

11_5_25 Talk*

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Speaker 1 [00:00:00] First, I'd like to say a word about that meditation. I got a little surprised in it myself in a good way in that it started becoming increasingly what's called a concentration practice. Those of you who have some background in concentration practices and different traditions. In Buddhism, they're sometimes called shamatha practices or samadhi practices in which we become increasingly absorbed. In something, perhaps the sensations of breathing around the upper lip, or in this case the state of being that is peacefully open and present. And then as we become increasingly absorbed, it can get a little different in terms of what it's, you know, ordinary states of consciousness. You start opening into things that are not so ordinary, including potentially a growing what's called unification of consciousness or singleness of mind in which everything's sort of comes together. And some of you may have experienced that. I was definitely kind of increasingly drawn into that. And as that happens, sometimes there can be quite strong feelings of happiness or even a kind of arising blissfulness even.

[00:01:26] These are known states and they're factors of deepening concentration. And, as you deepen in concentration, they have a purifying these experiences have a purifying effect that are known in contemplative traditions. And they develop, they deepen and strengthen a sense of conviction of, oh, this is available. Oh, that's what they were talking about. Oh, this the real deal. Oh, there can be a growing sense of identification. I was suggesting that. It's one thing to look at openness and peacefulness as sort of an experience over there. It's another thing to switch it or flip it in which peacefulness, openness, presence is here and you're looking out from it or there is a looking out for it here.

[00:02:29] So anyway, I invite you into this journey and I wanted to call out some of these steps along the way. Peacefulness, openness is a beautiful blend and way of being and related to that practices of concentrating and deepening into these ways of being are really good. They're, you know, my first 20 years at least on the meditative journey was couch potato meditation, which my mind was bouncing all over the place. And finally, a teacher, Christina Feldman, bless her, I asked the people. Me included in a small group. What about concentration practices? We're like, would? Concentration practices are important in general and definitely important for anyone who's interested in contemplative practice. And we got to have some sense of that here.

[00:03:21] So I'd like to enter into a topic that I find really interesting. And it basically has to do with the wise combination of responsibility and forgiveness. So I want to tell a little story here. So just the other morning, as I was waking up, I began musing about a memory I have from a time when I was maybe nine years old. I was very young going through school and was not very athletic because my dad, nor my mom, would play ball with me. My dad, my mom probably added gender socialization, although she was pretty good at fencing. I'll give her that, actually. And my dad grew up on a ranch, he was kind of a cowboy, and he knew about that stuff, but he didn't throw a ball at me. So anyway, there I am, nine years old, maybe fifth grade, sixth grade, and some boys are playing softball. And I kind of wander toward them and stand out on the edges. And the background for me was that I felt very lonely as a kid and ignored and on the sidelines and small. And I both wanted to be with the cool kids, and I was mad at them because I felt they didn't include me. They didn't want me. OK, you might be familiar with that experience with a group. You want to be included, but you also have a certain contempt for them, maybe. What to do? Well,

there I was standing. And somebody hit a fly ball. Yeah, the ball's coming right toward me. People started yelling, Hanson, catch it, catch. And I was like, the ball's coming toward me. And basically two things were true for me is the ball was coming toward. I was kind of scared of it because it was a ball and I didn't have a glove and what do I do? And I mad, I was mad at those other kids. You know, I'm like, heck with you all. And so it comes, comes, comes and I let it fall at my feet. Oh, Hanson, what? You know, like. Five boys were yelling at me, and I just kind of looked at them turned and walked away. So right there. At a certain level, I made a choice.

[00:05:46] We were talking earlier about, while depression itself is not a choice, how we relate to it and what we do about it has a fair amount of volitional freedom in there. Now I was nine years old, and still, you may look back in your own childhood, your own teen years and younger years, and recognize that you made choices, even as a little kid. You don't have moral culpability in the way an adult does for those choices, but yet still, you had agency. I had agency there. You had some choices and you're in some sense responsible for those choice. So how do we come to grips as adults now with our own responsibility as a kid? And I'm not trying to overstate it. We're not responsible for what people do to us. We're now responsible for the abuse we suffered. We're NOT. And amidst the complicated unfolding of a life, it can be really quite liberating to acknowledge our own choices, in some cases, along the way. As long as we understand that really carefully. We're not... Blaming the victim, we're not assuming more responsibility than any kid can rightfully assume. I'm just saying to me, there's a certain truth-telling. Like when you know that at certain points you made a decision.

[00:07:25] Now, there were so many factors behind making that decision, so many influences. Sometimes you would just get swept along. We're not really making a choice about anything. As a nine-year-old or a 19-year old even, or certainly not a nine month old. But one of the very deep findings in developmental psychology is recognizing the ways that children, including very young children, are active agents in what they are constructing in their understanding of the world. And even further on, there's a lot of understanding in developmental psychology of key moments when children make the choice of no. They turn their head away. They don't want the food. No, they shake their head. They're balky. These are volitional acts in some ways. And I'm just inviting you into kind of ownership of one part of a messy whole, of our own developmental evolution as beings. Two truths side by side being pushed around by events and forces, our own temperament, and also amidst all that, at least here and there, some of the time. Making our own choice like I did and it's really interesting in clinical psychology this is a very tricky topic because for some people can lead into shame for related to taking too much responsibility and I'm not saying that at all I'm really inviting you to look back at yourself as a 13 year old or a 16 year old, a 19 year old. Even a six-year-old. To what extent were you an agent, a volitional chooser of certain things?

[00:09:33] The choices you made about what you were interested in or what you chose to not invest yourself in, the choices you make to turn towards certain people or to turn away from them, choices to be kind? Really stood up for a kid who was very stigmatized in sixth grade. I was the only kid who went to his birthday party and all that. I made a choice to do that. I wanted to do it. You know, I also made a choose with a friend when I was roughhousing with him to kind of get him in a headlock and just kind of keep him there because there was sort of a weird gratification and having that kind of power, at least for that little bit. And that changed our friendship ever after. I'm just kind of naming some possibilities here. So here we have some recognition of our own responsibility for certain things. And then we kind of move that into adulthood. We have our responsibility for

certain choices and acts and, you know, commission and omission, doing and not doing in our life.

[00:10:45] And here we are today. Many of us, me included, are carrying a lot of baggage. A lot of luggage related to our life history and choices we've made. Baggage of guilt, remorse, shame, regret. It's a kind of a mess, right? And it burdens us. And so I want to explore with you tonight some themes of forgiveness. And even absolution, kind of a traditional word, absolution. I wanna draw on first some very practical psychological steps you can take toward forgiving yourself. And I've seen them work. They're not original to me. I've pulled them together, sure, but try them.

[00:11:42] So you might think of something that you're still carrying around. You feel bad about, it weighs on you. And by the way, the work of self-forgiveness sometimes takes multiple laps around the forgiveness track. Getting deeper and deeper increasingly as you go, that could well be true. So I want to name certain key steps.

[00:12:05] The first step is to take responsibility for your part and let go of responsibility for what was not your part. That involves a truth-telling. You may conclude when you do this that you have no responsibility whatsoever. And right there is a liberation. What I'm aware of is I don't have responsibility, going back to my little story, of being a skinny kid with glasses. I don't have responsibility for being skipped in a grade, which I enjoyed mainly. I don't have responsibility for nobody ever teaching me how to catch a fly ball. I don't have responsibility for my slightly anxious temperament that didn't want to get bonked in the face. You know, I am not sure how much responsibility I had for my kind of anger at those other kids. But I do have responsibility, I think, for making that little choice right there to not try to catch the darn ball. And instead, I'm going to, you know, as a nine-year-old version of screw you all. Heck with you all and just let it fall to my feet. You know, I own that one. I don't care how many therapists might tell me, oh, Rick, you were just a nine-year-old boy, blah, blah. For me, it's honest and noble to name. Yeah, yeah, in that half a second, maybe closer to one and a half seconds, it took to make a choice. The volitional executive process in me made that choice. So that's part of responsibility. Okay, so number one. A fearless and searching inventory, as they say in AA, about what is your responsibility and what is not. And you know, you're not responsible for the ways that that slammed your nervous system. As the years go by and you start having options that are real, I had the option to try to catch that ball or not. If there's no option, you don't have any responsibility. If you have no power, there's not responsibility.

[00:14:24] On the other hand, as we live onward from the trauma, we do have some options, to the extent we do. In other words, we do the power in some ways in how we work with that trauma. Okay, number one. Tell the truth and take responsibility of what's yours, and let go of what is not. Easier said than done, that's number one.

[00:14:48] Number two, let yourself feel appropriate remorse, or guilt, or shame, or regret for what is your responsibility. And by the way, we can regret things that are not our responsibility. Have remorse or guilt or shame for what is our responsibility. So feel it and it may take many months to fully cycle it took me Probably a couple years actually to cycle through a Lot of remorse about something in my life. You got to feel it. You gotta feel it to release it That's the nature of that I'm naming a process here that you can do. You have responsibility for what you do with what I'm saying here. So feel the remorse, you feel it.

[00:15:39] Third, repair and make amends as best you can. I cannot, you know, make amends to the boys, I don't know, who lost the baseball game because I refused to try to

catch the ball. I chose not to catch, even try to the ball, I can't change that, you know, a little bit. I can make amends to that little boy inside me that I've been kind of critical of and mad at for how he just did not even try to catch the ball. Sometimes we cannot make amends to those we have wronged. They're no longer in our life for various reasons. We don't have that ability, but sometimes we can make amends. And minimally, we can the amends of repairing the past by through our commitments for the future. I live my life now in which I'm gonna try to catch the ball. You know, unless it's really dangerous. But I'm going to try to the ball and I know that. And that helps me feel repaired at some level inside about those qualities in me to some extent a kind of maybe weakness, to some extent a kind grudge. You can make amends and make repairs today. So that's the third category, including with people that you've wronged. To make amends, make repairs as best you can. Sometimes it involves naming it to others if you can't name it to the person themselves.

[00:17:13] Okay, four. Open up to the big picture. You've made amends, you've felt the remorse, you've sorted things out. Open to the bigger picture. The causes upstream, the 10,000 causes upstream of what you did, all the various factors. And as you open out, including with insight, into, in effect, the kind of cloud-like, empty nature of all that happened there, it starts to get a lot lighter. I know a lot of people are deeply burdened by remorse and self-hatred, self-loathing, just feeling. Like a bad person, feeling broken, feeling bad and damaged. And there's something extremely freeing in what I'm naming here about, like I'm saying, seeing the big picture that can be a real release for you here. So we have finding, you know, telling the truth and identifying what you're responsible for and what you are not. Feel appropriate remorse. Make repairs and amends as best you can.

[00:18:26] See the bigger picture, and then four, either ask for forgiveness from others, and also forgive yourself. There's an active movement here, in which we reach out to others as appropriate, and we also say to ourself, If you can, I forgive you. I forgive. So people are asking me about the bigger picture. What I mean is like, sometimes it helps to be quite specific to go, okay, in my little story, we have gender. Whoa, athleticism, boys, me feeling unmanly, me feeling less than the bigger boys. I was small because I was a year and a half younger than most people on average. I also had a very late birthday. So. You know, that's in the picture. My dad, you know, his own role in his background, his father never played ball with them. They were trying to survive on a ranch in North Dakota during the Great Depression when the cattle were dying and nobody was buying them, whatever the moral implications of, you now, cattle racing and meat production and eating are, okay? Bigger picture, that what I mean, you start naming it. You start naming the ways that it was all happening really fast. I was kind of probably spaced out and thinking about some science fiction novel I was reading. When suddenly, crack, a ball's coming toward me. Kids are yelling, catch it, catch, you know, da da da. You know, you just sort of identify the different forces, the different factors. Reflecting now, I think, wow, they called me Hanson, my last name. I didn't like that. And that kind of fed into an underlying experience I had from very early childhood of not really being seen for who I really was. So that whatever caring came toward me was for somebody else that I wasn't. All in the mix. You tell the story, you name it. That lightens things up. And then you move toward a very deliberate movement. That's a choice to release. To release being hard on yourself. And it's a release you've earned by everything I've named so far. Taking responsibility, you know, feeling the remorse, making amends. It's a released you've earned. You know, maybe every time you think about it, you'll wince and go, yeah, I screwed that up. I dropped that ball, literally. I didn't be the kind of person I wanna be. But you're not dwelling there. You're

not dwellin' in anger at yourself. There's a release, there's a forgiveness for yourself. And there can be absolution. That's a really interesting word.

[00:21:18] One part of it, I think of as solution. Absolution and the kind of solvent that dissolves our anger in ourselves, Absolution dissolves the clouds or coverings over our deep true nature. You just feel it. It's like a. Absolution. You're giving yourself absolution, you can give others absolution and then an aspect of absolution is in the first part of the world, the absolute. Because as you have through meditation and teachings and other means, as you have a kind of a growing sense of, as the Buddha taught, an unconditional, unchanging, timeless, neither arising nor passing away. Underlying ground of all. Some people call that the absolute. As you start accessing and feeling more and more rooted in and with access into that timeless vastness, stillness. That kind of, it's a generative stillness in which all things arise and pass away. As you get more and more in touch with that, you realize that in that, all the froth on the surface. It doesn't touch the absolute ground of who you are.

[00:22:51] So in that sense too, absolution can rest you in the absolute. I really, really, really invite you into this territory. I think there's, as a therapist and a person, I can say there's so much burden, needless burden, carrying so many loads. And as a part of this, you can make a deliberate choice to turn a corner. You know, over on this street, you're ruminating about, you're dwelling in, or you're trying to avoid remembering, or you are engaging psychological defenses about feeling those things. You know you're on this Street. And so I've named so far the work you can choose to do on this St. Of being burdened by your history and your own responsibility, even as a child, for things you chose to do, or not to, even as young child. Having worked through this street. Street of Guilty Burdens. How do we call that? Guilty Burdens Boulevard. You still work it through, but even after you've worked it through sometimes, you're still stuck in that street. And it takes a deliberate choice to turn a corner. Not to suppress or resist that, but to turn the corner away from guilty burdens boulevard and walk down a different street and put more and more distance between you and that intersection. So you feel increasingly freed and lighter, less burdened by all that. And then how do you live from there? How do you live going forward in ways that do not accumulate going forward a kind of toxic grit, you know, of regrets and remorse?

[00:24:41] So Lin Feffer, what if the person you want forgiveness from doesn't want to give it and they are estranged? That's very common. The other person doesn't want to forgive you. They don't want let it go. And they want you to, they want to keep punishing you. By the way, that's something for us to think about ourselves, because everything I've talked about relates to our attitude about others who have wronged us and helping ourselves come to a place where we look over there and go, I will always think that what you did was wrong and I just don't wanna be carrying it around myself any longer. I'm making a choice to turn a corner here. Bless you, bye-bye. I'm turning a corner here. So, now what do we do with people that we'd love their absolution from? We'd love the forgiveness and they won't give it. Well, they're not gonna give it and we can keep trying to get it and they're gonna give. It's like trying to blood from the proverbial stone, not gonna happen. So what do you do about it? At least you can forgive yourself. And sometimes, if it works for you, You could even imagine. Make it up in your mind. You could even imagine them forgiving you. Or you could imagine almost like a really wise part of them underneath their personality. Find a hard time believing that it would ever forgive you, their personality, but under their personality, their innermost being, the depth of wisdom and the spark of light inside them, you could imagine that forgiving you. That can be really powerful and you can gradually let that into yourself.

[00:26:33] Linda asks, how do we know when we are not whitewashing, finding reasons and justifications versus owning responsibility? Great question. That's why I think that fearless searching inventory of really telling the truth about what happened, your part, and also how big a deal or small a deal it really was. And just double check that you've really looked at it, then I think Linda, it can really help to apply the good friend test. In other words, if you had a friend or even just simply an acquaintance you feel neutrally about, and they had done everything you've done, would you consider that they had taken appropriate responsibility for their part of the matter? If not, well, that probably means you need to do more. But on the other hand, if you would look at them and go, well, they really went through it all. They really looked hard at their part. They really acknowledged what they did that was a moral fault, not merely unskillful. Hugely important. They really look at the part that was a moral fall, distinct from simple unskillfulness. I lacked the skillfulness. To catch that ball. But I do think I let myself down. I don't mind letting those other boys down. They weren't very nice to me anyway. I let my self down. I didn't stand up for myself. I didn't go for it, you know? And I feel, ugh. But I handle that by, you know, generally not letting myself down anymore. And you can do the same. Right, so I would say that. So I wanna draw on some beautiful wisdom from the Buddha about how to live in a way in which you can keep your head high.

[00:28:28] The first of them being one of my absolute favorite quotations from the suttas of early Buddhism. Train yourself in good that lasts and brings happiness. Cultivate generosity, a life of peace, and a mind of boundless love. Think of those as specific instructions, like a coach. Train yourself in doing good that lasts, that lasts. That's durable and lasts and brings happiness. Train yourself and doing good inside your own mind, as well as out in the world. Doing good that last, including in the efforts and choices you make inside your mind and out in world, that lasts and bring happiness. And then, specifically, cultivate generosity. So, in a mind, you know, a life of peace and a mind of love.

[00:29:30] So again, I'll respond to what came in the chat, here from Jeanette. Dear Rick, how can I let go of the regret and frustration I feel towards myself when my past choices are now causing so much financial stress on my present? I feel great regret and shame for the profession I chose for many years and not taking into account the low pay. A single woman in my 50s now, I am trying to change careers. It's tough. I mean, I haven't lived your life, but I mean I do get the feeling of, as the Buddha put it, we all inherit the results of our deliberate choices. We inherit the results. We also inherit results that we have no responsibility for. Things that happen to us, bad luck, things like that. All right, we're living with it today, and I think there's a key difference between grief and shame. Huge difference. Yes, there could be a place for feeling sad. Darn, I really wish I had acted differently back then.

[00:30:38] On the other hand, if you really take into account the complexity of options available 30 years ago, when you were 20 years old, right? 30 years is 1995. A woman. Maybe in America. Limited options still, social factors, making choices, maybe to choose careers of service or creativity that are relatively low paid for various reasons. You know, that person you were then didn't know what you know now. You know you can see the bigger forces, the bigger factors, so they can lead you to a kind of sadness or grief about the results. But do you have to carry guilt around about it? And so then maybe you look hard like I have in my little boy, that's a very small example. You're getting at something hugely bigger, hugely bigger Jeanette, absolutely. But use this five step process I named to work your way through the remorse and the guilt, ways you let yourself down and come to healthy. Yuck, oh well, got to deal with it now. What a drag, oh, well, here I go. And then

turn that corner. And every day, obviously, do the best you can with the choices that you have and the options you do have, which, you know, are not always a pretty picture at age 50, but here you are. How can you act today and the next day? How can make the efforts today and tomorrow that lets you go to bed feeling like you put in a good day's work for yourself? That's all you can do.

[00:32:34] I want to put another quotation in here from Miller Williams, father of Lucinda Williams. Great singer. Have compassion for everyone you meet. I want to slow down here. Can you have, think about yourself. Have compassion for everyone you meet, even if they don't want it. What seems conceit, bad manners or cynicism, is always a sign of things no ears have heard, no eyes have seen. You do not know what wars are going on down there where the spirit meets the bone. Reflect on yourself. Can you have compassion for yourself? Even if you don't want it. As you were having all the life you've had up to the present moment, including when you were nine years old, like me back then, what wars were going on down there, including unconscious wars, that you're not responsible for. You're only responsible for what you do with what's in the field of consciousness, where you have, If there, you have some power. In the unconscious, you don't have power. In the moment that it's unconscious. What wars were going down, down there in you? Where your own spirit was meeting the bone. Can you be kind to yourself about that?

[00:34:05] This is a fairly well-known quotation from Teddy Roosevelt. It's highly gendered. I think he gave it at a speech maybe in 1890 or 1905, but it's really a good one. And basically it says, to hack with them, do the best you can every day. And that's how to judge yourself. Not by the results, but by the efforts you make. In a way, what we're exploring here, maybe as we kind of finish up, is... Two truths, side by side. How can we lay down in authentic ways the burdens we've been carrying from our past? While at the same time living each day in ways that do not add to a burdensome past. Both hands. And in this is so centrally a quality of being determined on your own behalf. Determined on your behalf to help yourself release authentically and wisely and honestly what is burdening you, you're for yourself. And also you're bringing will to your day. Deliberateness. The Buddha definitely was not messing around in his advice to us. You can bring a deliberateness to your day in how you live. And I think I may have a final quotation that is basically advice to myself, perhaps to other people, and I'm still trying to keep it, but it is an aspiration. I have this quotation on the wall of my office. Which is a photograph, or it's next to a photograph of a Zen monk with a shaved head and a big black robe looking out into a very peaceful, snow-covered Zen temple garden, and with a little kid sitting right next to the monk, sitting there also in a robe looking out. And I just, wow, it's great. So again, can we live happily in the present amidst the busyness? And can we find it in our quiet? At least for a minute a day, that is not so busy. So that increasingly we're rested in what is not busy. And has a lot of busyness is, you know, roiling the waters 10 feet up. That's our opportunity.