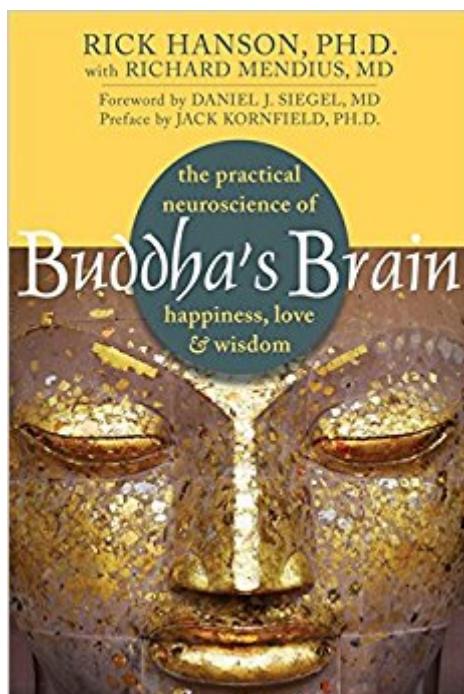


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# Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience Of Happiness, Love, And Wisdom



## 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; 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.

## Book Information

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[View larger](#) From The Book: Your Brain, Basic Facts Your brain is three pounds of tofu-like tissue containing 1.1 trillion cells, including 100 billion neurons. On average, each neuron receives about five thousand connections, called synapses, from other neurons (Linden 2007). At its receiving synapses, a neuron gets signals usually as a burst of chemicals called neurotransmitters from other neurons. Signals tell a neuron either to fire or not; whether it fires depends mainly on the combination of signals it receives each moment. In turn, when a neuron fires, it sends signals to other neurons through its transmitting synapses, telling them to fire or not. A typical neuron fires 5,000 times a second. In the time it takes you to read the bullet points in this box, literally quadrillions of signals will travel inside your head. Find out more in *Buddha's Brain*.

"A wonderfully comprehensive book. The authors have made it easy to understand how our minds function and how to make changes so that we can live happier, fuller lives." •Sharon Salzberg, author of *Lovingkindness*"This is simply the best book I have read on why and how we can shape our brains to be peaceful and happy. This is a book that will literally change your brain and your life." •Jennifer Louden, author of *The Woman's Comfort Book* and *The Life Organizer* "Buddha's Brain is a significant contribution to understanding the interface between science and meditation in the path of transformation. Illuminating." •Joseph Goldstein, author of *A Heart Full of Peace and One Dharma*"Buddha's Brain is compelling, easy to read, and quite educational. The book skillfully answers the central question of each of our lives—how to be happy—by presenting the core precepts of Buddhism integrated with a primer on how our brains function. This book will be helpful to anyone wanting to understand time-tested ways of skillful living backed up by up-to-date science." •Frederic Luskin, PhD, author of *Forgive for Good* and director of Stanford Forgiveness Projects"I wish I had a science teacher like Rick Hanson when I went to school. Buddha's Brain is at once fun, fascinating, and profound. It not only shows us effective ways to develop real happiness in our lives, but also explains physiologically how and why they work. As he instructs us to do with positive experiences, take in all the good information this book offers and savor it." •James Baraz, author of *Awakening Joy* and cofounder of Spirit Rock Meditation Center"With the mind of a scientist, the perspective of a psychologist, and the wise heart of a parent and devoted meditator, Rick Hanson has created a guide for all of us who want to learn about and apply the scintillating new research that embraces neurology, psychology, and authentic spiritual inquiry. Up-to-date discoveries combined with state-of-the-art practices make this book an engaging read. *Buddha's Brain*

is at the top of my list!" •Richard A. Heckler, PhD, assistant professor at John F. Kennedy University in Pleasant Hill, CA"An illuminating guide to the emerging confluence of cutting-edge neuropsychology and ancient Buddhist wisdom filled with practical suggestions on how to gradually rewire your brain for greater happiness. Lucid, good-humored, and easily accessible." •John J. Prendergast, PhD, adjunct associate professor of psychology at California Institute of Integral Studies and senior editor of *The Sacred Mirror* and *Listening from the Heart of Silence*"Buddha's Brain will show you how mental practices, informed by the contemplative traditions, can increase your capacity for experiencing happiness and peace. This book provides a scientific understanding of these methods, and clear guidance for practices that cultivate a wise and free heart." •Tara Brach, PhD author of *Radical Acceptance*"This book enables us to understand the whys and hows of our human operating system so we can make more informed actions that allow us to live our lives more fully, compassionately, and with greater well-being and kindness towards others and ourselves. What I find exciting about Buddha's Brain is Rick Hanson's ability to clearly delineate the root causes of suffering and explain pertinent ways we can actually change these causes and effect lasting change on all levels of our mind, body, and interpersonal relationships. His informative, relaxed, and easy-to-read style of writing made me want to pick up this book again and again and dive ever more deeply into the complexities of our human engineering. Buddha's Brain is now on my recommendation list for all my students and teachers-in-training." •Richard C. Miller, PhD, founding president of Integrative Restoration Institute"Numerous writings in recent years have exacerbated the traditional rift between science and religion; however, there has been a refreshing parallel movement in the opposite direction. Neuroscientists have become increasingly interested in using first-person introspective inquiries of the mind to complement their third-person, Western scientific investigations of the brain. Buddhist contemplative practices are particularly amenable to such collaboration, inviting efforts to find neurobiological explanations for Buddhist philosophy. Stripped of religious baggage, Buddha's Brain clearly describes how modern concepts of evolutionary and cognitive neurobiology support core Buddhist teachings and practice. This book should have great appeal for those seeking a secular spiritual path, while also raising many testable hypotheses for interested neuroscientists." •Jerome Engel, Jr., MD, PhD, Jonathan Sinay Distinguished Professor of Neurology, Neurobiology, and Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences at the University of California, Los Angeles"Buddha's Brain makes a significant contribution to the current dynamic dialogue among neuroscience, psychology, and Buddhist disciplines of mind training. Drawing on the wisdom born of their own meditation practice and their scientific backgrounds, the authors point

again and again to the possibilities of the deep transformation of our minds and lives."

•Christina Feldman, author of *Compassion* and *The Buddhist Path to Simplicity*"Recent developments in psychology and the neurosciences have led to clear and powerful insights about how our brains work and how these neurological functions shape our experience of the world. These insights are profoundly congruent with the wisdom that has been developed over thousands of years in the contemplative traditions. The authors of *Buddha's Brain* have given us a concise and practical guide to how these two currents of knowledge can be used to transform our capacity to engage both ourselves and others with wisdom, compassion, and mindfulness."

•Robert D. Truog, MD, professor at Harvard Medical School, executive director of the Institute for Professionalism and Ethical Practice, and senior associate in critical care medicine at Children's Hospital, Boston"A clear introduction to some basic principles of neuroscience and dharma." •Roger Walsh, MD, PhD, professor at the University of California, Irvine, and author of *Essential Spirituality*"*Buddha's Brain* brilliantly reveals the teachings of the Buddha in the light of modern neuroscience. This is a practical guide to changing your reality. This is your brain on Dharma!" •Wes "Scoop" Nisker, author of *Essential Crazy Wisdom* and editor of *Inquiring Mind*"Solidly grounded in the latest neuroscientific research, and supported by a deep understanding of contemplative practice, this book is accessible, compelling, and profound" •a crystallization of practical wisdom!" •Philip David Zelazo, PhD, Nancy M. and John E. Lindahl Professor at the Institute of Child Development, University of Minnesota

In *Buddha's Brain*, a clinical psychologist and a senior neurologist explain how the brain benefits from contemplative practice and show readers how to develop greater happiness, love, and wisdom by drawing from breakthroughs in modern neuroscience.

I got interested in this book after a So. Cal doctor ,experiencing burnout, stated that this book "changed my life" Well organized rapid progression thru mindfulness as it relates to modern neuroscience. Well developed concept of the I or self , it's reasons of evolving, and its limitations including the about of pain and suffering associated with it. Humans for the past 3000 years have been working out a better way to be. Rick Hanson masterfully presents an optional way of being. Bravo. I feel change already.

I just read Rick Hanson's book *Buddha's Brain*, a wonderful 'experience near' evoking presentation of the confluence of neuroscience, evolution, and 'felt sense' practice. A deceptively sophisticated

'book' that is in the 'service' of 'lived practice' enabling the reflective awareness of one's unique unfolding life source to nudge into experience within the mystery of the expanse, unnamable, of the ever emergent oneness. With less convoluted words a heartfelt journey at a number levels.

The authors have created both an interesting examination of the neuroscience underlying happiness and contentment, and a nice practical resource for how to use contemplative practices to cultivate serenity and emotional peace as well. This book will be profitable to anyone interested in either of those subjects, and will be especially attractive to anyone interested in both of them.

**Changing Your Brain for the Better**  
Rating: 4.5 stars out of 5  
**Buddha's Brain** is a thought-provoking text that has many fascinating themes. Rick Hanson, the author of this book attended University California Los Angeles at age 16, and received one of the four "outstanding senior" awards. He later entered the graduate program at San Francisco State University earning his PhD in clinical psychology. Richard Mendius, the other author of this book also graduated from UCLA. Hanson has written other books prior to this particular one, but in 2009 Mendius and Hanson teamed up and the result was **Buddha's Brain**. The **Buddha's Brain** incorporates the practice of meditation and field of neuroscience to explain how it can change one's brain. This book is informative, and easy to understand. Therefore, I would highly recommend it to anyone yearning to learn more about the ancient practice and teachings of Buddhism, and how it relates to neuroscience of the brain. **Buddha's Brain** explains to its audience of how one's mind can shape their brain. This book takes into account the importance of one's mind and the effectiveness it has on changing his or her life positively. The four main categories offered are suffering, happiness, wisdom, and love. Within the major sections there are chapters having to do with nutrition, kindness, relationships, focus, and relaxation. These aspects are all put into perspective from an ancient teaching point of view, more specifically Buddha's instruction. Supported by science the book offers the reader ways of overcoming any suffering in order to live a healthier and happier life. Each major section of the book provides neuroscience as a supplemental guide to the reader. Brain and neuron anatomy are offered within the text, providing helpful understandings of why and where things like feelings, moods, or thoughts may occur. The book is set up in a systematic fashion, which works well in order to make clear portrayals to the reader. For example, the book begins with the theme of suffering, probably to draw the reader in almost like an infomercial, enabling one to relate to problems mentioned. The cause of distress within your mind, which ultimately hinders your brain, is introduced along with other aspects of misery. Suffering is then later explained in a more

scientifically, while giving the reader information about the evolution of the brain and where some of these feelings are associated with regard to the human brain. The next section titled "Happiness" begins by relating the Buddhists Noble Eightfold Path to happiness, where this would prevent or eliminate harmful memories. This part then goes on to give the reader techniques in order to eliminate things from the mind that may affect one's happiness. Things like meditation are mentioned, followed by the science supporting these techniques. The third part to the book is called "Love" which begins with the evolution of relationships and love. Later chapters provide useful techniques for the reader to acquire love in their life through relationships while suppressing hate. The last section of the book is titled, "Wisdom" and immediately jumps into the "how" of the function of your brain while paying attention and how mindfulness leads to wisdom. Wisdom in the neuroscience explanation is related to the five traditional factors that steady the mind. Later chapters in this section are similar to the other three sections by providing techniques for the readers to achieve more wisdom in his or her life. The authors also provide the reader with a section at the end of each chapter called, "Key Points," which helps the reader better understand the main message Hanson is trying to get across and what should be taken away from that particular section. This "summary" section of the book was something I enjoyed the most, because it enabled me to piece things together. Another section in the book I will keep in mind for the future is the last chapter of the book, which goes more into more neuroscience. The chapter is called, "Nutritional Neurochemistry," and is written by Jan Hanson. It covers many different chemicals that are in foods and vitamins that should be taken or minimized in order to benefit your daily lives. For example, in this chapter Hanson states things such as sugar intake should be limited because overtime it has a wearing effect on the hippocampus. Also, a piece of information that is very interesting in this chapter had to do with taking omega-3 fatty acids, because it is something more and more people are doing lately. This paragraph informs the reader that omega-3 fatty acids are crucial for brain development, and the promotion of neuronal growth. This chapter in the book was perhaps my favorite. The Buddhist teachings were all supported by neuroscience, which was what personally kept my attention. Hanson provides diagrams and pictures to better explain the "how" some of the techniques work. An example of this was in a chapter about suffering and its evolution, where Hanson provides a picture of the brain labeled with areas like the amygdala and the hippocampus and then later explains that the amygdala sends pulses for both a general warning and a fast-track signal to the fight-or-flight neural and hormonal systems. The Buddhist tradition and techniques that offer people to find love, wisdom, and happiness are now supported by neuroscience, and Hanson has provided us a guide to better our daily lives. I highly recommend this

book for anyone interested in improving his or her life or simply learning more about neuroscience. This book is a quick and easy read, that although seems repetitive in structure at times, will keep the one's attention, simply because it has the potential to relate to other peoples' lives if they let it. The techniques suggested throughout can be a healthy solution to many common problems and feelings people have. Being a competitive athlete, college student, and leading a stress filled life like many other people I found the relaxing techniques such as meditation very interesting. The scientific support Hanson offers only makes these techniques more believable, which in itself makes them much more likely to work. The way I relate to the book is in a subtle manner compared to all of the information Hanson has to offer. He provides multiple ways for people to improve their quality of life. The Buddhist undertone of this book was linked to modern science throughout the text and stylistically, was presented in a very understandable manner. Overall this book offers interesting information that is general and basic enough for anyone to understand. One does not have to be a neurosurgeon to understand the major themes and information given. Buddha's Brain: happiness, love and wisdom, offers readers both the "how" and the "why" one should go about changing to ensure a life with more happiness, love, and wisdom. This is done in a very fascinating style, relating the roots and teaching of Buddhism, which are then tied in with neuroscience. Having a scientific theme, the book is general enough for a non-science audience. Although there is some repetitiveness with the formatting of this book making different ideas almost blend together, I recommend it because it has the potential to aid people to live a better life, by using techniques that Hanson proves through science.

This is a very well thought out book. As a former Psych/Physiology major I, for one, appreciated the well researched information about the inner workings of the brain during meditation, emotional expressions, relaxation and so on. Aside from the intellectual stimulation, I was also taken by the practices of various mind exercises in order to relax the mind and achieve some sort of meditative state. I am not the type that follows any one practice or any one "guru" but this book really has tons of useful information on how to achieve inner peace through various strategies. Definitely a great read.

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