



KARYN SHANKS MD

*Heart, Hope, Healing*

# How to Practice Human Flourishing.

BY KARYN SHANKS MD | SEPTEMBER 1, 2021



I spent the past three days attending the Institute for Functional Medicine's Annual International Conference. This year's theme was perfectly timely: Resilience.

A huge part of resilience—having the strength, energy, and adaptability to thrive through life's challenges—is wellbeing.

Resilience is hard when we're struggling.

I want to briefly share with you encouraging thoughts by the final speaker, Richard Davidson, MD, PhD, neuroscientist from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, who gave a talk called, "The Plasticity of Wellbeing: A Framework for the cultivation of human flourishing."

Human flourishing—we want in on *that*, don't we?

The strength of his message, fully supported by science conducted in his own lab, is that wellbeing is *a skill*. A skill to be learned like any other, not just an attribute of the genetically and environmentally lucky.

The themes supporting his work are those we talk about regularly here, from what I call the Science of Directable Human Potential:

- **Neuroplasticity**—how the brain constantly changes and is shaped by all of our experiences.
- **Epigenetics**—how our genetic expression constantly changes and is “regulated” by our experiences.
- **Body-mind-brain integration**—how the relationships between all aspects of us are multidirectional.
- **Innate basic goodness**—how we come into this world with positive, warm-hearted, altruistic inclinations towards others.

These attributes of our basic humanness are, in his words, “invitations” we can consciously accept to take more responsibility for our brains, our genetic expression, our minds, and our relationships by nurturing healthy daily habits.

Dr. Davison’s four pillars to training the plasticity of wellbeing are:

- **Awareness**—attention and presence.
- **Connection**—kindness, empathy, gratitude, compassion.
- **Insight**—self-knowledge, curiosity-driven investigation of personal narratives.
- **Purpose**—having a true north, meaning.

These simple elegant attributes are accessible to anyone, cultivated through daily practice. They’re backed by solid science and all lead to enhanced wellbeing—*human flourishing*.

Would you like to learn more about science-inspired practices for human flourishing?

Dr. Davidson and his colleagues have generously made these available through a free app called [The Healthy Minds Program](#). It is a teaching and support tool for developing the skills of awareness, connection, insight, and purpose through short daily practices. It lets you map and track your progress.

Happy Sunday.

Love,

Karyn

## KARYN SHANKS MD

Karyn Shanks, MD, is a physician who lives and practices in Iowa City. Her work is inspired by the science of Functional Medicine, body-mind principles, and wisdom

gleaned from the transformational journeys of thousands of clients over her twenty-five-year career. Her work honors each individual and the power of their stories, their inner wisdom, and innate healing potential. She believes that the bones of healing are in what we do for ourselves. She is the author of *Liftoff*, a manual of energy recovery and healing through essential self-care practices.

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