

## 5\_13\_26 Talk\*

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**Rick Hanson:** [00:00:00] So I'd like to take some time together to explore four aspects of time itself. And I'm gonna take the most time with the fourth of these, which, to give you a bit of a preview, is how shall we spend the time that remains?

[00:00:21] The first aspect of time is vastness. And my entry into this topic happened for me a day or two ago when I was reading my favorite magazine, Science Magazine, real news every week. Real news, actually, about real things. And this happened to be about when the moon formed. You know, the moon.

[00:00:50] And the basic gist of it is that our solar system, you may know already, began to form out of this vast disk of gas and heavier elements born in the heart of exploding stars billions of years previously around four and two thirds, four and three quarters, billion years ago. Swirling around and then planets started to form all orbiting our sun.

[00:01:21] All right, so it used to be thought that the moon emerged from some fairly large planet about the size of Mars smashing into the earth and in the collision the debris gathered together with gravitational force to become the moon which is fairly small compared to the earth which is larger than the moon.

[00:01:42] All right 4.3 billion years ago But... Scientists have figured out that that's wrong. No, it was closer to 4.5 billion years ago. Now, .3 and .5 doesn't sound like much, but that's 200 million years. If a lifetime is a century, a hundred years, if you're really, really lucky, well, in a million years, there are 10,000 lifetimes. That means 200 million years, whatever, do the math. Is a lot of lifetimes.

[00:02:17] My point about all this is that it just landed on me when I was looking up at the sky and reflecting on the moon and how it's orbited the earth and has water formed on our surface. The moon created tides. Tides had a major role in the development of life on the planet and the evolution of life.

[00:02:37] And I'm here because some ginormous planet the size of Mars collided with Earth four and a half billion years ago. You know, it just really hit me. The sweep of time. The vastness of time, time is long. And you know, our solar system has been around for just four and a half, five-ish billion years in a universe that's been around for 13.8 billion years.

[00:03:08] Now we can geek out on all this stuff and oh, that's very cool, Rick. Thank you, Captain Obvious. The sweep of time. You could do it at this large scale. You can do it as like humans have been walking around the Americas, North, Central, and South America-ish, 20,000 years. People have been working through my backyard in Northern California for, you know, could be easily 15,000 or more years. And then, you know, you extend it from there.

[00:03:44] So you just think about your own moment in the vast sweep of time, centuries rising and falling. I remember flipping open a volume of Will and Ariel Durant's book of history, chapter on the Reformation, you know, 1300s or so. And I was reading about these

amazing people, what lives they had, courage, accomplishment, contribution. I'd never heard of them. Maybe they were a statue somewhere. Easy come, easy go, I mean.

[00:04:20] So the first invitation here on this first aspect of time is gratitude. Just think about so many things had to happen for you to be here today. Thank you. You can look back and go, wow, thank you. A second aspect. From the vastness of time, is humility. It's a sense that, wow, we are so small, right now on the planet. Eight billion people are walking around. And by and large, each one of them feels as important to themselves as you feel to yourself. So many billions of people have lived, humility, you know.

[00:05:09] And there's a kind of release from suffering and contraction in both gratitude and humility that appreciates just the vastness of time, in the vastness of the universe. You know, our rinky-dank little planet, and the galaxy, a couple trillion other galaxies. It's not to feel like you don't matter at all, your life matters to you. And it's in this much larger context, in which way we can feel, I think, both grateful and humble. I have the hiccups. Okay, that's first.

[00:05:49] Second aspect of time, besides vastness, is timelessness. This is a slightly tricky topic. People can have different beliefs about it. I think the best way to approach this is as an invitation into mystery guided by the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha pointed out that time unfolds in dependent ways.

[00:06:20] In other words, this moment is dependent upon the previous moment, which was dependent upon the moment before that. Going back. Many moments going back all the way to the Big Bang. The conditioned clockwork, dominoes falling, unfolding of the Big Bang universe. That which is subject to arising is also subject to passing away, as the Buddha says. And he saw kind of inner peace and happiness that was not dependent on that which was arising and passing away. Because if it was dependent upon that which is passing away, he could not find an enduring. Happiness and peace so he eventually found what he described as the Unconditioned and people have been yelling at each other for 2,500 years ever since. What in the world was he talking about? And well in The world did he actually experience and many others have experienced as well. I Experienced it myself. You may experience it, too a sense of that which is unchanging in which changing is occurring.

[00:07:41] I think Thomas Berry had a quotation close to hold my mind to that which does not change amidst all changes. Minimally the Buddha described it as the deathless, the unconditioned, he left it at that. He described it is the ultimate refuge, the ultimate resort. You might have a sense of a kind of underlying stillness in the root of your own being even as your thoughts and feelings continually change. Some might point to this.

[00:08:18] Timelessness, which is therefore eternal, as having qualities of spirituality, perhaps consciousness, perhaps love, minimally, it's possible, I think, to have an intuition of, or at least a wondering about, if not a certainty about, timelessness, in which, through which, as which time passes.

[00:08:47] I just want to name the second aspect. People often leave it out in Western Buddhist circles. It's plainly there in the written record of the teachings of the Buddha, that which is unconditioned, that which not subject to passing away, because it is not subject arising. It's always the case, thus eternal.

[00:09:11] As a matter of personal practice, you might just simply be open-minded in your own explorations of what for you is that which is absolute, that which is timeless, even as relative phenomena, conditioned phenomena, keep on occurring.

[00:09:36] And if you don't relate to this at all... Move on to the third aspect here of time, which is impermanence, a Nietzsche in Pali. This is the fact that all experiences, all of which, and most of object to reality, is continually changing. It seems as if that literally the rate at which the universe is expanding from the original Big Bang is itself changing.

[00:10:14] Maybe there are certain things that don't change. Plunk's constant doesn't seem to change. You could say that that which has occurred will always have occurred. In other words, when the toothpaste is squeezed out of the tube, it will always have been squeezed out the tube. Okay, okay, okay.

[00:10:33] But generally speaking, certainly in our stream of experiences, and certainly in most material phenomena, at one rate or another, there is change. What's useful about recognizing that? Why in the world would the Buddha make the recognition of impermanence so central to his teachings? What happens when you recognize radical transience?

[00:11:12] One thing that happens, which is central to early Buddhism, is that insight into the recognition of the endlessness of change, the endless of endings, is that we relax our clinging, because we see the futility increasingly. We see the doomed suffering quest to hold on to that which is continually changing. We start letting go more. We start relaxing more. We start releasing more. We hold the streaming of consciousness more lightly. We hold our experiences more lightly and we suffer less as a result.

[00:11:59] So much of practice, including in meditation, involves recognizing just the changingness of things. Can help us let go. On a larger scale, in addition to the moment-to-moment-to moment- to moment-changingness of things, we realize that more macro-scale changes occur. Kids grow up. You know, the body changes over time. Empires rise and empires fall. It doesn't minimize the consequences of those things, but it gives us a larger perspective. Sometimes love grows cooler. Sometimes it grows warmer. Things change for the better sometimes. Because things can change, including your own consciousness, we can make efforts that produce good changes over time. We can plant trees and water them. And eventually harvest them and make some apple pie.

[00:13:22] So you might look at certain conditions in your life that are bothersome for you and, you know, reflect on how they might change over time. And you might reflect on how since things change, you can actually make efforts over time, even small efforts every day or every week, to change them for the better. That's a second takeaway from the changing-ness of things. The third aspect. Of time. Part of this has to do with an emphasis, I would say, in early Buddhism, and especially in Theravadan developments of Buddhism, on a kind of unsatisfactoriness in the endless endings of experiences as they change.

[00:14:15] And that can lead to, in my view, an excessively dour, glum, kind of grim take on life. Everything ends. Everything changes. Well, for everything to change, for every thing to end, that means there must also be everything newly arising in the freshness of the arising moment.

[00:14:39] And it's a lot easier to bear the losing-ness in every moment of experience by recognizing the gaining-ness also occurring in every moments of experience. And so as

we turn increasingly toward what we are receiving, moment by moment by moment, as we overcome the negativity bias of the brain that fixates on loss.

[00:15:06] Daniel Kahneman got a Nobel Prize in economics, a great psychologist, for pointing out that humans hate to lose more than they love in effect. So the brain tends to fixate on what it's not having any more of, so we have to help it to pay more attention to what it is endlessly receiving in the arisingness of the next moment. And when you turn your attention to what you're receiving, to what is appearing continuously at the front edge of now, it's ecstatic. It really takes you into a kind of ecstasy, which means to lose your place, in a good way. Ecstasy, you lose where you stand. Drawn into the ecstasy of... The givingness of the next moment. I'm not merely being, maybe I'm being poetical, but I'm trying to be merely poetical. It's true what I'm saying, isn't it? Everything is coming, right? It's going, but for it to be going, it must continually be coming.

[00:16:16] In fact, one of the very plausible accounts for why is there time at all, why does time occur? Is the notion that in our four dimensional Big Bang universe, three dimensions of space, one of time, the spatial dimensions of the Big Bang Universe are expanding at a certain rate that might itself be changing, woo, woo.

[00:16:41] Meanwhile, the temporal expansion of the universe, expansion of time of space-time is endlessly drawing us into the next moment. And for the temporal expansion of the universe to occur, we must continuously leave this moment behind as we expand into the next one. That means that if this is all true, we are living in creation continuously.

[00:17:09] As we receive and live into the the next moment, we literally are living at the edge, the front edge of now, in the temporal extension of our universe. The spatial dimensions are so vast we don't notice their expansion, but the temporal expansion of the universe that gives us the next moment of now. Perceptible and knowable and available to us as we continually receive the next arising moment.

[00:17:44] And as we really open to the arisingness of the next moment, the clinging to the previous moments falls away, craving starts falling away. And we live much more naturally and freshly, in the immediacy of the present. That's the third aspect of time.

[00:18:08] In practice, it's available. Now I'd like to shift to the fourth aspect of time. And let me take a peek first at what's come in in the chat. Great. Good, good, good. And I encourage you, if you're going to use the chat, use it to serve yourself. You know, be thoughtful. You know it's what I'm writing serving myself. You know occasionally write to support another person some skillful ways not to try to fix them or. Educate them or persuade them to anything.

[00:18:45] But really, okay, is it helpful for me to offer these comments in the chat? It might be. I don't know. I'm not, you know, speaking against that. And if the chat is distracting for you, just turn it off. It's okay. Alright.

[00:19:01] So, fourth aspect of time. It's making use of the time we have. Much as everything that arises is subject to passing away, our own arising as a unique body-mind process in the history of the universe. Each of us, me included, is unique. And there will be the inevitable passing away.

[00:19:38] So how do we relate to that? It could be wisdom in the facing of the finitude. Finiteness, the limitedness of the days we are given. This is a huge topic and I'm going to

offer here in my summary way what for me are some I would say headlines and opportunities for practice. One is the facing and the accepting of one's own inevitable death, as this body. And that is not anything to be glib about.

[00:20:33] You know, there's a true story told by a man who was a very, very long-time Zen student, very mature in his own practice, and he was talking with his beloved teacher, you very, very developed Zen master. And he was telling this teacher that he has been doing so much practice that he's really released attachment to the body. And at that moment, his Zen master, the way it's described, he's like a very slender and small and very, very old Japanese man leaped out of his chair and started throttling this. Fellow who was telling the story and choking him to death and the guy was completely shocked and finally just threw off this headmaster who very calmly looked at him and said, where is your attachment to the body now? The soft animal of the body doesn't want to go.

[00:21:42] You know, I've shared here that I've had two melanomas pulled out about 10 years ago and I get a good mole check every quarter and sunscreen is my friend and all that and there were there were many days where I did not know what the outcome was going to be and I knew that people do and die and have died from melanoma skin cancer I didn't know if it had metastasized so during those 10 days or so it felt like in my mind there were three levels, there was the analytical level, I had to cancel the whole teaching trip. 10 or more different things I was going to do and blah, blah, and searching out treatments and investigating doctors and side effects and that. Underneath that sort of rational level, Spock was very busy. Dr. McCoy, the little monkey inside was freaking out. It's like a sad, furry little animal wanted to curl up in a corner and be hugged.

[00:22:47] That's what the Buddha called the first dart. Inevitable pain, of course the little animal doesn't want to go. Of course, you know, and it's important not to add second darts by shaming it or going overboard about it, but rather having wisdom and kindness and care, for of course, the body doesn't wanna go.

[00:23:09] And underneath that, genuinely, I truly was in touch with a kind of complete inner peace about Erdogan. My point here is that as we face the limitedness, the finitude, the inevitability of having just one year to live, as Stephen Levine wrote beautifully, bless his memory, and then eventually one day to live and one breath to live. And the lights eventually will go out.

[00:23:42] You know, there are many ways to orient to that, but it's important to find your way. To find your own way, to orient to it, which... Include for myself an inclusion of, you know, the inner monkey, alongside a knowing of everything as a passing patterning in the river of time, moving through the banks of the unconditioned of the divine.

[00:24:19] And that's how it is for me. So yeah, this particular wave wants to have another day, you know, but eventually it will return to the sea, this wave of a particular body-mind process, and all along the nature, talk about taking refuge in the nature of things, the nature of this particular wave has always been water, much as the nature of all waves is water. So that's a possibility.

[00:24:45] So alongside the scared monkey can be a sense of, you know, some... Fundamental wisdom about the nature of everything as a way to hold The inevitability of this particular body mind, you know, the one that wears your name tag You know having its last day and people find their own way about that I'm just kind of nominating that kind of orientation, potentially, it's one that many people have explored.

[00:25:19] And then, also maybe, it is possible to look at your life as great, with gratitude, as a series of gifts. The gift of life itself, the gift of having any experiences. I mean I think it's true that certain lives, and sometimes we come to that point in our life, and I've had dear friends who have you know, unbalance, the pains are outnumbering the pleasures, you know, the misery index is just growing and there's no end in sight, and you know it's, if you can net, you know, on net, they want to leave.

[00:26:02] So I want to acknowledge that certain lives don't, you, know, are just very unfortunate. Okay, I acknowledge that. But if on balance... You know, on any given day, you'd prefer to continue. Well, if you look back, you know, maybe in this life, you've had... Just a lot of gifts that have been given to you. And the first day you were born was a gift, and then the next day was another gift, and the third day was a another gift and gift, gift, gift, and eventually, alas, the gifts will stop coming. And of course, we want the party to continue. And there will be the last party. And then the lights will go out and. Mystery will ensue. And yet the context of that is that so many gifts have been given.

[00:27:02] This is a way. I offer it, I nominate it, and I draw on it myself, as a way of recognizing the inevitability of ending of your own life. You know, acknowledging the scared little monkey being tender also appreciating Your underlying nature has already won with everything.

[00:27:33] Also resting in a kind of gratitude for what you've already been given. That's one aspect of practice for... Finitude. Additionally, on practical grounds, how shall we live in the time that remains? Very real. Whether it's 50 years, or 50 months, or weeks or days, how shall we live in the time that remains?

[00:28:08] And I think that there are three keys I would like to offer for your consideration. Is, in the time that remains, invest in yourself. The world is fickle. Changes, stuff happens, what? Meanwhile, invest in yourself, what is that? Maybe it means keeping all five of the precepts. You know, not killing, not stealing, not lying, not abusing sexuality, not getting intoxicated. Maybe it means really looking to health practices that shore up your body in the days that come. You know, investing in yourself today to extend your lifespan, and certainly to extend, extend your health span. Investing in yourself in terms of your practice, your process of healing, growing, and awakening. That's investing in your self.

[00:29:05] So you might ask yourself, in the day's that remain, how do I want to invest in myself? Both for its own sake. Because intrinsically it feels good to invest in yourself, body, mind, and relationships, and because it's instrumental, it is helpful, it's a means to an end, and out of your duty of care to the person you will be tomorrow, or in 50 days or weeks or years, investing in yourself is really a good thing to do. You might consider what that is.

[00:29:37] Second, in the days that remain, do you want to let go of? You know, maybe stressing over a mistake you made 30 years ago is something you want. You don't want to burden yourself with that. You want to take that stone out of the inner backpack you carry around and you want to let that go. Maybe the truth is you just want to You walk away feeling like you've absorbed some razor cuts. Ugh. Let that go. Maybe you want to let go a certain effort to fix something that just won't fix. Let go. What's on your let go list in the days that remain to you?

[00:30:36] Perhaps you wanna let go of trying to fix something in someone's mind. Maybe you want to realize you know, you've taken your shots, you've done the best you could. It's

on them now. You wish them well. You'll always be as helpful as you can, to the extent they're open to your help. But you're gonna let go of trying make something happen that's just not gonna happen there. Certainly has not happened yet. Let it go.

[00:31:04] And. In the days that remain to you, what do you want to let in? Your bucket list, or what do you want to do? What do you wanna let go of maybe so there's room in your life for that which you wanna lead in? I have a confession. I am letting go of a very long list of tasks and I'm releasing, I'm working my way through what's on that list faster than I'm adding new things to it, which amazes my family that I'm actually doing this. They didn't believe I would, but I really am.

[00:31:43] And now I'm not letting go of this gathering here. Could probably be the last to go, if it ever goes. Um, cause I really appreciate you all so much. And appreciate where we are together, we co-create each other. But I really am letting go of all that because I want to make more room for an unobligated mind. A mind that is not obliged, virtuously, generally, to do various things. But I'm really interested in exploring a mind that's not obliged. And there's certain things I'd like to see before I, you know, the lights entirely go out.

[00:32:30] So, for you, what do you want to let in? In the days that remain to you. So, in terms of this fourth aspect of time, quick summary, you know, how do you, can you come to peace with your own mortality and what helps you to do that?

[00:32:49] I've offered three things that have helped me to do that, which are to be kind to the little scared monkey inside, also to have a growing intuition of the truth of the ultimate, and third, to have a frame of gratitude. That appreciates so many gifts that have come. We've come to the last day of gifts.

[00:33:17] And then in terms of another takeaway is to invest in yourself in the days that remain to you and then let go of, you know, now is the time to lay it down. It's past its sell-by date. It's becoming a little rancid. And then what do you want to let in in the day that remain you? Including, you now, an orienting to awakening.

[00:33:47] Okay, well, I'm happy to say I had the time here to get through what I wanted to share. I'm gonna take a look at comments, questions, reactions that have come in. Lot of material here, right? Lot we've explored.

[00:34:11] One last little tidbit. There's something to, if you like, it's... It's a matter of personal taste. The extraordinary Japanese Zen Master, Chan Master, Zen Master. I think around the 1300s, 1200s, 1300s. 1200S probably, late 1200s. Anyway, he wrote this phenomenal short piece called Being Time, For the Time Being, and mer, it's the kind of thing that if you, for me at least, you start reading a sentence and your mind starts melting, mer, mer. Anyway, it really, it is really worth it, it's worth it. To explore, you know, the work of Dogen.

[00:34:58] And as you may have heard me talk about before, an extraordinary book that I really appreciate is called, and has a complex, you now, it's called, the title is Realizing Genjo Kowan. Realizing Gengio Kowan, someone might wanna put it in the chat, by Okumura. Anyway, it is a pretty extraordinary book. Take your time with it. It's profound. It relates a lot to what we've been talking about here.

[00:35:28] Okay, let's just see what people have written. Thank you. Appreciate what people write. We've got a minute left. I sometimes trip out at, I think scientists have figured out the first three seconds of the Big Bang. Whoa, you know, three seconds is not a lot of time.

[00:35:53] Let's see, okay. I think we're seeing what people have. Uh, the four aspects of time that I used to structure here, vastness, time- vastness timelessness, transience, and mortality. And how do we use our time?

[00:36:25] While contemplating on time in its different aspects. Let's see. I really appreciate comments here. So I see Andrew's comment. Andrew writes, 24 minutes past the hour, while I listen to you talk a lot, while I listened to you talked, a lot of regret is arising, a feeling of not taking advantage of my life, my gifts. I need to change my view of my past.

[00:37:08] Couple things here. There is a place, I believe, for reckoning, where we reckon. And we reckon, among other things, with our mistakes. Things that we simply regret, you know, as, wow, I was not so skillful there, and I made a mistake, I regret that. I hurt somebody through my mistake, I regret, that.

[00:37:36] And then a kind of step further, if we feel like there was a moral fault involved, we have remorse. There's a place, I think, for that kind of reckoning with our past. And it's normal in the developmental trajectory, psychologically.

[00:37:51] Do what's called life review as you get older. It kind of naturally arises. You look back from the porch and there are things you go, wow, no one gets through this life without making some catastrophic mistakes. Affect yourself and affect others.

[00:38:11] And sometimes, frankly, those catastrophic mistakes, you know, are very harmful. I just don't know how to get through this life without making catastrophic mistakes. So we face it. We look at it. We come to terms with it. We metabolize it.

[00:38:30] And also, we recognize, as I have recently, wow, mistreatment of oneself. We start to recognize those who have attacked us. Terribly unjustly. We sometimes recognize, particularly if we belong to a group of people that are structurally attacked, structurally mistreated, structurally biased against, discriminated against. Whoa! You know, you see a lot there. You see a lot there, so that that's part of the truth as well, when you look back. Right, Andrew?

[00:39:04] Not just what we might regret, but wow, how we were mistreated. And that perhaps is part of what led us to do some of the stuff we regret. It's complicated. And also, extremely important, when you look back on your life. Is to so appreciate so much of your own good intentions, your own heart, your own sweetness, including the sweetness of restraint. You didn't lash out, you didn't trash that person, you didn't dump your garbage in the street, even though it would have been really convenient. I mean, so much good rippling out from you that again, due to negativity bias, we don't tend to notice it.

[00:39:50] And other people, frankly, Many people are really crummy at appreciating what's good, including what's in other people, and even worse at acknowledging what they actually do recognize. So we're on the receiving end of that. People are quick to point out our errors and very slow to appreciate our gifts and our contributions. That's another really important thing when you look back on your life.

[00:40:21] And now, going forward, live well. Make this day a good one, so that when you go to bed tonight, you look back on your day as a total package. Definitely give yourself a passing grade. And if you're so inclined to really appreciate, you know, that yeah, this was a day worth living. This was a Day of Virtue. I have my head high. Good on you. Good on ya this day. That's really important. And to live that way going forward. Put some daylight between yourself and your past mistakes.

[00:41:15] So it's natural when we contemplate on time and mortality and finitude and roads untaken. You know, it's normal to have grief. And meanwhile, I think it's really important to appreciate the ways we've been mistreated that really played a role in our life, in which we were innocent, or maybe we had a tiny part of it, but not to justify what happened to us. That's important to recognize too, and to recognize your own gifts, your own beauty, your own lovingness, your own goodness, again and again. Because that's just, that's fair, that accurate, it's true to have that kind of recognition.

[00:42:01] And also because that kind if balanced, you know, comprehensive, fair recognition of your own past that you would give to another person that you cared about. That quality of balance and roundedness is a great Wellspring and wind at your back, tearing you forward into your future. I'll see you next week.

[00:42:34] Carry it into your future with me, me with you. I look forward to it. Take good care. I'm gonna finish here, and in a moment, my friends will sort those who remain into small breakout rooms. If you don't wanna be in a breakout room to talk about this stuff, now's the time to go.

[00:42:53] Now's the the time wave goodbye and hit the red leave button in the bottom right hand corner of your screen. I'll turn my camera and microphone off, but I'll stick around a little bit. To make sure I've read everything that's come through the chat.

[00:43:04] And, you know, I regret. I don't feel remorseful about it, but I feel regretful about not being able to respond to every question that's coming through the channel. Okay, take good care, live well meanwhile, and be excellent to each other. And watch Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure. Okay, Take good care. See you next week, bye bye.