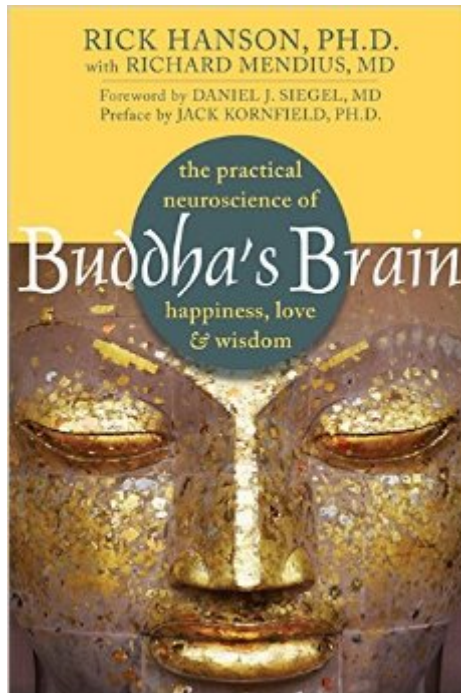


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Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience Of Happiness, Love, And Wisdom



Synopsis

If you change your brain, you can change your life. Great teachers like the Buddha, Jesus, Moses, Mohammed, and Gandhi were all born with brains built essentially like anyone else's; and then they changed their brains in ways that changed the world. Science is now revealing how the flow of thoughts actually sculpts the brain, and more and more, we are learning that it's possible to strengthen positive brain states. By combining breakthroughs in neuroscience with insights from thousands of years of mindfulness practice, you too can use your mind to shape your brain for greater happiness, love, and wisdom. Buddha's Brain draws on the latest research to show how to stimulate your brain for more fulfilling relationships, a deeper spiritual life, and a greater sense of inner confidence and worth. Using guided meditations and mindfulness exercises, you'll learn how to activate the brain states of calm, joy, and compassion instead of worry, sorrow, and anger. Most importantly, you will foster positive psychological growth that will literally change the way you live in your day-to-day life. This book presents an unprecedented intersection of psychology, neurology, and contemplative practice, and is filled with practical tools and skills that you can use every day to tap the unused potential of your brain and rewire it over time for greater well-being and peace of mind.

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Customer Reviews

We have often been told that by altering our thoughts, deeds and words, we can create a happier, more fulfilled life. This book, at the intersection between psychology, neuroscience, and Buddhism,

offers effective methods to show us how to live such a life by being fully present in the moment. Hanson and Mendius, a neuropsychologist and a neurologist and both practicing Buddhists, show us just how the brain programs us to experience the world a certain way by combining information from the external world with information held in neural pathways within the brain. These pathways operate in the background of our awareness, influencing our conscious mental activity. Unless we consciously interrupt this process, we are destined to develop deeper neural networks and even stronger programming. The argument that the brain has the ability to simulate the world is not new. What is interesting is how Hanson and Mendius link Buddhist teachings on the causes of suffering (painful situations cannot be avoided but our emotional responses to them can) to the deep programming in our brains caused by ancestral survival strategies. They suggest that this hardwiring helped us survive constant life-threatening situations but is based on erroneous beliefs that we are separate, that it is possible to stabilize an ever changing world, that we can avoid situations that create pain and pursue only those that give us pleasure. None of these beliefs are true or can be attained. Their inherent contradictions cause us to live with an underlying feeling of anxiety taking us away from our true ground of being and causing much physical and psychological ill-health.

"If I know one thing for sure, it's that you can do small things inside your mind that will lead to big changes in your brain and your experience of living. I've seen this happen again and again with people I've known as a psychologist and meditation teacher . . ."- Rick Hanson

Buddha's Brain will not only explain 'why' you should take in the good but 'how' you can achieve a more positive outlook with some basic awareness skills. The authors, Neuropsychologist, Rick Hanson and neurologist, Richard Mendius are the Click and Clack (Car Talk) of the brain. These two brainiacs/meditation teachers will show you how to create positive feelings that have many emotional and health benefits such as a stronger immune system and a cardiovascular system that is less reactive to stress. You'll learn how to create a positive cycle of good feelings that you can then spread to others. Enough with all the negativity out there! Haven't we all had enough? As a Type-A New Yorker, one of my favorite exercises in the book is 'Hush the Verbal Centers.' Here you use the power of prefrontal intention to politely (or impolitely) suggest that the verbal activity (voices in your head) shut the hell up. Tell them if they are quiet and well-behaved you will invite them to come yammer away later on after the job interview/tax return/golf putt/midterm exam. For us control freaks this is especially wonderful because now we can control our brains, as well as everything else. Who knew life could be so swell!?

Last, Hanson's wife, acupuncturist Jan Hanson writes an appendix on

nutritional neurochemistry recommending nutrients, supplements and dietary basics to support brain function.

This is a very good book in many ways, but it has one drawback that I think is very serious. Basically, the authors do not explain that the exercises they describe may lead to pain and frustration instead of increased well-being. They do point out, briefly, that if doing one of the exercises is uncomfortable, the reader should "feel free" to stop. This is not, however, nearly enough. Let me explain. The aim of the book is to guide people to increase the frequency and power of positive emotions in their lives--emotions like equanimity, compassion, gratitude and joy. (And, of course, to decrease the power of negative emotions like fear and hate.) There are a number of ways to do this, but the technique which the authors describe in the most detail is guided imagery. In guided imagery one imagines a situation that will trigger the desired emotion. Each time one creates these emotions, one strengthens their pathways in the brain/mind and thus makes oneself a happier/better person. The problem is that when some people do this imagery they are unable to generate the intended feelings. Instead they feel disappointment and frustration at being unable to do what comes so easily (it seems) to other people. If the person has a history of failure at trying to improve her mood, and if the person has been told all her life to cheer up, look at the bright side, etc., then this can be quite painful, and, ultimately, psychologically harmful. To see if these methods will work for you, try calling up some happy memory and see if it makes you feel happy. If it does, buy this book. There's a lot of good stuff here. If it doesn't, I recommend trying "The Mindful Way Through Depression".

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