

7_22_26 Talk*

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

Rick Hanson: [00:00:00] I'd like to talk with you about, to begin with, the eight qualities of a great person. This is a written record. That survived after several hundred years of oral transmission, literally, in the canon of teachings, suttas, from early Buddhism. And the sutta itself is really interesting. Now, there's some stuff about it that you kind of go with, like the Buddha has these psychic abilities that teleport himself after telepathically understanding what someone was thinking about, and then... He teleports himself back and all that sort of stuff. So there's some fireworks here. And the language is traditional and it's gendered. It's in the context of society in Northern India, 2,500 or so years ago. All that said, I wanna highlight some key points here and then use the eighth of these qualities as a way into exploring just how good it feels to come to rest. And how to do that, following the advice and a progression from our root teacher, the Buddha. All right?

[00:01:19] So I'm going to kind of highlight some things about this sutta. You could take some time with it later. I'm gonna sort of skim through it and bounce around a little bit. And this has been translated by, oh, definitely probably one of my favorite translators of all, the wonderful monk Bhikkhu Bodhi, whose work with, by the way, Buddhist Global Peace, something like that. Close to that is a wonderful nonprofit charity that supports people around the world. Okay, so. I'm going to summarize. On one occasion, the Blessed One, the Buddha, was dwelling among the bhagas, I'm going to mangle a lot of this, in Sahamsagarhaya in the deer park of Vesakala Grove. Meanwhile, on that occasion, The Venerable Anuruddha, this is somebody else, dwelled among the setis in the eastern bamboo park. Okay. And while the Venerable Anuruddha was alone in seclusion, in meditation, a course of thought arose in his mind thus. This Dhamma, this teaching, is for one with few desires, not for one, with strong desires. This teaching, this way, is one who is content, not for who is discontent.

[00:02:48] Now, to be clear, before we go further, we often start with strong desire and discontents. That's okay. He's really speaking to what are the qualities that are developed in practice. That's how to understand this here. And these eight qualities that are developed in practice are both a stretch and they're down to earth. They're not mystical, they're not magical. They're attainable, okay? So then third, this Dhamma is for one who resorts to solitude, not for one who delights in company, someone who's comfortable being alone. This is for someone who is energetic, not for someone is lazy. This is for someone with mindfulness. This is someone who is concentrated. And this is for somebody who is wise. So just kind of pause here. A way to understand this is, okay, we have a bit of a checklist here. We have descriptions, aspirational descriptions. I like watching people who are good at things. Recently tennis, the World Cup, rock climbing. Chess, other strange things, surfing. People are really good at it, you know?

[00:04:06] So here Anuruddha is reflecting what is being developed here in one who is deepening in practice. These are qualities, seven are listed so far, of letting go of unnecessary desires. You can certainly keep desires for a better world. This is developed as we develop contentment, being content. We're comfortable, you know, going deep in our own practice and relying on ourselves. We're also bringing some energy to this. We're not slacking around. Joseph Goldstein once described this as relaxed, but not lazy, something like that. Relaxed, but not casual. And then let's see, we have mindfulness. We're developing in our mindfulness, okay. And we're deepening in training in the mind and concentration. And cultivating insight and wisdom along the way. Very good.

[00:05:03] Then the Buddha reads the mind, do-do-do of Anuruddha, goes, huh, and then teleports himself into conversation with Anurudha. And the Buddha says, good, good Anuradha, it is good that you have reflected on these seven qualities of a great person. Goes through the list. And also, you should reflect on the eighth quality, the eighth thought of a great person, being someone who delights in non-proliferation, who takes delight in non for prolifer, non-proliferation. What is the Buddha talking about there? So just tapping the brakes briefly You might like to reflect on yourself How are you doing with? Wanting little For me, I'm working on just letting go of the normal machinery of scanning for something new to want. You know, dopamine, dopamine nation. And that hunger for something new to one is fed by modern society. So it's kind of autonomous and rebellious to say, time out with that. Nope, you're not going to keep hooking me with wanting something new. I'm Letting go of some of that. Also being more content, you know? Just, okay, appreciating enough-ness. There's a Daoist line, someone who knows when enough is enough, always has enough. Also, we appreciate being secluded, going inward, being with ourselves. We appreciate company. You know, Sangha is one of the three jewels of good company, other people. Sure, there's a time and a place, but also we're comfortable. In our own inner practice.

[00:07:07] Fourth, we bring some energy to the practice. Five, we've got mindfulness going. Six, there's some training of the mind, deepening concentration, reducing distraction. And we're gathering insight and wisdom along the way. And, huh, we're delighting in non-proliferation. Now the word for proliferation in Pali, a language of early Buddhism, is Papancha. And it's interesting that the Buddha is speaking to someone on Aruta who is very developed and saying on Arita, don't forget about non-proliferation. Don't forget delighting in not proliferating in your mind. What is this proliferation? Proliferation, you can watch it. It's just the discursive, self-referential. Wandering, seeking habits of the mind. It's what happens when we're in the default mode network in the back and mind wandering and ruminating. It is also when we are just chasing one problem after another or trying to accomplish one thing after another. There is a place for directed thought. There is place for it. But I don't know about you. I sure wish my mind were quieter. In a sense, what the Buddha's talking about here is delighting in, taking pleasure in, valuing a quieter mind. A quieter mind." If you think about it, the first seven qualities that are listed in the qualities of a great person, which we can become, and we are on the path of becoming, they have to do with character. They have to do with kind of who you are, what kind of a person you are.

[00:09:02] The eighth one is about liberation, in effect. It's liberating from the endless chasing of the next shiny object in the theater of consciousness. What a relief. The word for that chase thing, Papancha, is, fun to say, PAPANCHA. Has that feeling? I visualize one of these sort of time-lapse movies of a rainforest, like in the jungles in the Amazon, in which the vines and tendrils and plants and leaves are growing kind of at warp speed. You know, that's our mind. You know in just a second or two. You know, you can have like five different thoughts pass through awareness, like, brrr, you know, bubbling away. Oh, it's a lot. It's kind of wearying, right? It's exhausting to have so much cooking, so much going on. We're not trying to suppress anything here. The Buddha's not saying, you, know, shut it down or, you know, be angry at yourself about it. He's saying, delighting in its absence. Whoa, how do we do that? There's more in the sutta about how this delight in nonproliferation is engaged in practice. I'll kind of skip over that. It really doesn't matter. I'm not going to bother with that, but I'm going to keep going.

[00:10:30] So then a reasonable question, especially if you're neurologically inclined, is to ask, whoa, what is nonproliferation neurologically? Does that mean just shutting down experiences, the flow of experiences? How can there be the, quote, stilling of the proliferating self-referential elaboration of experience? That's what we're talking about here. How can there be, in your brain and mine, the stilling of the proliferating self-referential elaboration of experience. How does this work? Well, In the Buddha dharma, it's understood that there are three roots or factors of this proliferation, Papancha. One is craving. The more we're caught up in craving, the more noise there is in the mind. Okay. Second root is comparing, especially comparing that's very self-referential. You know, am I up? Am I down? What do you think about me? Do you have more? Do I have less? Comparing. Is this better? Is that worse? Right? Comparing mind. There's some kind of proverb that comparison is the thief of joy. Comparing is the second root of this mental proliferation. So you can see that as we reduce craving and reduce comparing, and I'll get to the third root in a second, we reduce proliferation, Papancha. Noise.

[00:12:10] The third root of Papancha in the Buddha Dharma is views, is getting caught up in our thoughts about their thoughts, about our thoughts, who's right, who is wrong, what's correct, what's the right way to look at something, you know, what is their opinion, what my opinion. One of my, I don't know if it's a guilty pleasure, it's some guilt probably, One of my pleasures is I'll spend a bout. I admit it. About 10 to 15 minutes, probably no more, a day in political social media. I have several people I track. They're good curators of the latest. It's a good way to kind of track commentary. And wow, you can just see whether it's Blue Sky, my favorite, or Twitter, or in other areas like Facebook, commentaries on commentaries, on commentaries, or in the news, you know, like on TV. Talking heads, wow, it's just a bunch of talk about their talk, about my talk, about their talks, about mine. That's exhausting. So, views, all right? So, there is bare experience. There is, as you probably got to in the meditation, you know, a quiet. There's an ongoingness of experiencing, right? There are sensations, you know. There is a kind of a basic sense of what's happening. There is minimal sense of liking or disliking or being neutral in its simple form. You know, basic thoughts are arising, people are functioning, it's time for dinner, opening the refrigerator. It's basic, but there's not a lot added to it. The question is, how do we add less to the resting state of ongoing experiencing?

[00:14:10] Now I'll give you an extreme example, and I say this as someone who went to the contest yesterday. In this example, which I read in a magazine some years ago, a monk living in Southeast Asia in very simple conditions without much medical care, certainly without dental care, is developing a really serious toothache. So the monk tells the story, and if you're alarmed about dentistry, you might want to turn off my sound or something or other, or just kind of keep some distance here. Basically the monk tells the story that, you know, there was great pain and there was walking toward the tool shed where there was knowing that there was a pair of pliers. And there was stepping and stepping and stopping and simply stepping and opening the door of the shed, and then reaching. And then holding the pliers and then placing the pliers and then pulling suddenly and some pain and then less pain and then setting down the pliers and observing what they were holding and then turning and walking back out through the door, stepping. Stepping, stepping back to the little hut of meditation. Whoa, that's a pretty good example of not adding a lot to it, all right? The problem is not the ongoingness of basic functioning and experiencing, including, you know, some necessary planning plans to send an email or run a meeting or prepare a talk. It's what we add to it. It's this constructing, this fabricating is a key word, this adding to the basics of this second layer, which very often includes, as you know the metaphor, the second arrows or second darts of our own

suffering that gets laid on top of basic sensory pain or the basic loss of certain pleasures. How might that happen in the brain?

[00:16:43] Well, there's some good research about this. There's some growing research that, for example, Judson Brewer, among others, Shinzen Yang, among other, Richie Davidson, University of Wisconsin, among others are showing that people who have greater training in meditation, like you're getting here yourself. Maybe you're encouraging those in your networks to check out. People with a growing meditative practice in formal practice when they're doing it with an MRI and by extension probably increasingly as a trait in everyday life are more and more able to simply be with what's happening as it is without getting a lot of activation in the default mode network, which is in the midline and spreading to the sides in the rearward areas of the brain. In other words, there seem to be very clear and plausible neural correlates of less activity in regions that drive Papancha, not the only areas, but major kind of headquarters for Papanchava, et cetera, in the brain. As that gets quieter, people report less and less of this proliferative activity. Wow. That's pretty nice, isn't it, you know? So that kind of makes sense here.

[00:18:00] So just a quick recap. In effect, to borrow from T.S. Eliot, in his poem Ash Wednesday, he says, teach us to care and not to care. Teach us to sit still. So we care, we care about injustice, we open our hearts to caring and meditation, including we care about our own self-interest and like, you know, pulling out a diseased tooth, given that that's our option. You know, there's a place for caring. Okay, reasonable, enough. And there's a place for learning to increasingly just not care about the rest. Just engage from it. That metaphor I used early on of just coming home from a big trip and plopping in your chair. Ah, that kind of not caring. So how do we actually do this? How do we still the roots of Papancha? How do we crave less, compare less, and think, think, think less? How do we actually do it, especially in a culture and a society that is feeding those roots of mental proliferation? How do you actually do that? Well, here is where I want to draw your attention to a classic sequence that I talked about a few weeks ago in Instructions for Meditation, and you can follow this sequence in kind of everyday life.

[00:19:43] One thing I love about Buddhism and early Buddhism is that apart from the telepathy and teleportation and past lives aspects, you know, maybe a few other bells and whistles, it's very grounded. It's very psychological. It's a very common sense. You know, I think about that, you know the three kind of encouragements in a kindergarten, you know. Pay attention and share your toys. Very basic, right? There's a lot about Buddhism that has that kind of basicness to it. So here we have this sequence. Number one is personal virtue, not some kind of necessary saintliness. This is the first of the three basic pillars of Buddhist practice, sila, sometimes translated as virtue or morality or non-harming, including yourself, restraint, ethics, you know, getting your stuff together. Walking lightly as you move through the world, not landing hard on other people, not giving people cause to feel mistreated by you, reasonable cause. And that's virtue. Virtue then leads to the bliss of blamelessness. And again, you don't have to be perfect. I'm really talking about, going back to my talk previous week, of grounding yourself in what you bow to. You know, grounding yourself into what you both accept and also what you appreciate.

[00:21:16] And... On the basis of that, establishing yourself in your principles, your commitments, your inclinations, your promises, your word, through what you vow. And then, at the end of the day, you look back and you go, hey, I wasn't a schmo. I opened, you know, I came from my heart today, right? I... Made efforts, and you know, I learned a little along the way. Good enough, good on ya. Ah, that's the non-remorse. That's the not remorse part. Where, you know you're not caught up in guilt or shame. There's no basis

for it. Essentially, at least today, right? Lovely. The bliss of blamelessness, which then leads onward to, and I'm going back to this sequence, gladness. Gladness is a very interesting experience. The Buddha is calling out states of being that are differentiated from other states of beings, not to be pedantic or complicated per se, not to pedantic at all, nor complicated per say, but rather to become more mindful, to deepen our granularity of mindfulness. Because as we become skillful with anything, I've talked about earlier skillfulness with tennis or golf or cooking, I love watching these cooking shows or rap, Eminem is amazing, a lot of other great rappers too, just skillfulness in any domain. It involves a differentiated clarity, a granularity of mindfulness around various distinctions and then they become integrated later. We differentiate, then we integrate. It's a long time saying. And so that's what the Buddha's pointing us to.

[00:23:06] So gladness, the gladness that arises from a clean conscience or a relatively clean conscience, you know? That's a really beautiful thing. Has qualities I've said earlier of relief and reassurance in it? Like, yeah, I'm all right, yeah. Gladness, really nice, right? And then what can gladness lead onward to? Gladness? Can lead onward to what's the word is pity, pity or PT in Pali, language of early Buddhism, a key language of Early Buddhism. And PT can be translated as rapture or bliss or joy. And there can be pulses of PT or as practice deepens, you can just become a wash in it. Like, so, I've been there. Maybe something I assume many of you have as well, in your own practices, you're just so absorbed in rapture and kind of being in love with the present moment. It can be a little hard to get up out of your chair. You know, whoa. And P.T., like two of the other steps in this path, I'll get to you in a moment, are among the seven factors of awakening. It's kind of wild that a tradition And that's very prepared to be renunciate. And has a jaundiced view of clinging and craving, really values intensely enjoyable, emotionally positive experiences as factors of liberation. Whoa, pretty cool.

[00:24:48] So you can see this following and you can, in your own efforts, you can help virtue, your everyday virtue become freedom from remorse. You know, a sense of gladness in your goodness. And as that recognition of your goodness deepens, you can kind of encourage it, kind of open to or invite gladness. And then as you rest in gladness, including in meditation, you can invite and open into, if it will come, it may come, it may not, but you can open to it, you can invited, may pity arise. A traditional instruction in meditation that moves into deepening absorption. Involves may such and such arise, you know, may mindfulness arise, may steadiness of mind arise, may gladness arise. May rapture and joyfulness arise. And then PT, which is pretty darn intense, you know, it's just hard to sustain. It just naturally, settles down and it settles down into tranquility.

[00:26:09] Now, by the way, in terms of the sequence, sometimes it really happens is that you skip a step and it's not uncommon, I think, to just go fairly directly to tranquility, you know the body relaxes, the breathing slows, Especially with you know, sustained practice of meditation and increasingly a mind that's, you know has often privilege, not always privilege, but sometimes privilege of less and less to worry about and for whatever reason it just gets more and more settled, more and more resolved, kind of settled more rapidly into tranquility, one of the seven factors of awakening in which the root of the word for tranquility In Pali, the roots have to do with an intensification of settling. So there's a common metaphor, a very lovely one, of a pond whose contents gradually settle. The sediments subside and the always pure water of being becomes apparent, including the jewels that have always been there at the bottom in the heart of your own being. Tranquility, stillness, nice. And then, tranquility, again, with a little encouragement sometimes, or invitation, because that peacefulness, that tranquility can feel fairly kind of inert, you know, like, okay, tranquil. It then opens further into, in Pali, sukha. Sukha is the

root of the word for sucrose, or sugar, in Sanskrit, or then in English later, it's sweet. There's a contentment. Tranquility becomes contentment, you know, tranquility is not very affectively balanced because you're really, really tranquil. It's a real stillness. Sukha is affectively It's positive, it's enjoyable, it is contentment. It's like, ah. I am content. You know, it's a sense of wellbeing with no wish for anything else. There's a release from the urgency, the proliferating energy of becoming. There's no juice for becoming because you're good right now.

[00:28:30] Now around this contentment or included in it, literally could be physical pain, could be anguish in the back of your mind, could be grieving, you're still grieving. Years later, you're still grieving the loss of this or that, you know, and still in the present somehow, there's a sense of enoughness in this progression, right? In this progression. And then Sukha leads onward in the classic progression to samadhi. Samadhi is a non-ordinary, samadhis can be understood in an ordinary sense. It's just growing steadiness of mind. Deepening concentration, in two senses of the word concentration, you're becoming... More and more stably with your object of attention, which could be sensations of breathing, your object attention could be love and kindness. Your object of intention also could be gladness, leading onward to joyfulness, leading on to tranquility. These can be objects of attention to help you become more and absorbed in them, and leading on, et cetera, into contentment and then deep samadhi. That sense of concentration, you know, like you're in it. And also, like concentrating a sauce, you become more and more pervaded by tranquility. You know, it is concentrated as an experience within you.

[00:30:03] So there's an ordinary sense of the word samadhi, and samadhi is pointing toward the right concentration or wise concentration, eighth element of the Eightfold Path, in which you're moving into non-ordinary states of being. Called the Jhanas, that are well-known, you know, I've experienced certainly the first two fairly stably and I know many people have moved through the four basic ones and then onward, da da da, but you know you're not in Kansas anymore. And everything up to that point is completely within reach in everyday contemplative practice, and even within reach, in everyday life. And really worth exploring. Not out of any kind of pressure, but out of honoring the Buddha's invitation, and frankly, out of cultivating states and traits in your own consciousness. Neurologically, there are multiple ways to help experiences or states of gladness or tranquility or joyfulness or contentment and so forth become traits, become increasingly rested in you. To move from state gladness to trait gladness, from state tranquility to trait tranquility, right? If only in the background of consciousness.

[00:31:26] And a key way to do this, to, you can help yourself, help these experiences leave lasting traces in your body, in your nervous system, in literally lasting changes of structure and function in your brain. Multiple ways to do it. I wrote a paper about this. Published paper called Learning to Learn from Positive Experiences, multiple factors I've taught. There are three that are kind of major go-tos I return to again and again. Anyone is good, more is better. Number one, duration. Stay with the experience. That's why steadiness of mind is a factor of neuroplastic change, because then you can stay with the experience. You keep the neurons firing, so they start wiring together. Second, feel it in your body. The more embodied your tranquility, your gladness, your contentment, huh, the more it will lodge within you. And enjoy it. Stay with what's enjoyable about it. Focus on what's enjoyable. Really enjoy it. Because actually, as you really enjoy it, the basis for craving and clinging falls away because increasingly, it's just inside you already. You don't have to go outside yourself looking for peace of mind, tranquility, or a sense of gladness in your own goodness, not arrogantly, but with reassurance and relief. You don't need to look outside yourself for that because you stayed with the experience, you've felt it in your

body, and you've enjoyed it hundreds if not thousands of times, a few breaths or less at a time. To what extent are the qualities we've been naming here, they're all psychological, ordinary, they are in the dictionary, qualities of mind, qualities a being, to what extent are they already present in your daily life. Okay. Cool. To what extent are virtue, non-remorse, gladness, rapture, joyfulness, tranquility, and contentment present in your life? And, you know? What opportunities might there be for you in increasing them?

[00:33:41] I go back to the first two qualities or characteristics of a quote unquote great person of making your wants less. You know, I've just started to watch it. I've started the ways in which my mind is like, and I'm fairly kind of mellow partly due to privilege, partly due training and temperament, but whoa, it's just goal seeking. The generation of goals. And I look at him and go, huh. And there's a way in which you start to realize that your brain, especially its reward-seeking systems that are evolved with the earliest mammals are really kind of primitive. It's like an inner ad agency that's constantly pitching you something new to want. And increasingly it's like, no, I can renounce that. I can let go of that. Wise intention is one of the elements of the eight-fold path. That's the second one typically listed right in 10. And one of the three aspects of right intention is renunciation, not out of pushing away, but out of freedom, freedom from wanting. Huh, it's great. And wanting has these two meanings, including a sense of want or lack.

[00:34:55] So that moves us into the second of the eight qualities of a great person, being content, really training and appreciating this subtle but very important feeling of. Being content rather than discontent and tracking that difference. All right. So kind of bring it at home here. You can, you know, I think I've named maybe eight key things to pay attention to sorta whatever. Such as tranquility or gladness or you know contentment but really it boils down to where we started teaches to care not to care this whole teaching about delighting in non-proliferation is delighting and wise not caring not caring enough to chase it not caring enough to feed or follow it not being interested in the next shiny object you know your brain just throws up for you to want. Tosses it up on the screen. Look at me, look at me. Chase me, want me. Yeah, get into it. You're like, yeah, I'm good. I'm already enoughness already. I'm okay. I'm Okay. I'm OK already. That's what this is about. Not caring about that.

[00:36:14] And on the other hand, teaches to care about virtue. Teaches to care about freedom from remorse. Teaches to care about gladness. We cultivate them. What we appreciate. You know, the old line, what you appreciate, appreciates, all right? Teaches to care about joyfulness, tranquility, and contentment. And teaches to care along the way without getting caught up in goal seeking. Teaches us to care about transformative, revelatory, non-ordinary states of consciousness that are available to us all, progressively with practice. All right? And... Again, teach us not to care about the habitual chase things and graspings of the mind. You know, not to about comparisons and who is up and who's down and not to hear about, you know, so much about being right or caught up in views. What a beautiful path. So let's sit for a minute. Just kind of marinate in this. Let's care enough to sit in, wisdom about what not to care about. You're letting all this reverberate within you. Whatever is good, you're letting it linger. So it gradually leaves lasting traces in your body, in your brain with benefits for yourself and many other beings.

[00:38:21] Okay, thank you for going along with this ride. I hope it was useful for you. I think it's really helpful to finish here. When one faces, you know, original teachings from the Buddha, it's the big leaks. It's a master class. And it can sometimes seem a little daunting. Whoa, all these words and states of mind, and oh man, where do I start? Wow. And it's really helpful. Number one, to trust in your own nature, deep down, through and

through, just to like, okay. That which is noble within me, that which is good within me is drawn to this, and I can be lived increasingly by what is always already good within. And you can have some humor and playfulness about the journey we're learning. And learning involves correcting, riding a bicycle, lean left and you gotta lean right and you're constantly doing that. Think about sailing, zigging and zagging, but toward your goal. It's okay, it's playful, it's all right. And appreciate your own efforts along the way. It's really important. Keep it simple, pick one thing. These days I'm really zeroed in a lot on, Thoreau's line, I think. I make myself rich by making my wants few. That doesn't justify poverty and oppression, whatever. Just, I mean, disengaging from the ad agencies out there in the world and inside your own mind. You might have a different thing. You might be very interested in the gladness in your own goodness, non-remorse. Maybe tranquility is calling to you. Oh, great. Maybe you're interested in becoming more mindful of your tendency toward comparing. This moment compared to previous moments, yourself compared to others, that person compared to that person. Maybe that's your practice. You know, it's good. Pick one thing. Kind of, you know, keep that as a major focus for a while. And keep meditating. And keep coming back. Take good care. Thank you. It's a wrap.