

## 2\_4\_26Talk\*

\*This is an automatically generated transcript, so there are errors.

**Rick Hanson:** [00:00:00] I went for the deep end of the pool there in 35 minutes and if it was maybe a challenge to settle into it that would be very understandable. On the other hand if you were able to kind of settle in initially bodily into a sense of being present in the present and releasing anxiety and then as that sense of peacefulness in the body. Recognizing that you're basically okay right now when you are, has that became a growing recognition of spaciousness and vastness and then stillness? As an underlying container in your own mind, and perhaps an, I think, ultimate reality itself, an unconditioned ground that is still. If you were able to kind of go along there, good for you, good for your, that was good. Good for you. Definitely stuff bubbling to the surface, held in vastness.

[00:01:05] I'd like to explore with you, starting with a kind of metaphor that's very real. Actually in our lives, a deep teaching found in Buddhism and also elsewhere about how do we cope with the process of aging? How do we cop with illness? How do cope with death and the certainty of death and how do cope all that with regard to others, including others we love? And how do draw on practice with regard all that? So the more mythic version of this in the Buddhist tradition has that. Prince Siddhartha was raised in great privilege and he was protected from anything that was not beautiful and not healthy. And then one day though he managed to escape his well-intended wardens and slipped out through the front door of the castle in which he had lived his whole life up to that as a young man. And to his shock he saw someone who was old and wrinkled. And then he saw another person who was very ill. And then he saw a corpse lying there on the ground. He had no idea. What? How could this be? How could be possible? And then in the midst of his reactions to this, he saw walking by, radiantly, someone who communicated a fundamental inner peace in the mist of all things, including aging, disease. That's the extreme version of the story.

[00:02:58] So I would invite you right now to take a moment and relate to these qualities as messengers. They're described as messengers, even heavenly messengers. What's their message? What's their message for you? So why don't we take a minute for each of these and I'll keep track of the time. Good stuff here. And so the first messenger is practice. You know the heavenly messenger of practice and the possibility and reality of you know the the highest the heights of human happiness. So why don't we just pause for one minute. In your own case, imagine inviting that messenger in to sit with you. Maybe share a cup of tea with you and ask that messenger of deep practice. It has to say to you, to offer to you even teach you at this point in your life. One minute. You could take the last bit here to even have a sense of letting in to yourself whatever the teachings are for you from this messenger. Okay.

[00:05:32] Now, having strengthened ourselves, hopefully a little bit, at least, and helped us to rest in our heart with this first messenger. And if you like, you can imagine that first messenger now sitting next to you as you invite the second messenger in of aging. All things age, time flows, things are impermanent, bodies age, you are aging, I am aging. Okay, can you invite that messenger in? And ask it, oh, well wisdom, can it offer to you? Let's take a minute for this now, the messenger of aging. Okay.

[00:07:22] If you like, you might imagine even that the messengers are coming to have tea with you, and the messenger of practice and awakening is with you if you like. And then the other messenger of aging is with you. And now there's a third messenger with messages. The messenger of illness, disability, Injury. And so see if it's possible to invite

that messenger in to see what it has to offer to you in your real life, even in the days to come for the next minute or so. The messenger of illness. The focus here is on the offering, the teaching, the messages from this messenger of illness. Okay, so you might thank this messenger, as we used to say in the workshop days, thank you for sharing. Perhaps invite that messenger to sit to the side, and then with the messenger of practice close to you. Radiating its messages for you, if you like, if you're ready to, you could invite in the messenger of death, finitude, endings, and bow to it, and ask it to have a cup of tea, and asked it, ah, For me these days, what messages do you have for me? For the next minute.

[00:11:12] And finishing up with the fourth messenger. Thank you again. And if you like, however you visualize this or imagine it is fine, you could imagine thanking the messengers and saying for now it's all right for you to leave the immediacy of awareness. Or you could, on the other hand, realize that, wow, these heavenly messengers are omnipresent and their teachings, their messages. Could be available at any time, and it's okay to allow them to sit with you, whatever is good for you. So I'd like to explore with you some ways to, how do we relate to these messengers? What do we do about them? In addition to kind of the personal immediacy of illness, aging, and death, we can certainly apply teachings here to other realities of living that are, you know, not so wanted, not so desired. It's also true that there are many other messengers. Among us. I was talking with my wife earlier, you know, messengers, for example, of beginnings. If one of the messengers—one of the heavenly messengers is his death, his endings, yes. And also a major aspect of life is beginnings. Seeds planting, new starts, fresh starts, births, the arising moment again and again and Yeah, there's that messenger. We like that messenger! So we don't have to work too hard about it, but it's a messenger too.

[00:13:09] And how do we, you know, practice with and how do we understand and how we relate to these difficult messengers, particularly of illness, aging and death. One is to relate to them as messengers as we did here. And to ask yourself, are you prepared to invite them into your consciousness for the wisdom they offer to you? The recognition of aging, has many teachings in it. The recognition of frailty and vulnerability to illness and inevitability of illness in the body. What teachings does it have for you? And certainly the inevitability your own personal mortality and the mortality of all other things, all other living things. You know, can we orient to them rather than aversion, which just makes things worse. To more like. You're part of reality, you're a part of life, you're apart of my life, can I invite you in for a cup of tea? That starts to change things, doesn't it? Now to do that, it's really helpful to get in touch with a kind of tenderness. This is not about a spiritual bypass or getting all cosmic and up here, it's tender to know that You're getting old, if you are. What's the Dillon line? One who is not busy being born is busy dying. We're all busy dying, it's tender to recognize that. It's tender, to deal as I'm dealing with increasingly, you know, this or that in the body. It's tend to deal with illness and others, including those we love, it is tender. Can we be tender-hearted about it? While also being invitational.

[00:15:13] Now to do that, it's really important to appreciate that we also need to resource ourselves to be able to accept illness, aging and death. That's a big deal. And I think it's easy to be glib about this. And it's, I think, really important not to be clip, but instead to be tender and to be real. But wow, these are big things. These are big thing for you. I was recently at a memorial, a celebration of life memorial for a dear friend of mine, lesser memory. And for me, what was so striking amidst the jokes and the fond memories of this person who was just a wonderful, large hearted being, this is a big deal. And it's easy to kind of bypass the big dealness of it. Yes, we are all facing these messengers and it's a big thing. So tender, tender hearted. Grounded in practice that enables you to accept and

to invite in these messengers to relate to them with acceptance. Now on that foundation, what also is helpful?

[00:16:31] On the foundation of recognition and resourcing yourself and acceptance and invitation and tender heartedness, it's really helpful to feel every bit of it as to feel it, you know? To feel the grief, to feel the shock, to fill the fear, to allow the scared monkey inside us all to be on pins and needles till you get the word from the doctor. About the next thing, to feel for your friends. I'm of an age increasingly that large numbers of my friends are facing serious, serious, serious medical issues. Some are on a kind of probably a terminal glide path, as we all inevitably be included will be. As Steven Levine wrote in his beautiful book and bless his memory about a year to live. Inevitably every single one of us will cross that day when we have just one year live. And most of us, almost all of us will not know when we've crossed that day. So we feel it, it's important to let it to feel it. To grieve, to mourn. Grieving is loving. We grieve. We sorrow because we care, right? We are of the nature to care. To care about each other, to care about ourselves. It's because that is our nature that it lands on us in real ways to be getting older. And to be ill already, or dealing with one health condition or another, or some really, really serious stuff. And to know that inevitably, there will be that final breath. Final heartbeat. That helps. That's why the foregrounding of this is so central in all the great teachings. To face it and to feel it, that helps. Another thing that helps is to recognize some of what is also true. It's of our nature biologically to close down around pain or threat, to kind of freeze in the face of it, to brace against it, and to get kind of preoccupied with it, ruminating about it. That's very understandable. That ruminative process that is locked onto that, which is hard, is not good for us. It makes us suffer. It turns us away from things we could do to cope better. It turns away from others. Sometimes it creates issues with others and our preoccupations. Not so good for us.

[00:19:40] It's really good to kind of, you know, counteract the natural movement that curls around the pain. Fixates on that one tile on the mosaic of reality that's flashing red. Move into a different mode. Literally, bodily sometimes, to open up, to spread out, to lift your gaze, to take the bird's eye view, to turn toward others, to care about others, to see what is also true. And in terms of what is all so true, as we face illness, aging, and death, in others and ourselves, is to recall this teaching. From Zen Master Yun Min, who was asked, as you may have heard me describe in the past, he was asked what is it that leaves fall and trees wither? And he replied, body exposed in the golden wind. There are many aspects of that. To live is to be exposed. Born, that which is subject to arising is subject to passing away by virtue of our emergence in arising as a being. As a body, we are also subject to passing away as the causes and conditions of our own arising are impermanent and inevitably decay and disperse. And the particular Eddie in the streaming of reality that is you. Disperses along with them. I will disperse. Along with the causes and conditions. Of my being.

[00:21:40] So to enjoy the gift of this life, we must also be subject to illness, aging and death. For those we love to enjoy, the beauty of this life, they too must be subject, to aging, illness and death. No way around it. In what is also true, is all the goodness, all the opportunity that comes. Being manifested as the being you are, uniquely in the wild and crazy, strange long trip it's been of this universe. Here we are, right? You know, kind of a dumpy third rate small planet twirling around a mid-range boring star in a kind of middling galaxy amidst another 100 billion stars in this galaxy, estimated another million or so. Rocky earth-like planets just in our galaxy alone and then another trillion or more galaxies in the whole universe and you're uniquely here right what an opportunity what an opportunity to be just gobsmacked with gratitude at all that's available to us in this life

amidst everything that sucks, amidst tyrannies and despots and injustices. Wrongs that will never be righted along with bad luck and mistreatment and all the rest of it, you know, from the all of it. Mistell that what is also true, what is all so true for you and the opportunities in your life. What is true and available for you in the days to come? I was talking with someone earlier about, you now, if I have a handful of mottos, this is one of them, live well meanwhile. Right? Meanwhile, what are you doing to live well meanwhile?

[00:23:49] If, you know, to me, aging, illness and death have a message for us, it's to live while meanwhile. Includes being loving, caring, and helpful to others. So that's another key. Practice with and cope with all of the messengers is to be aware of what is also true alongside illness, disease, and death. Live well, meanwhile. And then further. As an aid to living well meanwhile, but also as something much, much deeper than that. There's a particular word that appears again and again in the early surviving teachings of the Buddha and in the language Pali, P-A-L-I, the word is upekkha. Upekkha appears along with compassion, kindness, and happiness for others. It appears as one of the seven factors of awakening alongside mindfulness, energy or effort, investigation, tranquility, and other factors. It appears in other places as well as a deep, deep resource for us. And it's routinely translated in English, Upekkha. As equanimity, spelled typically U-P-E-K-K, H-A, Upeka. Equanimity. Equanimity in its depth is non-reactivity. It's a stillness. It's presence that is experiencing all that is being experienced. Without reacting to it. It includes what's unpleasant, but there's a depth, a non-reactivity that's not contingent on whatever's appearing in awareness.

[00:26:12] In a sense, if reactions are based on conditions of one kind or another, the depth of equanimity is unconditioned. It's a kind of stable ground. One of the common metaphors for equanimity is the earth. You know, the earth can, you can dump whatever, you can drop all kinds of stuff on the earth, the earth abides. It is itself stable. In the meditation, you might have started to experience qualities of spaciousness and vastness and awareness that themselves are equanimous. Whatever we're feeling, including illness, aging, and death, and the prospect of these, is occurring. But the container, the ground, the basis for that experience is itself undisturbed. The depth of equanimity is something that's cultivated over time. It's cultivated through practice and it's cultivated through insight that recognizes that, you know, all phenomena arise and pass away. And they have the nature of being made of parts that are connected and changing. So they lack an inherent solidity, they lack an inherent identity. And in this recognition of the nature, That is the nature of illness. It is empty of solidity. It's there, it's unpleasant, but it's dynamic, it's cloud-like, it's fizzy, it foaming, it gauzy. These are words that could be used. And with insight, we recognize this increasingly. And that opens us into identifying more and more with the spaciousness and the undisturbedness that contains and holds all of it.

[00:28:10] I remember a lovely teaching from Kamala Masters on a retreat I was on who was talking about a trip down the Ganges when she was in India. And as she described going down the Gandhi Ganges, I think in Varanasi there, the sun was rising on one side of the river and on the other side of river were funeral pyres and the smell in the air. You know, she described equanimity as having a heart that was big enough to include the beautiful, beautiful sunrise and the lovingness she felt with her teacher on the boat with her. On the one hand, right, on the one hand and on the other hand, the sorrow and the cries and the smells of the funeral pyres alongside the river. That's a kind of equanimity. Now, as a major factor in that equanimity is another word you may have heard before. Root meaning is in friendliness or friendship. It's often translated as loving kindness, which sounds kind of elevated and great, wonderful, and I like friendliness. I can get that. We can be friendly. We can have metta toward the messenger of illness. Can you imagine greeting

that messenger with metta, with friendliness, with welcome, with an open heart, with goodwill? These are all qualities of Metta.

[00:29:50] And lately I've been reflecting on Upekkha Metta, it's a new word, Upekka Metta one word, upakkha Meta. And realizing that the combination of these is really where it's at a lot, right? As we deepen increasingly in the kind of as we, it's sort of like if we move up to the surface of things, there's a lot of turbulence there. The mind is very busy and very active and fizzy and rrrrrrr, but actually as we settle in increasingly, increasingly, it gets quieter. It gets more stable as you kind of go down, sort of settle down, and Upekkha lives down there and radiates upward. You know, you could have a sense of equanimity, not suppressing anything, not bypassing but a kind of equanimity. With love arising up through it, a kind of wellspring of love rising up through, you know, a spaciousness of awareness that welcomes everything and pursues nothing in the present. I want to, if I could, sort of review what we've talked about very briefly, and then take a look at some of the comments that have come in.

[00:31:15] So We have these fundamental aspects of living, aging, illness. We have also the opportunity for realization, for coping, for practice, for awakening, for identification with that which is not aging, ill or dying in the deepest sense. How do we be with all that? Well, a great opportunity for us is to welcome in the three of the four messengers that we tend to not really want and you ask them what their offering is. Their wisdom and to tend to look closely at that. You know, for me, one of the takeaways from really getting that this body's getting older is to invest in the present, in myself, and increasingly realize that the runway is shortening. You know? However many days we are each given, there's one less each day. And to increasingly, you know. Give my time to what I care about most and to increasingly disengage as best I can from giving time to what I don't really care about. That's kind of a takeaway. I recall the translation from Stephen Batchelor of the Buddha's last words as best we know. I love Stephen's translation of the Buddhist saying, things fall apart. He's pointing to three of the four messengers, and then he names the fourth messenger. Tread the path with care. Bring care to it, both in the sense of heart and conscientiousness, to your own path. All that comes together will eventually fall apart.

[00:33:09] To do that though, we need to resource ourselves to be able to practice with the three messengers and to heed their calls, then on the basis of that bring a tenderness to it, a realness that is strong enough to be tender enough to feel it fully. And allow it, and to respect ourselves and honor ourselves as those, as you, as a being who cares enough and loves enough, to feel keenly the golden wind blowing through the lives of others and your own life as well. To do that, of course, it also helps to be aware and to look to what is also true. And this is, okay, ready for a geek alert? A nerd alert here. Why do we get older? Why do things change, right? Some things change for the better. Some things changed for the worse. The body, as we age, tends to, especially toward the end, change for worse. Why is that? Why is it that?

[00:34:18] Well, one version of that, when viewed scientifically. Is that the Big Bang universe has four dimensions, three of space and one of time. And it, from the bang, is still expanding. It's expanding. And it's clear, scientifically, that it's expanding spatially, but we don't notice it because it's over such vast distances. And one view is that the temporal fourth dimension, temporal expansion of the universe, is what necessitates the next moment occurring. Which requires the current moment passing away. So we are living in creation continuously at the front edge of now in the temporal expansion of the Big Bang universe. Gradually, inevitably leaving this body behind. That's also true. With all the passings away, are also all the arisings. And so you might ask yourself, given what is also

true, what are good ways to live? Gob smacked with gratitude, with a tender and open heart, living well meanwhile, be getting realistic about aging, illness and death, planning accordingly as best you can, and drawing on deep tools in Buddhism, deep resources such as equanimity. Now, these are not unique to Buddhism, of course. The Buddha called them out. I love the kind of traditional words. I don't know, they have a certain echo in my mind. Upekkha for equanimity, metta for love. Upekkha, mette, the two together, you know. Love without equanimities is vulnerable to getting really disturbed. Equanimity without love is vulnerable to being kind of inert and cool and disengaged. Upekkha. Including allowing us to maintain a fundamental inner stability even as we engage in activist path motivated by love. Upekkha.

[00:36:39] And then last, I'll just say that the focus here, my focus has mainly been on the personal implications and that's appropriate, you know. A teacher of mine once said, we all become mystics on our deathbed. Why not start sooner? The heavenly messengers, the four messengers come for us all. And so it's appropriate to personalize it, you know. It's your body that's going to eventually disperse. And meanwhile, this is true for everybody else as well. You know, I'd love to hang out for one more day, one more, you now, year. But I'm okay, I recognize that it's gonna end. The lights are gonna go out, you know, eventually. I don't feel terribly bothered by that. I'd like to keep them going one more day. Who'd like be 100? Who'd to live? Well, someone who's 99, right? But it really bugs me that this is gonna happen to our kids, and to you, and others. So there's a place here for realizing how this lands on other people. And a lot of people, it's hard for them. The three messengers are coming hard. And maybe they're not that equipped to deal with them. And we can keep in mind that lovely line you may have heard from me, from Miller Williams. We don't know what secret wars are going on down there in other people, where the spirit meets the bone. So keeping in mind that the three messengers come for everyone. And what's it like for them over there when the messengers are knocking on the door? And how are those other people with regard to the fourth messenger? Of the opportunity for practice and awakening. I also think about this line that says from the Dharma, many are those who think they will never die. Those that do know that they will one day die, settle their quarrels. And that's something else to think about.

[00:38:53] And to realize that many people will not repair with you. People have commented here about people who are estranged and cut us off. And I feel sad about that. And, you know, one of the messengers is, you know a different messenger, a fifth messenger or six messengers is, you now other people who do not act well. And that's real, but still I don't know for you, but for me, there are people in my life who have cut me off and treated me unjustly. And when I know that the three messengers will be coming for them too, it softens my heart and relaxes the clench of selfing, knowing that those messengers are coming for those that. Mistreated me and it's not like oh yeah you're going to get yours no it's more like oh yeah you too are subject to illness you too or subject to aging you too are subject of passing away oh and in that oh you too common humanity there can be a softening of the heart that reduces your own suffering certainly and even opens up maybe some possibilities with other people too. In any case, whatever the pragmatic benefits might be, you're resting in the wisdom of knowing that the three messengers are coming for all living beings. Certainly for us humans and maybe for other beings as well, there is the opportunity, of course, of the fourth messenger sitting next to us having a cup of tea. So thank you for having this cup of tea with me here. And I hope it's been helpful for you. This is a profound contemplation. It's a vast subject. And they're set, there are... So many individual ways to approach it. I've just tried to offer. You know, I invite you, or invite's a funny word. I recognize that you on your journey are journeying, as

I am, as we all are, with all four of the messengers. And may your journey go well, and may you tread your path with care.