it for a breath or two. Feel it in your body and highlight what's rewarding about it, what's meaningful, what's enjoyable, why does it matter to you. Those are three leading factors of experience-dependent neuroplasticity: duration - stay with it for a breath or two or three -, embodiment – feel it in your whole body as best you can, turn that idea into more of a sensation or a felt sense as they say -, and then third, track what's rewarding which will increase activity of two neurotransmitters – dopamine and norepinephrine – which will tend to flag the experience as a keeper in terms of its residues. It's not so much that you will remember the episode that occurred but you'll retain the sense of it in your body which will gradually tilt you in a good way. So, those three things, just stay with it for a breath or two, feel it – why not, it's so sweet to give this to yourself and why not - and then see what's enjoyable about it. Why not? All of that is going to help it sink in, so you don't keep leaving all that money on the table.

Elise: So, this was the installing piece and you talk in the book about “to install an experience so that it creates lasting change”, it's about enriching and absorbing. So is that what you're speaking to there?

Rick Hanson: Yeah, you're really tracking, you read it carefully, thank you. Yes, that's it.

Elise: And just a question on what you just said, the embodiment part, because I think that people that are new to mindfulness or some of these different practices, it can seem a little bit abstract or kind of weird to feel it in the body. Can you speak a little bit more to that and what you know about why that would be important and how someone can feel it in their body? Like, for example, if someone is with their child and they're playing in the garden and they recognise, oh, this is a lovely moment of love, something like that.

Rick Hanson: Yes. It's a great question. First of all, notice what I call good facts but I want to start by saying none of this for me is about denying or minimising problems. If anything, it's an old school focus on the essence of self-reliance, to grow strengths inside, to deal with problems. And second, from a mindfulness perspective, sometimes all we can do is witness what's happening inside ourselves. We just ride the wave, let the storm pass, that's all we can do and that's all we should do. We just witness. Or maybe we do a meditation where all we're doing is **choiceness** awareness, where we're just being with what's there. That's great. What I'm talking about is more a matter of cultivation and development, in which you're being a little more active inside your mind rather than simply witnessing. Both are important, it's not either or, and they actually work together. So in terms of what it would be like: you're in the garden, first of all, notice that you're in the garden. And it sounds so stupid, but it's utterly true. We're surrounded by good things around us, and I say good in the sense of they're pragmatic or they're beneficial or enjoyable, so think of that. So, look around for good facts. You can drink fresh water, your child is breathing and happy, somebody invented a swing set, how neat, right? You live in a relatively safe place. Think about how many people in the world would love to have the worst day of your life. It's a relatively privileged affluent person. Just notice, notice what's around you. You know, you walk out of the door, notice if there's a flower, notice that the sidewalk is flat and it's not rubble. Notice that people actually stop at red lights, notice that the guy next to you did not drive into you, I mean don't get paranoid, you need to notice good facts that are so totally obvious but people don't do it. First, notice the good facts. Second, let yourself feel something. So, now you see your child. You notice that your child is happy. Can you slow down? For roughly it takes a few seconds to let your emotions catch up with your cognition in a sense. Thought is grounded in very recent layers of the brain. Recent million years, a couple of hundred thousand years of evolution of the brain. Emotion and sensation, like a heartfelt feeling of love is grounded in more ancient subcortical portions of the brain, the so-called limbic system, and they started to emerge around two hundred plus million years ago, and they're older and slower. They need some time. So, help your emotion and help your sensation to catch up to what you're thinking or what you're perceiving. Like you're seeing your child, and your child is happy. So, slow it down. You know, the real thing is to slow it down for a heartbeat or half a breath to let yourself catch up with your life. And then, when you've slowed it down, attention is under conscious control. That means we're responsible for it. So, people need to frankly exercise responsibility to put their attention on, for example, their body's sensations. And, unless a person is very seriously brain-damaged, as you know, they can be aware of sensation of breathing, up or down. Much as we could say that someone notices sensation of the chair on your tush. They can do that. So,

bring your attention to your body, that's the second step. And then, when you notice the good fact, and you help yourself have a good experience, then it's a private, sweet and muscular thing to stick up for yourself inside your own mind, to let yourself have that good experience for a dozen or a two dozen seconds in a row. And I've worked with a lot of people about this. Sometimes what happens is you run into a block, like a person is just really numb, or they're really afraid of feeling their feelings cause if they pop the lid, a lot of crud will come up. In those particular cases, which are very real and important to acknowledge, then what's important is first to build resources inside yourself so that the person is more willing to risk feeling their feelings. But that's again a pretty straightforward manner to build up those resources inside. But for most people, the opportunity is in front of our nose all day long. We walk along this path, strewn as I say with ordinary jewels, all the little good things in our lives that we hardly notice, because we get used to them. And under our noses are those ordinary jewels, and also, under our nose, we're often having beneficial experiences. Like the person in the garden, let's say it's a mother, she's having a nice moment with her child but then she's distracted to the next thing rather than really getting, this is valuable. It's like so many people, Elise, live with a sense of a hole in the heart, or a sense of emptiness inside like they're running on empty. It's like a hunger. And it's like we're in a desert in a sense and we're always looking for water, and yet water's right under our nose all day long without denying any bit of what's problematic in life, there are so many moments where people can just register something beneficial, including their own good heart and then on the basis of that feel something useful, then take it in, to be able to be more resilient and have more inside themselves, so they can give to other people.

Elise: What you're talking about here, what comes up for me is this word attention which you already mentioned. But I think to just really highlight that this capacity to be aware of where our attention is and then actively place it in those good moments so that as you're saying it gets sustained is really key, right?

Rick Hanson: Yes, absolutely, I think of attention as our most fundamental property and it's an interesting way to think about it for one: don't let other people steal your property, steal your attention, you know, just take it all over the place. Second, as William James, the godfather of American psychology over a hundred years ago, said this well-known saying "the education of attention would be the education par excellence" in part because if you can't regulate where your attention goes, you're not the master of your own ship, you're not the captain of your own ship. And second, given that the process of brain change is turbocharged for what we pay attention to – attention is like a vacuum cleaner, what you rest it upon, gets drawn into you. And as you know, we have what is called the negativity bias in the brain, so that that vacuum cleaner tends to be drawn to the crud, and once it lands on the crud, it's supercharged into the brain. So, therefore, something like mindfulness and things that you teach, for example, which are so important, are absolutely fundamental to being the captain of your own ship, being autonomous in a fundamental sense and second, attention training is fundamental to being able to control your own change process, your own development and healing and growth process.

Elise: Thank you. On that topic, I'd love to hear how you define mindfulness and then how you link it... or the relationship it has to resilience.

Rick Hanson: Yes, that's great. So, people use the word mindfulness in different ways, it's like local dialects, "as long as we know what we're saying everyone's okay with that". There's no "right" definition. That said, myself, I tend to I guess I think it's helpful to be clear and bounded what we mean by different words, otherwise they sort of blur together. And so, I mean by mindfulness the traditional Buddhist meaning of it, essentially as sustained present moment awareness. And it has this metacognitive quality in which the root of the word as you may know for mindfulness and the language of early Buddhism is memory or reflectiveness, so there's a kind of reflectiveness rather than being forgetful and distractive. So, sustained present moment awareness applied to both the inner world and the outer world. We can be mindful of our most subtle gut feelings as well as the flicker of emotion across the face of our partner. And mindfulness can be narrowed down to a laser like focus in concentration training or it can be widened out in choiceless awareness. Notice that mindfulness itself is neutral. It's morally neutral and it does not evaluate anything but alongside mindfulness can be many other factors, and a kind of inadvertent error I think has crept in the way that many people speak of mindfulness as only a passive witnessing of the stream of consciousness. So that any sort of wise effort in your own mind – is against mindfulness or is in conflict or an obstruction to mindfulness. That's totally not true. You can be utterly mindful while pressing your point to someone that really needs to hear you. You can be mindful while you're working through a problem with your finances or your budget. You can be mindful while eating dinner or making love or yelling at the television set when someone whose politics you don't like is on it. You can be mindful under all these conditions. And in particular, you can be mindful while you are releasing what's problematic, letting go, like letting go of thoughts or feelings or desires that are harmful to yourself and others. And you can be mindful while you're letting in, while you're internalising, you're taking in the good as I say. And it all works together, you need to be mindful to take in the good, to grow the good, to develop these inner strengths cause you got to be able to sustain attention to them for at least a few seconds in a row typically, if not a breath or two in a row. And flipped the other way, to be able to sustain that present moment awareness in our ADD culture and also with brains that evolved to be kind of constantly vigilant and skittery, looking for the next tiger and looking for the next carrot or banana, to be able to sustain the present moment awareness you need to develop inner resources, inner strengths, like executive control of attention, greater tranquillity inside yourself, understanding why you're doing it, an attitude of self-compassion and attitude of accepting what you're mindful of, all those are factors of mindfulness and, therefore, are resources to grow.

Elise: And can you just highlight – just to clarify – how mindfulness then supports resilience from your perspective.

Rick Hanson: Oh, thank you very much. These are big topics and I just tend to...

Elise: Yes, there's so much to dive into.

Rick Hanson: The short version is that mindfulness allows us to be aware of what's really happening around us and our reactions to it. So, one of the things that really prevents resilience is people being hijacked by their emotional reactions. They get flooded and then they start drowning with their feeling. And as understandable as that is, that's not resilient, that's not coping. Resilience means you maintain a core of clarity and strength inside yourself even if everything outside that one percent of you, the other 99 percent is falling apart. And it must be really clear. I think it's okay that at times people are just not resilient, they're just shattered. Really. And it's unkind and unfair to insist that they be resilient every second. On the other hand, to authentically grow the capacity to feel more and more fully, while internally being more and more at peace with all of that. That's a really good thing. So, mindfulness is critically important and you can't do that unless you're mindfully aware including with growing what I call granularity of mindfulness, a growing capacity to pick up finer and finer, more or more subtle sensations in your body, nuances in your emotion and also to be able to get more and more in real time with your reactions. When I started out – fifty years ago, just about, it would take me days to figure out why I was so pissed off about something, years. And then people gradually, like I have, and other people do, you get closer and closer to - I call it the front edge of now, more and more in real time and therefore, more and more autonomous with your reactions, less and less controlled by them and hijacked by them, and more and more able to feel them fully while not being swept away by them. And mindfulness is totally central with that.

Elise: Thank you. Another thing you talk about in your book which I think is so powerful is the way that you can help yourself heal like if you're caught up in something negative – either a past experience or some kind of uncomfortable thought – then you can use this process which you call linking. And I just think that's so useful. So, would you mind just sharing a bit about that? And sorry and just to add there: is this linking process that you're going to describe, something we can use with small things and big things that are difficult for us?

Rick Hanson: Yes. So, I use the word “linking” to refer to the experience that I think almost everyone has had. So I'm interested in how to do it more often and more skilfully. But it's a natural kind of thing, it's not exotic. Experiencing when we're aware of something positive - let's say in the foreground of awareness – such as feeling liked and included by your friends today. But off to the side in your awareness is something negative like feelings of being left out, when you were child in school or being cheated on, let's say betrayed, by a partner. Okay? So, you're aware of two things at once. And because the brain is an association machine in a fact, since neurons that fire together, wire together, if you have the neurons of the positive firing at the same time as the neurons of the negative, they start to associate with each other. These are very familiar ideas in neuropsychology. What that means is that people can take charge of that linking process themselves. I mean, in addition to doing it with a therapist or in some formal sense on your own, you can use this process in two ways. First, if you're upset about something, ride out the storm for a while. I think there are three ways to practise with the mind: let be, let go, let in. So, let be: you're being with it and at some authentic point you start moving into releasing and then at some point – that's the letting go – you let in something that's the alternative. So, let's say you remember or maybe I'll use the example: your former

partner cheated on you, betrayed you – it was bad – somebody reminds you of that, there you are, upset about it. You let it be, you ride it out for a few minutes or hours or days until it kind of settles, then you start moving into letting go. And then if you want to let in something, you replace what you released. It's not enough to just be with the mind or to let go the negative. It's like watching the garden and pulling weeds. Well, that's good. But you got to put flowers back.

Elise: Yeah, I loved that in your book. I love how you described that. That's great.

Rick Hanson: I like gardens and nature and the wilderness. So, the point is, in my example, let's say you start by being upset, and then at some point that feels right to you. You're not suppressing the negative. But on the other hand, you're being willing to be active and effortful, modelling your mind with it. Right? Then you might bring in: wait a second, maybe I don't have a partner right now in my life but I do have friends, they do like me, I have had partners in the past, I do have good qualities, my cat loves me, my dog loves me, my grandma loved me. You just start bringing it in, and so you build that positive experience which starts to associate with the negative and sooth and ease it and replace it. And that's a very natural process that's not in conflict with mindfulness. In fact, you need to be mindful to be able to do that process. The other way to do it – which is really powerful, I've used this one a lot myself. Suppose you know something about yourself, you know you have an issue. So, in my case I was a dorky, shy kid very young going through school, and my parents were loving but not very good in empathy, so I had a lot of feelings inside me and felt that there was a big hole in my heart. So knowing that and knowing that I was vulnerable in that way and I wanted to grow and heal and fill myself up with what was missing when I was a child that are natural things that humans need: we need these supplies to come in and if you don't get them, it leaves you like with a hole inside. So, knowing that, knowing that I had that kind of hole in myself, I looked for opportunities to experience something positive that was authentic and a natural supply for what had been missing in me. So, I would look for opportunities to feel included, or liked or even loved. Typically small ones in the flow of everyday life and bit by bit I would reach for them, I'd look for them, and then gradually I'd take them into myself. So, that's the other way to do it. In the first example I gave you start with something negative, in the second example, you're on the lookout for something positive that's your personal medicine, it's as if I use the metaphor you have scurvy and you're looking for some vitamin C. And when you find it, eat the whole orange.

Elise: It's so hopeful and optimistic to know that as humans – whatever happened to us in our past or any kind of injuries or whatever – we have to some extent the capacity to use our brains and our attention to bring in these good things and fundamentally change ourselves.

Rick Hanson: I know. I think it's so hopeful and for me it speaks to the fact that there is a lot of suffering. There are a lot of difficulties, even subtle forms uneasiness or irritation or unfulfilled longings and these are real things, these are real aspects of life. And there's an inevitable minimum amount of that, all right, so be it, but a lot of human suffering is discretionary. We add it to the actual conditions themselves for a variety of reasons, including how we were brought up and what we've learnt as adults, and so on. So, part of what drives

this interest I have in the actual process of growing resources inside which could sound very pollyanna-ish and superficial but actually for me it's driven by an underlying kind of soulful poignant view of human condition, first, and second, it's driven by an emphasis on autonomy and self-reliance, that it's up to us to grow these resources inside so that we're not so dependent on what the outer world does. Obviously, meanwhile we should do what we can to improve the outer world. It's not either or, and in fact as we grow these resources inside, we become more capable of acting politically or in our local communities to help things become better. But however we think about it, that other aspect of self-reliance and being determined and stubborn. That's very fundamental to this as well.

Elise: Where do you see patience fitting into this? Because I'm just thinking that this is a great concept and you've given us really helpful practical ways of applying this idea – but for people that have perhaps had significant trauma in their life, and they might be hearing this and how long's it going to take, where do you see patience fitting into this kind of equation?

Rick Hanson: So, let's see. First off, patience is a resource you can grow inside yourself. And actually for me – even though it sounds like such a superficial thing, patience – it's become a really important thing in my life, to watch in my mind, to watch how I get impatient, including with other people, subtleties that are not moving quickly enough or things are not getting better fast enough. So patience itself is something to develop inside ourselves. Interestingly, in Buddhist tradition, it's one of the 10 perfections of an awakened being. Patience is identified as a characteristic of people who are really far along. Second, in terms of pace, we're talking here really about or we're drawing upon the research on how people do change in therapy or in other ways and the rate of change. So, clearly, people do change. What you and I are talking about is not magic or some great breakthrough. What we're really talking about is how to take charge of the change process, take responsibility for your own personal change process and get competent at it, get good at it, in reasonable everyday kind of ways that usually takes less than five minutes a day, really. I mean, if I were to give people advice, including people who have been traumatised, first, half a dozen times a day, take a breath or two. Notice something beneficial and stay with the experience. It sounds stupid, that's less than 5 minutes a day. It will change your day. Do it a week or two or three in a row, it'll change your life. Because it prods you to look around for the facts that are good around you and it prods you to give yourself their gift, to receive their gift. So, that's my first suggestion. Second, know what your vitamin C is. Know what is the particular thing, including relevant for your trauma, or the stress you're dealing with right now, of let's say an ageing parent or a child with special needs. Given whatever your chances are, what's that one thing, special that you're trying to grow these days. You keep coming back to it. Like for me patience is actually probably tied for first place on my short list of what working on. And I'm already pretty patient but I'm really going after here. So, and then look for at least once a day to try and have that experience, look for what that is – maybe it's patience, maybe it's self-worth, maybe it's physical pleasure. What is it like to eat a chocolate chip cookie? And just give yourself five minutes. World, go away. It's me and my cookie. Give yourself that treat if that's...

Elise: That sounds like an easy one to achieve.

Rick Hanson: Yes, that's an easy one. But know your vitamin C and give that to yourself. Those are the two things I would suggest. And then the question is how rapidly will people change and I would say two things here from both personal practice and my own professional work. First of all, there is a dosing effect. In other words, the more you practise, it's like the more you're going to go to gym and lift weights, the more you're going to get the muscles. The more that you do these practices in a serious way, in a determined way, the more you're going to benefit from them. So, a little part of me would say in a kind of old school way to people: do the work. You've got to do work. And so make sure you're doing the work. And the work I'm focused on is enjoyable work almost always. Because usually most beneficial experiences are enjoyable.

Elise: We've covered a lot today, so thank you. Actually, one thing I wanted to ask you was specifically about your meditation practice and your learning and whether there was a story from the teaching that you've always loved, that speaks to some kind of principle or instruction in meditation. I know there's literally thousands.

Rick Hanson: Thank you. And by the way I could talk with you Elise for a long time and hear more from you. And I imagine that if we turn the tables here, you would have an awful lot of good things to say.

Elise: Thank you.

Rick Hanson: Well, that's touching. So, you're asking me about my personal practice?

Elise: I'm asking about whether even from a teacher that you've had or from a teaching or a story in a text or in an ancient story, anything that's kind of driven a point home to you, that's really kind of landed and kind of made difference to your life or to your practice.

Rick Hanson: If I may, I would try to say it succinctly but I would say several key things. One is a saying from Tibet, two related sayings. Gradual cultivation, sudden awakening, gradual cultivation, sudden awakening, gradual cultivation. And the ways that the two go together. I think that's a very important thing. And also this other related saying also from Tibet: moments of awakening, many times a day, where we have like a second and then maybe it's two seconds, many-many times a day. And then last, another Tibetan saying: if you take care of the minutes, the years will take care of themselves. I find that to be very-very helpful because it speaks to what I consider to be the most important minute of your life. The next one. Continuously. The next minute. And just take care of the next minute. No matter how bad things are and in fact the worse they are, just take care of the next minute. Minute after minute, after minute.

Elise: Thank you so much, Rick. As we come to the end, I wondered if there was anything else – I'll share links to your book and your work – was there anything else that you wanted to share with the listeners who might be starting their mindfulness journey or anything else about your own work?

Rick Hanson: Oh, thank you. Well, about my own work: go to my website, tons of freely offered resources, it also got some neat online programs. Anyone with limited financial means

can do them for free, we love giving them away. We're happy for people to pay for them who can afford them who are ethical about that. But in general, if you have any issue, we love doing that for major purpose for what I do. generally, I want to express my gratitude to you, Elise, for being quite extraordinary to interact with, and I hope that this is also helpful for the people listening and watching. Thank you.

Elise: Thank you very much, it's been a pleasure.

Rick Hanson: Thank you, Elise.