

10_29_25 Talk*

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Speaker 1 [00:00:00] So I'd like to explore a question that is at the heart of a lot of practice, which is essentially, if I am inherently good, radiant and wise, why do I not act like it much of the time? And why do I have to work so hard to become who I have always already been? Classic question. It goes to some teachings that are present in early Buddhism as best we can gather from them early, from the surviving written records there in the so-called Pali Canon. There are some references to the Buddha saying or someone pretending to be the Buddha in the written record saying, I think of it all as kind of like the Buddha stream. So in the Buddha's stream, there's some words along the lines of essentially the nature of mind. Inherently pure. The nature of consciousness is inherently pure. And then the other 99% of the words in the Pali Canon are about dealing with all the impurities in the mind.

[00:01:17] And it reminds me a little bit of the metaphor that I heard a while back, which goes like this. If you, let's say acquire a home that's been boarded up for many decades, maybe it's a house in the woods, you're now gonna have for yourself, and you go into it and the faucet has been turned off for 30 years. And you turn it on so the water can flow, and ooh, out comes initially a bunch of greens, brown, smelly stuff. And the tendency is to turn it off. But what you need to do is to let that water flow, which is you could say a metaphor for mindfulness, for awareness, for being with what's there. We let our experiences flow. And then as they gradually flow and release, All the rest of that, some of the weightier content, you know, and even the settler flotsam and jetsam gradually disperses on its way. Beautiful, beautiful.

[00:02:18] And a second teaching in that metaphor is that the nature of the water itself, every molecule of H₂O, the nature water itself is always inherently pure water, containing all kinds of other content. But the water itself. The ground of being itself, the field of awareness itself, is inherently pure. And okay, so that's pretty beautiful. Then the notion of underlying Buddha nature, Bodhicitta, et cetera, gets more developed in the Buddhist traditions in Tibetan, Zen, and then onward Pure Land Buddhism. So I want to explore with you a little bit about that as it applies to our lives today and how it could actually help us, how it does actually help to tune into and access. Our sense of innate goodness, even while dealing with our struggles, and including our struggles with other people, and our struggles in the political environments in which we're dealing today.

[00:03:27] So I want to start here a little bit with Roy Cohen's comment. Roy writes, although at times I feel warmhearted from inside, when I look at myself from the outside, I look to myself as harsh and closed up. I often struggle to see my own goodness because of that. So let's suppose that a person is actually harsh and closed up some of the time. What purpose or function does that serve? What is the intention, including unconsciously represented in the body mind, in the brain especially? What is intention? The intentions are always good at bottom. You know, we're harsh because we have good intent. We're trying to protect ourselves or we're quick or that's how we grew up. It's not just how we learned to be. Maybe that's our temperament. Maybe we're just a kind of more of a fiery, blunt, matter of fact kind of person. Just so the intent there is to simply continue living and going on being and being who we are. Or let's suppose closed. What's closed in us in the service of? Potentially. Protecting oneself, not wanting to let leak out onto others, some of the stuff that's still swirling around inside. Okay, it's good intent. Every single, it kind of wild, and I want to really offer this to you.

[00:05:08] I was listening to Mignon Rinpoche recently in an interview that Forrest and I had with him for our podcast, and he made a comment that really struck me about how. Even our neurotic stuff that I, as a therapist, will pay attention to in my own mind and out there in other people. Even that neurotic is well-intended. It too is an expression of our innate goodness. Wow. In other words, even all the crud and garbage in myself that I've been trying to get rid of, even all of that is an expansion of my inherent. Goodness, my inherent goodness of heart, goodness of intent. Wow! So I want to invite you, Roy included, into reflecting on that in your own case. It doesn't mean to get sloppy or, you know, just indifferent about the wreckage you leave around you with your communications. It just is a way to see truly, see clearly. And then when you see too into the good intent behind quote unquote bad behavior, deep down. Then when you rest in that good intent, you can find better ways to enact it that are more flexible, more tuned to the present, less relics of training from your childhood. Okay, so far. Really. And then I want to draw your attention to a visual aid here. And I've presented this visual aid previously, and I'm going to focus on a particular aspect of it. So here we go.

[00:06:57] I consider this to be the truth of things in a broad sense. Imagine that each layer of this triangle is actually 10 or 1,000 times bigger than the layer above. And so out in the world, we see actual harms being done occasionally by ourselves, often by others, often at vast and unfortunate scales by large, powerful forces such as militaries and certain governments and certain leaders and policies and structural poverty and inequity and injustice. Actual harms, no denial of actual harms. The planet is getting hotter, actual harms.

[00:07:42] Then there is also what is not directly objectively harmful yet, but is poisoning our culture, toxic spectacle, scads of disinformation and misinformation and trolls and bad actors, social freeloaders and social media and all the rest of that. It's all true. Okay. So you have the first two layers. Could be just summarized in two words, what sucks. It's real. That's what's out there in the world. And then there's the rest of it, okay? And we have certainly, right now, 10, 20, 100 million people in organizations, probably more actually, around the world, ranging from somebody picking up somebody else's litter in the street to some people fixing a pothole to people working in healthcare settings, school teachers. All kinds of non-profit organizations, scientists, public policy groups, advocacy groups, all around the world, including in pretty harsh conditions. I'm sure in North Korea, there are some people coming together there in the context of that dictatorship to make things better, you know, out of service to the people around them. Great.

[00:09:03] Many of whom are you included, I'll bet you, in the ways that you... Make donations, you offer your time in service, maybe you're part of a nonprofit organization of one kind or another, you too are helping to make a better world. Perhaps you donate to political campaigns, just vote or share what you know is factually true. What a concept, factually truth with other people. You're helping to a better a world. Notice that. And then we have the goodness in ordinary lives. And I really want to focus on this one here with you. The goodness in ordinary lives, people enjoying a cup of coffee, you know, a glass of water, making a meal, laughing, making love, having children, raising their children, just enjoying life, you know? Planting a tree, repairing a faucet, just goodness. And here I want to draw your attention to your own generosity, your own generosity. It's said that as the Buddha traveled from here to there throughout northern India during his 40 year roughly teaching career after his awakening, it is said that the first thing he typically taught was the value of generosity, not toxic altruism, pathological altruism, but the givingness of a warm heart, the generosity of attention, sustaining, giving your attention. To somebody else. The

generosity, certainly supporting the monastics and supporting others of their time with a little food here, a little help there, the generosity of letting another person go ahead of you, just the ordinary generosity of everyday life, doing some dishes for somebody else, you know, gifts, your own givingness. Lovingness is givingness, You know, it's that there's a generosity to it. The giving of forgiving. You know, we started out early before we actually got formally started with how to respond to a complaint about you, oh my goodness, from somebody else and the generosity of receiving the complaint.

[00:11:19] I did a interview with Forrest earlier today about extricating oneself from problematic relationships and we were talking about one of the indicators of a problematic relationship. Is to be with someone whose complaint department is never open. You know, like the sign, complaint department, out to lunch, they're always out to lunch. They're never there to receive your complaint. And that's kind of a giveaway. That's not good. Well, flip it around. You have the generosity of being open to maybe grudgingly at first, but then you settle down the receiving the complaints of others. So I want to, and I invite you to take a moment to kind of rest and reflect on... You know, the many, many good intentions. Good intentions to get your job done, to do your duty. Yeah, good intentions to put the cap back on the toothpaste tube to pick up your own socks. To stop at stop signs and look both ways before continuing. To honor your agreements, good intentions, to keep your word. And then just think about all the efforts you've made, often while being tired or stressed or strained, to just do your best again and again and again and and again. I know quite a few of you from past experiences, workshops, different settings, communications. And I think, you know, honestly, a lot of you don't really give yourself enough credit for your own good intentions, your own generosity and your own goodness. It's interesting that in divisive times with a fair amount of pathologizing of other people across the aisle and so forth and so fourth, It's quite a refuge to rest and... Your own good intent, the knowing of your good efforts, which includes your willingness to repair and to receive the complaints of others. That's a real refuge.

[00:13:45] And now I'd like to kind of build on this in a particular way. And I'm asking for your generosity of attention here to what I'm about to bring up. And you'll understand why I said that in a moment. So, as you may know... One of my own forms of generosity over the last over three years now has been a nonprofit I started called the Global Compassion Coalition. And basically I've given the majority of my working hours to this nonprofit as a volunteer for over three year. Really put myself into it and it's actually grown remarkably. If you go to our website, you'll see that the fundamental aim here is to use the power of compassion. To galvanize the collective action that the world needs for systemic change. The world already has a lot of focus on individual consciousness. The world all ready has a lots of efforts in their own silos to make a better world.

[00:14:55] And meanwhile, the forces of wealth and power are dragging us toward catastrophe. We need to come together at larger and larger scales to be big enough to be strong enough to promote the common good. The good of the many not just the few. That's the fundamental purpose of the Global Compassion Coalition, responding to the suffering, especially the needless suffering due to systemic forces of injustice of others. It's an ambitious and noble vision. We've gone for it. And it's galvanized the interest of 150,000 people so far and growing rapidly, and with a core of 1,000 really distinguished people among our founding supporters and founding organizations. You're very welcome to join the coalition. It's free. Everything about it is freely offered. We have the occasional paid program, some of them created by me. If financial issues are significant, you can do everything we offer for free, fundamentally. So that's the Global Compassion Coalition. And at this time of year, when people start thinking about donations to nonprofits, tax-

deductible donations to nonprofits, I would really request that you consider your own gratitude to me, you know, your own appreciation of my generosity to you in these sitting groups and other things I do. And if you're so moved, you can donate to the Global Compassion Coalition. You can donate in my name, one dollar or, well, a million dollars would be great. I'm not expecting it. So that's my request to you.

[00:16:36] So I wanna keep going here with a question that got asked to me and I think it was shared publicly so I'm gonna use her name. Anne Weiner, she said essentially when I was talking about not letting the poison of hatred invade her heart and particularly in these political times, she was basically saying, well, anger energizes me. Anger mobilizes me and there's a truth to that. I think it's really important to not suppress anger and also to appreciate its uses. We don't let it use you. The uses of anger are to highlight what matters most and to mobilize energy toward it. Great. On the other hand, if anger carries us away, it gradually wears us down. So we have less and less capacity to fight the good fight and it can create a lot of interpersonal consequences with other people. Really comes back to, for you, multiple motivations that lead in the same direction. For example, it may be that when you look out at the world, you're furious at certain things about it. I know I am. I'm furious.

[00:17:58] I remember traveling to Haiti and walking around there for The two days, essentially, I was there. In a cold rage. I was very, very controlled about it. It was appropriate. I was appalled at the life for most of the people there. There's a place for that, there's a space for that. And alongside that cold rage was a lot of compassion and a lot respect. And an analytical and constructive focus on my mind around, how can I make an actual difference here? How could I actually help? So right there, we would have multiple horses, multiple motivations going down the same road. Cold rage, compassion, constructive desire to help. Grief, and what people were dealing with there, all of it going down the same road. The question then becomes, which one are you primarily writing? The rage, the anger is there. It's going down the road. But if that's the horse you're mainly riding and how you act in the world, as the Buddha said famously a long time ago, see for yourself. See for yourself what actually are the results of riding that particular motivational horse of intention. You decide. You might find that what works best is it kind of blends, you know, that cold rage in the background, as they say in Zen, you know. Firm back, soft front, stiffens your backbone. You know, your sense of moral clarity and outrage back here. While in the front of you, you're more measured, you're gentler, you bring the gravitas, the weight of people like, you know Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Or. You know, I'm a fan of Michelle Obama and others. You know you bring that moral weight. And Pema Chodron, for example, you bring that moral way.

[00:20:17] So I invite you to think about in your own life what are for you some of the multiple intentions that you have for dealing with things. You know? Including with your partner. So, it's me and myself. My long suffering wife Jan. She'll do a thing. Where I'm with a fair amount of momentum because I'm dealing with a fairly long to-do list every day. It's getting shorter, but it's still long. I'm moving from one room to another. I'm getting something done. I'm move through it. And I'm on my way into the other room to do the thing, you know, like to put something in the recycling. And she'll say with good intent, yeah, please put that in the recycle. Now I'm going toward the recycling. I'm putting it in the recycling, what do I do then? I grew up with controlling, advice giving parents. I have some relics of that reactivity still within me. So anyway, what I do?

[00:21:24] One motive, one of my ponies, one my horses, is to be kind of irritable with her, snarky, say something. And then I have another horse alongside that one that has more

noble intent, you know, more noble intend to take into account the larger picture. I play an internal game about how fast can I get off my positions? How fast can I release authentically or reaction authentically? And you know it's a fun game to play with yourself. It's a game that only you keep score internally. And it's a game you can win at because you can get faster and faster at it. What a good game. How quickly can I genuinely release around some position? The cortisol may still be grr, grr. Not yet metabolically fully metabolized or released, but on the whole, it's not invading you. It's not remaining in your mind. You're like increasingly free of it. How fast can you do that? Depending on how big things are. Obviously it's slower with bigger things. So in any case, I've got those two ponies. Riding side-by-side, which one do I act from? And it just goes better if I act from the wise pony rather than the reactive pony. So I wonder what you think about this in terms of your own intentions, and can you recognize the depth of good intent that's actually in you, that's actual in you? As Elaine puts it here, which pony, which wolf, which pony do you feed? So I wanna see if there are questions about this particularly, including related to the fact that if you think about both of them, both the horses have good intentions underneath it all. And one of them probably has more generosity of heart, more generosity or spirit. Well, I'm gonna do something I haven't done in a while. I'm going to take an actual real question from my friend Madison. You know, short and sweet, oh my goodness. As you know, Madison, I always say it to everybody. If you could, if I'm gonna talk with you, please have a succinct, clear question of general interest related to the topic at hand. All right, cut to the chase.

Speaker 2 [00:23:47] Spectacular! Okay, here's the chase real life experience from today. I am managing four or five people cleaning up household situations and I see something I don't like or want to change or someone's doing it not the way I want it and I go smashing in and with a comment. Sometimes his comment like, good job, but that's not the one I'm bringing up to you. The one I bring up to is, no, don't do that, or I'm allergic to that, or stop that, or what are you doing with that, or you almost hurt somebody. And those were all real live things that came, and I've spent decades learning about you need to have quite a bit of space between reaction and response or whatever those two things are and I haven't mastered it and if you have something to say about that I would love to hear it.

Speaker 1 [00:24:54] So I'm gonna ask you a blunt question. No blame, just inquiry. You know better. Why do you keep doing it?

Speaker 2 [00:25:10] I guess I would say because it feels efficient. And timely, not necessarily kind. I got that, but it feels very efficient, like, wow, I see it, I name it, I blame it.

Speaker 1 [00:25:26] So I kind of want to pause right here and, you know, I, you're my friend, Madison, we know each other and I know you're diligent. I know your work on your mind. What I'm hearing is you're not yet really convinced. The better way. You don't, you're not really convinced yet. And I think for many of us, that's the key. And then, you know, in AA, Alcoholics Anonymous, sometimes to some extent, they talk about the need to hit bottom. And I they're different aspects of hitting bottom, but fundamentally, that's one way hitting bottom where, but there are other ways as well, without necessarily the huge catastrophe often involved in hitting bottom. Where you become truly convinced, you let in conviction, and you help yourself to believe the better way. That's, I think, the real key a lot, to believe it. And not just to believe, it but to saturate yourself in the benefits of the better away so that your monkey mind, as it were, is really motivated to lean into the better ways. And I think for a lot of people, you know, and yeah, it's like, are you really convinced? And can you help yourself develop to a deep conviction where you realize like once and for all, it's so much better for Madison. What a good person Madison is. She puts

up with all these people. She's like a new graphite rod in a nuclear reactor absorbing all those stray neutrons. Dealing with other people's chaos and all the rest of that. And what a good person Madison is. She doesn't need to go down that road anymore. That would be my suggestion, to challenge yourself to really, really believe what you know is true and to be kind to yourself about what's best for Madison. That's my two cents. What do you think?

Speaker 2 [00:27:36] I like it. I think the part that I don't do so often is the kindness toward the other people, which you're also saying would be the kindness towards me. Instead, it's a feeling of this is an emergency and I've got the hose in my hand and I keep spraying it. Yeah, and I'm hearing you because I have another chance to practice this tomorrow. Afternoon. I don't have to wait very long to see whether I'm going to jump on people or not.

Speaker 1 [00:28:10] That's right. And finishing on this, you know, as you're aware of, basically when there's one red light flashing on the inner dashboard, that's where attention goes. So you're getting, your attention is being hijacked and this is another piece of it. Again, you want to help yourself believe in the better road. Frankly, I'm gonna be really blunt. I know you as well, to someone who's very determined, self-determined, and hates being controlled by other people, right? You don't like being controlled. You don't like being a puppet. Madame Madison, when that reaction grabs you, it's controlling you. You're letting it control you. You're giving it power. When your attention collapses around the hose or the mess or the words they use, you are now a puppet. That kind of feisty moxie you have, which I share. Fuck that. Sorry, folks, I don't want to be controlled by that and to reframe it, you know, that reactivity, that little module in your brain, which is well-intended. That little module is controlling you. No more, you now, to take that stand. Report back next week. See you then. It's kind of a generosity to ourselves. It's a givingness to ourselves that we help ourselves walk the higher road, you know, to stabilize in those motivations. Great. What do you think about helping yourself to develop conviction? You know, in Buddhism there are these lists of strengths, like these five spiritual strengths. One of them is conviction. It's sometimes translated as faith, because of some of the connotations of faith, I kind of prefer conviction. But it also means confidence. That you know, like Madison's example, that if you just chill, and you let the reactivity of other people swirl on pals, and you say, stably present, and your own noble intentions, your own good intentions, your wholesome intentions, things will work out for the best. Best-odd strategy. That's confidence. So, another thing here. In our politics today, and not just politics, but doing what we can to make a better world, it's so easy. I have friends who, when I'm with them... They have a really hard time not helplessly complaining about the state of the world and kind of doom's growing. They're really caught by that. That's where their attention is going. So that pony wants that kind of corn. Okay, what are the results?

[00:31:18] So much about the Buddhist teachings about result, about everything is really about cause and effect. You know, intention. End result, you know, action result. And so when we engage that action of being caught up in our fury or helpless anger, them, past, you now, the 90 seconds or nine seconds that it might be worth really. Once we get past that, we can then turn back to our true intent, which is to send a little money to some judicial election somewhere in a state, to support an organization maybe like the Global Compassion Coalition, which is trying to really, really get at the deep causes the crises that we're involved with today. Maybe it's to just know how you're gonna vote and that's all you can do and you move on to what's for dinner. That's a beneficial horse that you can ride. And I find it's really helpful often to just kind of clarify, okay, what's my beneficial intent here? Uncle Bob is wanting me to convince me about, I don't know what. So, but I don't want to involve myself in that argument. I have good intent. I don't, you know, one of my ponies wants to fight with Bob, but that's not a pony I want to ride today. Right? So

identifying your own intent. Really central in Buddhism, you know, in the Eightfold Path, wise intent is one of the Eightfold Factors, right, or wise intention. And it's interesting that two of the three have to do with mainly interpersonal relationships, you know, the intention of non-harming and the intention of ill will, which could be extended to our relationship with ourselves.

[00:33:11] The other one, the third, is the intention to be not stuck to. Or driven around, avoiding pain or approaching pleasure. Relatively free in relationship to sensual desire and sensual pleasure. So the releasing of ill will, the releasing the intent to harm, there are ponies within us that are cruel, callous and malicious. Okay, they have good intent way down deep, but we don't need to ride them. Great, Anne asked us a question. When we're triggered, how can we know if it's a trauma response when we react, or is it rooted in the reality of the other person's behavior? Great question. One is, over time, you start to recognize the turbocharging from previous experiences. You feel it in your body, you feel the amplification. Second, your mind can probably observe, especially in retrospect, if their reaction was out of proportion, really, to what actually happened. Think about out of proportion, sometimes it helps. How would someone not named you, who's a reasonable wise person, view what happened there? Would they think that your reaction was out of proportion to what the other person did? You know, that wise hypothetical or actual friend or teacher ally might say to you, no, they really they really did a bad thing there. You know, right on. So to me, those are some of the ways to help ourselves. And I appreciate what you said there, Leslie, about that.

[00:34:55] So Linda asked a question. This goes also to another question, comment that came earlier about dealing with narcissistic people, self-centered. Or people who are using you as a means to their ends. They just want to rile you up or they just want to spew and perform with a captive audience. Not good. So how do we get past the nine seconds when we're being spewed at or caught up in their complaint? I think lately a fair amount about these this line from a poem by Miller Williams. You may know it. The line is essentially we do not know what secret wars are going on down there where the spirit meets the bone. Where the spirit meets the bone. And I try to... Just sort of, I don't want to be... Mistreated I don't want to be threatened. You know, I'm very alert to actual threat People can get weird But on the other hand if this is a person who? It's just really rattled and fired up and they've got their agenda You know I I let it go for a little bit, you know, i have certain privileges and through advantage That position me to be relatively able to do that. I'm male. I am tall Vigorous, I'm healthy, I have a PhD. I recognize that everybody has those, that A, disability, to stay in place.

[00:36:30] That said, however you can, for me it's helpful, and also internally, maybe there's a little mantra, I'm not implicated, I am not implicated, not my problem, not my monkey, not my zoo, not job, et cetera. That can be really helpful for people too. And then at a certain point you just go, I got it, I got it. What would you like me to do about this or what would make this right? Or I what I don't quite follow the purpose here. Is your purpose just to kind of release and have me you know receive it somehow. I can't do anything about what you're complaining about. Maybe you should talk to the person who can. Find a place, try to keep the snark out, because that would be inflammatory. You know, maintain your dignity. Maybe physically take a step back. Maybe start looking away. Maybe look at your watch, you know. Turn your body to the side. Just, you don't have to take it on board. It's not yours. I really want to pound the point with Madison and everybody. Help yourself to believe. What you know is true, and including the feeling of the knowing of what's in your true best interest, which includes compassion and kindness toward other people while setting appropriate boundaries and asserting yourself as

needed, resting in that. And in all that, it's really interesting. Feel, if you can, my suggestion to you, the goodness of your generosity. You know, you have good intent. You're here to help, you're here to build up, not tear down, you are here to construct, not destruct. You're here to learn. You're investing your Wednesday evenings in this process. You know, appreciate yourself as the Buddha put it. This will be my closing offering. Find gladness in your goodness.