



Lesson #3 — The Vagus Nerve and Neuroplasticity

Transcribed by Barbara Becker, edited by Linda LaTores
Copyright © 2021 by Richard L. Haight and SoulHub.com

Great to have you back. Hope you enjoyed yesterday's homework. If you'll recall, we were just going to practice the concentration method. We touch the point and from there we concentrate for a minute or two and see if we notice when the brainwave shifts from beta to alpha, conscious alpha as the case may be. And also, maybe pay attention to TV and notice when that shift might occur.

And, moving forward, there are several other pieces of information. We have brainwaves, which we now have a little bit of information about: beta, alpha, which is meditation, and theta, which is the mind wandering off into daydream. We want to stay in between beta and theta.

The next thing to understand is the vagus nerve. Now, there are twelve cranial nerves and one of them is called the vagus nerve. It's called the vagus nerve because it meanders through the body like a vagabond. What that means is it starts at the brainstem and travels down and goes to the various visceral organs. It facilitates communication between the brain and the visceral organs, as well as the immune system and probably a number of other systems within the body. The key point about the vagus nerve to be cognizant of is that when we are in meditation, what's happening is it is stimulating the vagus nerve. There are a number of practices which can stimulate the vagus nerve and all of those practices

lead to an enhanced bodily awareness, increased health and what we would describe as a meditative effect.

In today's meditation, we are going to, of course, make use of the vagus nerve just as all meditations that are effective do. But there is one other piece of information that we want to be cognizant of as we move forward in our meditative practice and that is neuroplasticity. That is a term that is quite popular these days, but what neuroplasticity means is the flexibility of the brain to change. And what really is occurring is as you practice anything, as you show your body that you value something, you practice something, as it challenges the brain during the day, what happens is at night, neural pathways that have not been used much, that aren't being reinforced, get broken down and those resources are reallocated to the new pathways that you are working on.

Which means as you meditate or practice anything, that awkward feeling that you feel, that feeling of uncertainty, that is an indicator that you're challenging the brain. See, most of us feel like when we're doing meditation, especially early on, that we don't like that awkward feeling. It creates lots of feelings of doubt and then we tend to give up. But what that feeling really means is the brain is being challenged and so you are telling your body that *that's important*. And at night, as you sleep, resources will be allocated to facilitate new neural pathways which will allow for the meditative capacity to increase so that you can have greater effect in moving forward. Essentially, it's your body's process of acclimating. And so, instead of avoiding the awkward feeling when you are challenging yourself to do something, know that that feeling is an indicator that you are having some success, at least to the degree that you are challenging your brain, which is very important.

Now, of course this makes things difficult when we get to very advanced levels and we're very comfortable with meditation because we are not really challenging the brain as much, which is why it's difficult for the brain to make leaps and bounds in progress as you become very skilled at something. The increases are very, very incremental. But early on it's actually easier to make progress, especially if we embrace that feeling of uncertainty and awkwardness and allow it to be without concerning too much over it. Don't allow it to throw you off the path.

Now, since we know that the brain reallocates resources at night and builds new neural pathways, the ones we want to be building. There are two steps in this process. One, do less of the things that you don't want your brain to learn how to do or sustain the capacity to do well, which means unhealthy habits, of course. Ideally you pick and choose

whichever ones you want to give up and give them up at the pace you want, so that those resources can be allocated to something that is more healthy like meditation.

The second thing to be aware of is that practicing every day is the key. We want our brain to restructure in the way that we are aiming and in alignment with our aims every night, and that's going to make things work much more efficiently. Instead of building a pathway and letting it fade, if you practice every other day for example, or every third day, you're spending some resources allocating and then letting it fade. We just keep building a little bit every day. And so, with that in mind, a few minutes of practice every day is worth more than an hour once a week. And so we are going to take advantage of that in our practice of meditation through the Warrior's Meditation, especially when we get to the next few parts. But, even still during this very basic concentration meditation, it's better if you do it every day, even if it's just a minute or two.

Alright, so we've got two points that we just discussed which is the vagal nerve and how the stimulation of the vagal nerve is affected by meditation and other types of activities which we are going to explore in some of the future lessons. And of course, neuroplasticity and that's the reason why we should be very persistent in our practice. Now, we are going to separate persistence from willpower, not willpower, willfulness. So, willpower is good, it is required to do anything. To make a decision, to have an intention, just to sit and meditate, just to decide to sit in meditation. Just to decide to sit and meditate requires a little bit of intention and willpower. For some of us, it requires quite a bit of intention and willpower. That be as it is, during meditation we relax, enjoy, and don't use too much willpower. Try to keep a light feeling about the process. No need to fight if your mind is going into thoughts and all that sort of thing, just bring it back to whatever the concentration point is that we're working on.

Which brings us to today's practice. We are going to do the same things we did the last lesson, only we are going to spend a little bit more time in it and we are going to pick a different point. So, for example, you might choose a point on your chest, a point on your shoulder, it might be your knee, it doesn't matter where it is but you are going to tap wherever that point is three, four, five times. In this case, my right shoulder, close the eyes, sit up straight, relax the spine and feel. Concentrate on that point and feel. Relax deeper and deeper. Let your breathing settle, releasing the excess tension from your face, your neck and shoulders, your hands and feet and just concentrate on that one point.

Now let's switch the point. For example, I was working on the shoulder. We are going to do the chest now, a little bit of tapping there on your sternum. Concentrate, and feel that, remain softly centered.

Next, let's go a little bit higher or a little bit lower so we work the sternum, maybe a few inches higher. Tap that area, feel and concentrate.

Let's do the chin. Feel and concentrate on the chin.

Try the top of the head. Give it a couple of good taps. Bring your awareness to the top of the head. Feel that point.

Alright, wonderful. How was that for you, I wonder? If you have a notebook, I highly recommend you keep track of which points were easier versus which points were more challenging. Now the mind would tend to think, "The ones that are easier are the ones we ought to practice." That's okay, but really, again, to take advantage of neuroplasticity, we may want to actually work on some of them that are a little bit more difficult. I generally recommend you start with, for example, today, would be to say spend five minutes or so, and each minute you pick, just a rough guess, close your eyes, pick a spot, tap on it. Maybe start with an easy location, and little by little migrate to different spots, migrating towards locations that you think might be a little bit more difficult. See if you can't remain deeply centered, relaxed and clear in the process. If there are thoughts that come, it's okay, just bring your attention back to the point of focus.

Thank you so much and hope to see you in the next lesson.