

## 12\_3\_25 Talk\*

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**Rick Hanson:** [00:00:00] So I'd like to say a bit about that meditation and then speak to two questions that have come to me privately and then move into what I hope to explore with you tonight or or today, depending on where you are. First, about the meditation. It's okay sometimes to do meditations that are a stretch. And I recall being in a small group of people with Yvonne Rand, a very realized Zen teacher who had founded, I believe, Goat in the Road Meditation Center in Northern California. In any case, I was in this gathering with her, and she used the phrase, train the mind, with reference to meditation and Buddhist practice in general. And I was very startled by that. Train the mind. Wow. And it really opened my eyes to a lot of what we're doing. We are training the mind. And some of that training is a matter of uncovering beautiful, wonderful, true nature that's there already. Even that is a training, though. We're training the mind. So it's okay to kind of take on your mind.

[00:01:07] And then obviously we have to be careful about pitfalls of overtraining, kind of like physical training. You can go too far, you can hurt yourself, or you can make turn it into kind of a chore, really a drag. No, the right approach to training the mind to use a Zen saying again, another Zen saying is that we should be with our mind like the skillful rider of a horse. With reins that are neither too loose nor too tight. In early Buddhism, there's a metaphor of a musical instrument.

[00:01:37] Someone asked the Buddha, how should we train our mind? And he said, Well, much like with a musical instrument, you don't want the strings to be too tight, nor do you want them to be too slack. Or as Joseph Goldstein said once in a retreat I was in, we should be relaxed in our training, but not casual. And I want to call out the two-step movement, or really three steps, that were inherent in that meditation because that's a really fundamental aspect, these three steps in training your mind to become happier and more resilient, more loving, more capable, more ambitious, more motivated, and also less unhappy, less worried, less contracted, less irritable, less addicted, and so on.

[00:02:28] So the first is to recognize something that's true and which is useful. So recognizing the fact of the ways in which the physical world in general and nature in particular are supporting you. You recognize the fact of it. Okay, that starts conceptually. You see it, you know it. It yeah, it's true, actually. Hold your breath for a little while. You know, oh, I'm supported by the air I'm breathing, the oxygen in it. Oh, go for a while without drinking any water. Oh, wow, I'm supported. You recognize the fact. Then in the second step, and you can apply this to anything, including recognizing your own good qualities, recognizing your own rights in relationships and the okayness of saying what you need in certain settings. Whatever it might be, you recognize it.

[00:03:30] Second step, you help the recognizing, the knowing to become a feeling. An experienced, embodied, emotionally rich, very often enjoyable state of being. You help the knowing become a feeling of a state of being. That's the second, that's the second step. Now, to do that, sometimes it's quite challenging, especially if you were like me growing up, really in my head, numb from the neck down. Well, over time, tuning into body sensations will increase your ability to help knowing become feeling. Starting to give words to someone what you're trying to feel can help, especially if it's hard for you to find words. Sometimes imagery can help, like a sense of your body, just living in this beautiful, nurturing net of, you know. Physical reality and nature supporting you, you know, you can

fall back into it, it will hold you, you're being cradled, whatever. You're helping the knowing become a feeling. That's the second step.

[00:04:38] And then in the third step, which we did in the meditation, and again you can apply in many other areas, you're helping the feeling to become increasingly established in you as a way of being, not just a passing experience, a passing state, but a neurologically embedded trait over time. So that more and more your default in the present is to feel supported by many, many, many, many things. And that is an extremely useful trait to cultivate in the present. It's very helpful in as a factor of resilience. It's very helpful to be aware of what is supporting you even as you deal with those people who are not supporting you, acknowledging whatever's true about that, we're going to be more effective in dealing with what is not supportive if we can move into that from a kind of a secure base of where we are actually being supported in the present with a feeling of that. So you see the three steps recognizing the good news of something, the fact of it, helping the knowing become a feeling and then helping the feeling become a way of being. Three steps. And you can follow that map in all kinds of applications as you train your mind, which means training your brain.

[00:06:08] Okay. Now, two questions came in, I think of general interest. The first of these is can PTSD from childhood, even after therapy, lead to insecure attachment issues in relationships, even 50 years after childhood? If so, what can make a difference? This gets at a very broad and important question of how much can we heal? Or what does it mean to heal? I, on the one hand, never want to bet against the human heart. There are so many examples, anecdotally in your own life and in the research literature, of people who had terrible, terrible, terrible, terrible childhoods, or terrible things, pardon me, happened to them in adulthood, and they were able to make enormous repairs inside their own minds and in their relationships and live well and continue to grow and develop and even awaken. Many examples of that on the one hand.

[00:07:18] On the other hand, I think it's also true that certain events injure us. And we carry those injuries with us. It's a little bit like if you were someone who skied a lot, and I didn't, but if you did, maybe you you know, catch an edge, black guy, you skid into a tree, you smash your knee. Bummer. Well, then you go through a bunch of rehab, you repair your knee, maybe you have some surgery, or you know, you do rehab as well. And then when you ski, you need to wear a brace still, because there was an injury with lingering effects, and you avoid big bumpy moguls. In much the same way, in adulthood, I think we can do a lot of repair in our childhood. It can still help to wear a brace, like bring a friend with you to a family gathering, or you know, have some beads and keep working your mala, you know, while you're sitting across the table from Uncle Bob rattling on about some stump, something or other. You know, you're supporting yourself. It's okay to bring psychological braces and scaffolding, including the support of others. Whatever, you know, have a crystal in your pocket. For a long time, I would carry a stone in my pocket that reminded me of some really good things I wanted to stay in touch with. And if things got weird, I would slip my hand into my pocket and hold my stone. Great.

[00:08:49] And there's certain situations where you think to yourself, nah. I really don't need to challenge myself with that anymore, because that's just always going to be a little hard for me. I just don't care enough to, you know, put myself in those situations. So, oh yeah, okay. I know I'm not living as fully as infinitely I could. That's all right. You know, if life gives me, you know, 5,000 good experiences, gosh, you know, I'm gonna rule out five of them. That still needs 4,995. So I think that's a lot of the truth in this life. And so, and one of the ways that that manifests is, yeah, people can still have vulnerabilities in

relationships based on deeply embedded learning in childhood with a brain that's designed to be a sh to be particularly shaped by negative experiences, especially in childhood, especially in involving other people. And if you caught the trifecta of crud there, it's normal to still be affected by it.

[00:09:56] So maybe in your relationships today, you still have a vulnerability around just needing reassurance. Maybe there's some residues of anxious, insecure attachment with a kind of clinging need for reassurance and kind of a sensitivity to any perceived slights or or you know, distancing on the part of your attachment figures and a c you know and an anger about that, an intense reactivity. You know, you just know that, okay, you're kind of a little vulnerable for that. So you want to be especially careful if that stuff starts to arise, so then you can still find your way to the other side of it and rest in a deeper and increasingly stable sense of security in that relationship. Or maybe you are like I was as a kid, avoidantly attached, you know, with maneuvers around distancing, so that you might observe in intimate relationships or high-stakes relationships, a tendency to kind of dissociate or go away or tune out or you know, get get away. And again, that tendency may arise, but then you can practice with it, and you know, over time it may not be so intense.

[00:11:12] Or, you know, it may keep coming up, drag, and you practice with it yet again. In a life that on the whole, though, has certainly been improved by your own inner practices. To me, this is realistic. And underneath it all, this is where Buddha Dharma is really powerful and useful. What's the container for the remaining residues of a painful childhood? Those residues may be imperfectible. Maybe there will be some ineradicable. You cannot eradicate them. Residues from your childhood. I still have some, and I've been at it more than most people for fifty years, easily, pushing fifty-five at this point. And they're still residues. Okay. What's the nature of those residues? In what are those residues occurring? This is radically the case for everything. The nature of all residues is they are made of parts that are connected and changing, thus empty of binding solidity, and empty of independent existence and inappropriate to identify with, because they are cloudy and fleeting and dynamic and changing. Wow.

[00:12:46] Even if those residues are still there, they need not be so weighty. And also, what's the context of them? Minimally, those residues are occurring in, they're arising in a space of awareness, which is certainly undisturbed by them. It contains them, but awareness itself is not childhood residues. Awareness itself, just directly observe it. Is spacious, can hold anything, and is not damaged by what passes through it. You are that awareness in a very deep sense. And you can even extend the sense of the ground or the container in which painful childhood residues are occurring. It they're untroubled. They are not ever spoiled or poisoned or stained by those residues. They are undefeatable. They are unbreakable, invincible. And the innate goodness in you is invincible. It's unbreakable. It's indestructible. It's unconditional. It's independent of the crud that was heaped upon you when you were a vulnerable, innocent, undeserving kid. So the next question. Oh, here we go.

[00:14:38] Oh, another one came in. I'm going to do this kind of quickly. Do I have anything to say about ecstasy for trauma? I think they're referring to MDMA, the drug. I think ecstasy for trauma. Without being drugged. What's happening alongside the trauma? So I don't know much about it. It's hard to do research on this. I I certainly have done ecstasy quite a few times. I it's an amphetamine derivative. If you're vulnerable to speediness, as I know people who are, be really careful about that. I'm not saying yay or nay about illegal drugs, blah, blah. And you know, I got a lot of value from it, I would say. And I don't know

about its particular effects for trauma. So I think there's probably a lot of anecdotal information. I think, you know, the more powerful the tool, the more important it is to be careful with the tool and to find people who are very skillful with that kind of tool.

[00:15:40] And then I want one more question. Any words of wisdom for me or others in hospice and or facing imminent dying and death. I'm gonna do a whole talk on this because it's such a profound subject, and I'm gonna do, I'm sure more than one. As you know, in the story of the Buddha's own process, whether it's factually true or not, it makes for a good story. As a fairly young man, late 20s, he encountered what are referred to as the four heavenly messengers. He encountered purportedly from his life of great privilege in the situation in which he lived at that time, 2500 or so years ago, he encountered a corpse, a dead person, he encountered an old person, and he encountered an ill person, someone who is sick. So he encountered death, aging, and disease, while also forth encountering someone who is a very sincere and engaged spiritual practitioner, the four heavenly messengers. Three of the four of them deal with our frailty, the precarity of living, and the inevitability of being separated eventually, one way or another, in various ways and times, from all that we love. That's our reality. And Buddhism really puts that reality very squarely in front of us. What do we do about it?

[00:17:28] So I think what I'll do is rather than go into my head. And play, you know, the bullet points of a talk on death and dying. I'm going to speak more from my heart. Which will be good for me and maybe better for you. There have been several times, I've nearly died in several times in wilderness settings. And I've also had a couple of instances in which I was facing a potentially terminal illness and I didn't know what would happen. And spare you some of the details about this, but I'll just get to the essence. So for me, what was true was that as I was facing my own, you know, seemingly potentially quite likely death, it was like the surface of me was engaged with problem solving, sorting things out, what's the best medical treatment, how do I deal with my schedule? Who do I tell? How do we tell our kids? You know, problem solving. Underneath it, I was just like a scared little monkey who wanted to curl up in a corner and be hugged and cry. And that's a natural response. You know, the body doesn't want to go until it eventually sometimes does.

[00:18:47] The Buddha referred to the first darts of life, you know, the first arrows of inevitable, inescapable discomfort, physical and mental, mild to severe. And it's natural to simply be with those experiences and not deny them or lie about them. To not, as best we can then, to not add craving to them, because that's when suffering begins. The first arts of life are the dukkha that, along with impermanence and interdependence, is you know, an element of living. Now, alongside dukkha, the challenges that are in an element of living is also sukha, that which is sweet, such as you know, tuning into the goodness in your heart or the lovingness of others. Life is not only dukkha, impermanence and interdependence. There's more to it than that, certainly. That said, it's when we add craving in the second noble truth to the challenges of life, such as the experience in the body, of course, of mortality and imminent death. That's when we suffer. So be careful about not adding. So that would be a key word of wisdom. Watch what we add to things as they are, including our sadness, our sense of things undone. I'm not yet ready to leave the party. I've had you know 25,000 birthdays, maybe in whatever many years 25,000 days adds up to be. But I still want another one. Okay. But what do we add to it? Can we avoid adding craving to that? You know, clinging and pressure and intensity and taking things personally.

[00:20:34] And then underneath it all, that kind of was a third level of awareness of the ultimate underneath of all, and just like an identification with a deep peacefulness. And if you can find that sense of identification with that, your identity all along has been a local

manifestation of reality altogether, and and live in the knowing of that increasingly, then nothing really changes. You know, it is the ocean that is making the wave. And as a particular wave subsides, yeah, that wave is no longer here, and that's part of the truth. And meanwhile, the ocean continues. Yeah. There's another karma purportedly, you know, when there's a karma today, and but you know, potentially a rebirth of the previous one. In any case, that karma, the previous one was dying, and people were very sorrowful around him. And he looked at them and Said reassuringly on the eve of his own death, don't worry, nothing changes. Wow. So, you know, I would say as best we can, for myself at least, you know, those three levels. You know, make good plans to whatever extent you can. Be thoughtful, you know, live well and die well as best you can. Underneath it, oh goodness, make so much room for how your you know, a little scared monkey feels, and just the realness of it all, and try to minimize the craving and attachment and clinging and selfing and all the rest of that. Try to minimize that.

[00:22:31] And then if it arises, try to minimize what you add to that. Because as that craving arises, it can become, in a fact, another first art that you don't have to add reactions to or reactions to reactions to reactions. So that would be the second part. And then as best you can, see if you can find your way into gratitude for all the givingness that has lived your livingness for real. Which draws you into a very nurturing sense of being supported by all that is, which relates to our topic tonight. With if you can, an awareness of what the Buddha called the unconditioned, that which is timeless, deathless, neither arising nor passing away, as the ground in which conditioned big bang reality unfolds. And if you can be more and more aware of that aspect of reality, the combination of the absolute and the relative, the unconditioned and the conditioned, timelessness and time, and find your being in the intersection of those two ongoing aspects of reality, that's a really helpful, I believe, as we approach our own release and return back into the ground of all. Okay. Not in a great way in a Cloud of smoke, poof, but more to a topic here that I hope to get into in general.

[00:24:45] And I'm minded as well by this saying from Tibet, apparently, that if you take care of the minutes, the years will take care of themselves. And I think that's true as we approach the inevitable end of it all. You know, one of the best ways to prepare, because as long as you're living, you're still preparing and can prepare as you train your mind. You know, a beautiful way to prepare is to really take good care of your minutes. Each one is beautiful, it's a gift. The universe had to conspire to produce you 13.8 billion years after it bubbled into being. Wow. Think of the minutes of your life. What a gift. And to enjoy them and use them well, you know, and then know that you've used them well in the time there remains. I have regrets. I've made mistakes. I have remorse. Most people do, particularly if they really reflect, you know, on the less than perfect life they've lived and and and are responsible for some aspects of. And okay, so be it. Well, learn from those mistakes, regrets, and remorse, and you know, live in the next minute. Take care of the next minute in such a way that you feel good about it. Take care of this day in a way that you feel good about. And that's a beautiful way to live well until you're no longer here. I'm going to try to say some big things in a small amount of time. And I hope, and it will be good practice for me as I train my mind to be a better teacher.

[00:26:22] So there are two parts to what I want to name here. The first part is I invite you into reflecting on and noticing the difference between reality itself and our account of it. In other words, the difference between the land and the map, between the meal and the menu, between this and the sound of it from the words we apply, like glass and ting and knuckles and air and sound waves. There's a difference. They just can't do it. The injuries are too great when they finally show up in the ER. And I was asking my friend, who's a Zen

teacher, oh, what does Zen offer here? And he said, Oh, getting out of the story. Interesting. Getting out of the narrative. And that's a very fundamental, it's really emphasized in Zen, getting out of the narrative. My own opinion is that some people take it too far and throwing the baby out with the bathwater, the baby being all kinds of teachings in written form from early Buddhism that are full of value and what hello, our teacher taught. Like, why throw all of those out just because, yeah, don't get super caught up in the words. Fine. And yet the Buddha offered a lot of words that were very helpful to the people that he offered them to.

[00:28:26] So, in any case, it's very useful to reflect on what's actually happening in the present and our story about it. Because with our you know, complicated brains and their capacity to do mental time travel based a lot on midline cortex function that our nearest primate relatives do not have, and therefore they are both blessed and cursed by being trapped in the present. We have the benefit of being able to imagine different futures and make good plans. We have the benefit of being able to reflect on our past and learn from it while we have the curse, the burden of you know, worrying and obsessing and getting caught up in different versions of our future. And also regretting, remorse, and so forth about our past. So there's a lot of story involved in mental time travel that typically is saturated with the sense of self, which is an engine of craving that leads to suffering when it is applied to reality as it is, which includes both painful and pleasurable and neutral experiences. So the first invitation here is to recognize in your practice the difference between sensations of breathing as they are and the words we might apply to that. And to use meditative practice in one of its most useful ways to gradually disidentify from the story, the voice in the back of the head, or the multiple stories, the multiple narratives, the multiple voices in the back of your head. Big, big topic.

[00:30:11] This shows up around view. View is a narrative. Reality itself doesn't have a view. Rocks are just rocks. We add viewpoints to them, like nice rock, pretty rock, or ugly rock, or I could use this rock, you know, in some good way, like I don't know what, to build a wall to that shape that supports the house. That's all view. There's a place for right view, it's an element of the Eightfold Path, but our views, our beliefs, our perspectives, our paradigms, our frames, our narratives, their meanings that often in language that we add to things as they are. So tracking that difference, incredibly useful on the one hand.

[00:31:01] Now, on the other hand, I want to share with you a schemancy meta analysis. I don't know if you can see that in the camera. Because the background may be too light. Let's see if this works better. So I'm just going to show I don't know if you can see it. Well, anyway, the title of this meta analysis, which is to say it is a summary of 604 well-done research studies. And the title of the paper is How does perceived social support relate to human thriving? There's a key word here. Perceived. That's a view. That's a narrative. That's a belief about something added to what things actually are. Well, the researchers found. Not too surprising, but good to have common sense confirmed that the perception of social support by individuals increased individual physical health, mental health, educational functioning, occupational functioning, and decreased risk-taking behaviors in both global north and global south populations. Wow. Perceived social support is good. It's helpful. So what's the takeaway here?

[00:32:44] First, it's important to increase actual social support, often in very simple forms of, you know, earlier today I got a coffee at a nice Starbucks. I confess I went to a Starbucks, I was on the road, I had no choice. Anyway, I'm fine. Anyway, my point being the people there were they were nice behind the counter. You know, they took my order, they were friendly, they weren't robotic. They got my food, my coffee, it was all good.

That's a form of social support. There are other forms of actual social support that we can increase in our life. Many of them are not traumatic. Just because we don't have not yet found the love of our life does not mean. That the people on either side of our apartment are not, you know, casually and informally supportive. So we want to increase actual social support. And that's certainly true all the way up at national policy. Additionally, here is where it's very helpful to increase your perception of social support, your narrative about social support. And you might ask yourself how foregrounded in your day-to-day experiencing is the recognition of social support in your life. I want to name five forms of social support, being included, including in systems that deliver care. I have the privilege and good fortune of having decent health insurance and access to health systems. I'm included in systems of care, in which recently I had an ultrasound that reassured me that my carotid arteries are still rocking.

[00:34:43] Second form of social support, being seen. You're not just included, you're recognized as a person in your own right, and people are interested in you. They want to know what's going on, even if you know they're not perfect about it. Third, there's warmth coming towards you. There's benevolence, compassion, kindness. Fri friendliness. It's not just neutral, emotionally neutral social support. You know, it's friendly. Oh, sorry.

[00:35:11] Third, you're respected, you're appreciated. People are grateful to you. You know, they value you, they seek you out, they want you. That's the third form of social support I want to name here. Fourth form, friendliness, kindness, warmth coming to you. And then, of course, fifth, love. Any one of those is a form of social support. Including quite broadly the first one, which is systems of care and support that you're part of. Where I live, the garbage trucks and the recycling trucks will be arriving tomorrow. That's a form of social support. Thank you. You know, and there are many other forms as well. The kids in my county get educated by school teachers and you know, educational staff. Thank you. The people who run their brooms down the sidewalks or down the hallways, including early in the morning. That's a form of social support.

[00:36:03] So think about the practice of recognizing actual social support for you and then helping yourself feel it. Because science knows that this is good for you. I want to name two particular examples of this. My mother is no longer alive and was a very large hearted person who expressed that love often in ways that were a little difficult sometimes for people around her. She had a big personality. She was grew up in the depression. She wanted to make sure that nothing bad happened. And you know, she wanted to help you be better, to improve. That landed often as criticism or control or both, which I didn't care for. And then I finally, in my twenties, started to realize that it wasn't good for me to keep resisting my mother's personality and the form of the expression of her love. So I started ignoring her personality. I started ignoring her narrative about how I could improve myself in various ways. And I looked past the narrative to the thing itself, to the suchness of the true love she had for me. And it metaphorically in my mind, I'm quite visual. It was as if I was looking through a lattice work of vines and thorns and twigs and leaves to a warm fire, campfire 20 feet away, through the lattice work, the campfire of her lovingness for me, and I allowed myself to open into and recognize, like I've described here, recognize the fact. Of that form of social support and then let myself feel her love, which then I allowed and encouraged by taking in the good of it to increasingly become a stable trait of a background knowing that I was loved. That's an example of recognizing social support that may not be so obvious. Another version of that is recognizing good intentions in others that may be expressed in sort of annoying ways. I am fairly busy. I have a schedule that draws me into many things and away from my wife, who would like to have a husband, you know, at least occasionally. So she will sometimes express that intention, which in which there's

an embedded valuing of me in the form of kind of pinning me down about my time commitments and reminding me that we're gonna, you know, gather before bedtime to meditate together at a certain time or something. So I might experience that, and I do. So these are this is a residue from my childhood of a two controlling parents. I might get a little prickly about it, or that prickliness might arise it, but it helps me to recognize the social support in her good intention, even if it's expressed in a way that. Mm-hmm.

**Rick Hanson:** [00:39:35] I have a little reactivity about. So very often people have very good intentions toward us that are expressed in bad ways. But at least even as we manage the bad ways they're expressed, and my wife is not expressing it in a bad way. I'm just reacting to something perfectly fine. Even as we manage what's coming at us, we can look past it to the good intent behind it. That's another way to practice and to help yourself to increase the perception of social support, which has a lot of value for you. And then to finish here, we can turn it around. We can ask ourselves, Am I really taking advantage of opportunities to deliver actual social support to other people, particularly informal opportunities that might cost me 10 seconds here, 30 seconds there, a minute or two, occasionally even more, but are very doable for me. In other words, I can listen a little longer before I jump in with my infinite wisdom. Maybe I can be asked if they really are interested in my advice before I give it and it's unwanted, you know. Can I be affirming and complimentary in ways that are authentic? Can I deliver actual social support? Can I deliver just a some authentic warmth that's at the upper end of my range that would be natural to me? Even though I tend to hang out on the low end of that range of authentic warmth, but I could nudge myself to go toward more of the upper end of that range and my warmth for that person.

[00:41:14] So that's a question for you. Can you increase in maybe one key relationship or maybe more actual social support for one or more beings? And then are there ways to help others to perceive your social support? This can be a little tricky because you don't want to be demanding about it and don't you see, don't you know by now? Stuff like that. No. But, you know, in small ways, you know, like to let it be more known that you really are supportive, that you really do care about another person, that they really do have a place in your heart. They matter to you. Can you let them know that? So to help them gain the benefit of increasing their perception of your social support and increasing it so that it's in proportion to and it matches your actual social support for them. That's a beautiful gift to other people. Okay.

[00:42:17] Quick review. There's a distinction between what is and our account or story or belief or languaging, et cetera, about what is? And very often there's a lot of suffering that's generated in those narratives. And being able increasingly to rest in reality as it is in the present is a beautiful thing. Second, and also there is a place for wise view and right view, including a place for perceived social support. And there are things we can do to increase actual social support in our life, and in particular, as a focus here, increase our perception of social support. We can do that to receive those benefits here, and we can do things with others to increase actual social support for them and to help them increase their perception of actual social support from you for them as a beautiful form of practice. So thank you for your social support for me. I perceive a lot of social support here. I'm very grateful for it. It fills my heart, lives my life through me. And I want to thank you, thank you, thank you for it.