

## How to Get out of the War in Your Head (Talk from 10/13/21)

**Rick Hanson** [00:00:00] I'd like to begin by saying that that way of being, summarized really in three aspects, warmhearted, spacious, presence, is a really good and central establishment that can be difficult to establish in the beginning. OK. That's where we start. That's why it's a stretch, as I said, really at the outset. And with time, though, those three aspects feed each other. The sense of presence does tend to naturally become increasingly open. That spaciousness of the sense of the body as a whole and then all of experiences and then the whole world really as a whole, that tends to help us stay in the present moment, present. And as we settle and feel less agitated, less contracted, less driven, less swept away by this or that or pushing away this or that, naturally, what's revealed increasingly as our underlying condition of fundamental benevolence, fundamental goodness, warm heartedness.

[00:01:22] And so these three come together and it can sometimes help to start with warm heartedness, which helps you be present in a spacious and open way. But the three together warm hearted, spaciousness, and presence, it's really a nice way of being. And with practice, since neurons that fire together wire together, you can increasingly rest here as you develop the trait of warm hearted, spacious presence, which becomes more and more kind of your resting state. Maybe in the background, while in the foreground you're doing something or rooting on your San Francisco Giants baseball team during the playoffs or whatever it might be. But, you know, it's available. And definitely it's something you can come home to more and more readily with just a little attention and effort, such as during a little meditation or maybe to kind of ground yourself before you need to enter into a difficult conversation with somebody warm hearted, spacious presence. And the sense of what feels good about it is motivating, so it tends to draw us there. It helps us make room for it. It's OK. It's good. It's resilient. It's moral. It's happy to be rested and warm hearted, spacious presence.

[00:02:49] Additionally, technically in your brain, as the sense of reward during an experience increases, so does neuroplastic change also tend, incrementally, bit by bit, synapse by synapse, to increase as well. In other words, highlighting or turning up the volume and in a kind of wholesome pleasure, in a beneficial experience, such as warm hearted, spacious presence, helps to really hardwire that way of being into yourself. Being aware of what is rewarding about it, what's enjoyable or meaningful about it. That's how it all kind of works together there.

[00:03:29] And that's a very good foundation for my topic here about getting out of the war in our heads. So I'm gonna tell you about some of the wars in my head over the years. And so one of them is where I feel wronged by somebody. So you might think to yourself, what are the situations in which you feel wronged by someone? They mistreated you. They got one over on you. They let you down. They violated some important standard or ethical principle, some morality. Maybe they were provocative, they affronted you. So you have a grievance about it. You're aggrieved. Maybe it takes the form of kind of a background feeling of resentment like. In the sense of being wronged often is another element of there is something unfair, like harumph, how did they get to go ahead in line? How did they get that advantage, huh? You know, the sense of unfairness, a sense of injustice.

[00:04:40] And another element here, certainly for me, maybe for you, I don't know, from time to time is these feelings on behalf of others. Getting really angry that certain people are, you know, talked to in a certain way. Earlier today, I happened to be in a waiting room and I heard—and the husband and wife there, clearly waiting for an appointment—he was

kind of snappish to her. He said to her one point, I told you that already. Weren't you listening? And in that environment, she's the patient, clearly. She had a lot on her mind. So, you know, we might be irritated on behalf of others at all kinds of scales, including scaled up politically. That's another war in the head. Turn on the television set, read a newspaper headline, we really get into it.

[00:05:38] So there different kinds of wars in the head, and even some of them have more of a wistful, soft, hurt quality, like, oh, sort of reproachful. Not so much aggrieved, which can have a foreground of anger, but reproachful which has more of a quality of sadness in it, and hurt, and oh, you know, why did you hurt me like that?

[00:06:10] And last, a kind of war in the head you may be familiar with, I can get familiar with myself, where we're battling with ourselves. Right? What you did, Rick, was horrible. Well, no, it wasn't so bad. It was horrible. No, it wasn't so bad. Something like that. The war inside your own head. What to do about it? Now, to be very clear, often the war on our head is about real stuff that matters. And I want to be crystal clear throughout this talk and our discussion, including in the tone of voice I'm using here, that I'm not trying to diminish the moral basis or the fact basis for our grievances, our complaints. They may well be utterly legitimate and valid and appropriate and grounded in justice, maybe moving into being aggrieved from having maybe spent all too long apologizing for the people who attack you or mistreat you or mistreat other people. And stepping out of that kind of passivity about it or compliance with it, or even, you know, enabling it moving into a sense of fiery grievance could be a positive step. Clear about all of that. That said, it does seem that, let's say, we start with something real has happened. Whatever was real that happened was real that it happened or is continuing to happen. And whatever the relevant facts are and values are, they are what they are. Let's say we start there. Let's say that a person badmouthed you behind your back to somebody else. Or let's say that you were really counting on a doctor or the medical system to get the job done and they didn't in some important way. Or maybe you're just sort of appalled that when person A clearly mistreats you in a group, persons B, C and D don't do a darn thing about it. They don't even agree with you that, yeah, that was wrong that happened. Let's say something real has happened there. OK? Something real has happened. It could be fairly small scale. It could be catastrophic. It could be enormous. Let's say that's the case.

[00:08:57] Then it seems to me there is a kind of fork in the road. We're at a junction there, in terms of how are we going to be about it. Let's say the initial shock has worn off if something immediately has happened. That's OK. The initial some kind of reaction cascade has occurred. OK. So be it. Maybe initially you just were frozen, understandably. OK. But you get to a point where there's an option here. There is a fork in the road. And down one road, one way of being is the war in your head, which may be matched by a kind of war as well more out in the world. Maybe you're involved in legal action, maybe you're caught up in screaming matches with other people. Maybe you start, you know, putting sugar in their gas tank of their car. I had a client who did that one time. Breaking up with a lover. Maybe the externalization of the war involves enlisting other people in a campaign against the person who wronged you. Getting them revved up, they agree with you, yeah, yeah. One road is the road of the war. OK. Got it.

[00:10:36] And that road has benefits and costs. Benefits include it's organizing, it kind of pulls you together, it's energizing, it's saturated with righteousness. That's one of the benefits, right? We feel really right as we form this case in our mind, like a prosecutor might or, you know, a bill of particulars, an, indictment makes us feel very right and sometimes morally superior. Hmm. I'm better than them. You know? OK. So there are

some benefits down the road of war. Sometimes, especially if you have a background in which you've been kind of immobilized, it can be initially really energizing in a way that's helpful even to start a little bit down that road of war.

[00:11:33] On the other hand, as you probably well know, that road of war is full of costs for us and other people. For other people, you know, we're coming at them. We're upsetting them. Sometimes we're moving into vengeance. Sometimes we get carried away. We go too far. You know, there's a kind of emotional momentum. We build up a head of steam. We can have all kinds of impacts on them. And internally, whatever the effects on other people might be, the road of war feels bad, doesn't it? It's a kind of suffering. It involves, in the Buddhist analysis of things, a craving. There's the cravings of various kinds. Craving for things to be different than the way they are, cravings to be, you know, no longer one down, but to move to being one up, cravings to be right, cravings to win, cravings to dominate, cravings, you know, to, you know, get others to agree with us. And with all those cravings inevitably comes various kinds of suffering. Particularly just the simple discontent, the simple stress and lack of well-being in resentment or reproach, you know, kind of a chronic mood of melancholic reproach, helpless complaint. Ooh. I'm long-time psychologists and that is really bad for mental health, helpless. grudges. Not good at all.

[00:13:24] Then there's another road, and I call this the road of calm strength. In this road, we definitely take action as appropriate. We march in the streets. We file lawsuits. We leave a message for the manager of the person who, you know, the employee who mistreated us. We talk with trusted allies, wise friends, family, teachers, we consult our inner guides. We definitely don't just lie down and let them do it, you know, let them prevail. I mean, we take action, but the way we take action feels calmer. And it includes elements that I'm going to talk about in a moment of compassion, of kindness for ourselves, a warm heartedness for ourselves, and a groundedness, and a sense of perspective, and a way of being about whatever has happened, the wrongdoing, the injustice, the failure, the betrayal, a way of being in relationship to it that is maximally effective, actually. And one in which we retain a fundamental freedom. In the road of war, we're bound to the conflict. We're stuck in it. We're tangled up in it. We're attached to our oppressors, the perpetrators, we're kind of caught up with them.

[00:15:16] In the road of, I'll call it calm strength, there is more of a freedom in our relationship to what happened. We have room to breathe. We don't feel so bound by it. We can be lighter in relationship to it. We're separated from it. We're not so identified with it. We're not so caught up in it. It doesn't preoccupy us. The road of war occupies us. It's an internal occupation by those who've wronged us, which is doubly unfortunate. First, that they wronged us. Second, that we let them occupy us like an invading hostile power. In the road of calm strength, we're not preoccupied. We think about it when we need to think about it. We take action when we need to take action. Otherwise, it does not ruin our sleep. It does not invade your meditation. It does not dominate conversation at the dinner table. You're not caught up in endless emails about it. You're not, as I do, composing emails at two o'clock in the morning inside your mind to get the words just right. You're out. You're not doing that. OK.

[00:16:32] So I see comments coming in on the chat. Excellent. Wonderful. And again, I just encourage you to focus on your own experience. You know, this is what it's about here. And, you know, be careful about advising or criticizing other people. OK, very good.

[00:16:50] So, well, you know, so we have these two roads. And I'm going to talk here tonight about getting out of the war road, getting off the war road. Or when you find yourself, as I still do, and you may, down that road, you suddenly, like in a beam me up, Scotty, kind of moment—that's a bit of an homage for the 90 year old Captain Kirk going up in space recently and coming back down again safely—you sort of, as soon as you notice you're on the war road, you can actually be over in the calm strength road. All right?

[00:17:26] So how to do it? I have five suggestions. I have a little list. And think of these as kind of like a five-sided pentagram in which each of the five elements is connected to every other element with little lines that go across. You might even want to draw it out eventually when I'm done. I'm going to give you an overview of the five. And now I'm going to talk about it. All right? OK, good.

[00:17:52] So first, decide to get out of the war. Decide which road you want to take, again and again and again. Second, I call it open it up and let it flow. That's where we get in touch with how we feel, including its many layers, as well as younger layers. And we also try to really understand what was the name of that truck that hit me. What happened there? What was that? And what are the different forces and factors? And also what are the relevant values that are in play here? You know? Let it—and in this, there's a kind of flowing because you're trying to help yourself disentangle. And I'll talk about each of these. Third, be kind to yourself. So important. Compassion. Kindness encompasses compassion. Compassion presupposes suffering. Kindness is broader than that. It's not better than compassion. It's just, by its nature, inclusive of many, many nuances. It's this feeling of support for yourself and an empathy for yourself. Wow, this really sucks. This really hurts. This is really hard for me. Oh oh, you know? Be good to yourself. Be on your side. Part of the problem often is that when bad things happen to us, we were failed by others. We were failed by the people who mistreated us or let us down. And then we're often failed by third parties who turn a blind eye or just don't want to—they look away. They don't want to see it. They don't want to get involved. They don't want to risk their own standing. You know, they're afraid. Whatever it might be. Or maybe their bonds of friendship with us are actually very, very thin, unfortunately. So understandably, we feel let down by others. So it's really important that we don't let ourselves down. Be kind to yourself. That's number three. Number four, see the big picture. And again, I'll go in detail about each one of these in a moment. See the big picture for me includes elements of acceptance where it is what it is. Doesn't mean we like it, or that we approve of it, or that we're given up about it. But we're in reality. We see it for what it is. And in there sometimes is the acceptance of injustice. This is a really tricky one because I don't mean in any way colluding with injustice or complacency about it. No, no, no, no, no. I just simply mean, the truth in this life is that sometimes people are going to score on us and there's nothing we could do about it. Or they will mistreat others and they're going to get away with it. And there's a kind of lack of acceptance of that fact that can keep us stuck on the war road and stuck with our preoccupation. So acceptance. Also in seeing the big picture is a sense of perspective. Was it that big a deal? Right? Maybe it was. But often we kind of make it bigger than it really was, or we make it seem more lasting than it really does last or as a larger portion of our life than it really is. See the big picture. In that as well, we can take it less personally. That's another element of see the big picture, you know, a sense of perspective. We can take less personally. And then ultimately we can have a feeling for the emptiness of it all. It's there, it exists, but in a foamier, lighter, less substantial way. And then the fifth element is to make a plan. And part of making a plan is knowing where you stand. It's very helpful, actually, to clarify for yourself your own moral view, your own clarity about what the facts are as best you can know them and the scale of the moral implications. How bad was it? How do you see it? How big a deal is this? And there's

something kind of freeing that helps us get out of the war to know in our bones, like how bad, really, we think it is. And we do think it's that bad. With no apologies or, you know, trying to persuade the other person, we know where we stand. Know where you stand. OK? So now I'm going to go through these.

[00:22:26] Number one, decide to take the higher road. That's really important. It can be really hard to take the higher road, to take the road of calm strength, the non-war road. It can be hard to take it because our habits tend to draw us back. And I'll explain in a moment neurologically, some of the things that make it hard to keep taking to get out of the war. But the decision to get out of the war, any one of us can make that decision at any time. Only you can make it. But, you know, kind of consistent with, I guess, my leaning here on stretching without pressure, I'm stretching here and I'm encouraging you to stretch to realize you can decide based in your heart of hearts you can choose. Go down the war road. You want to go down the war road? Go down the war road. That's your choice. And sometimes it can actually be weirdly effective to claim your choice. I am choosing to go on the war road. I know what Rick said. I know what the Buddha said. I know what Oprah said. I know what Michelle Obama said. I don't care. War. OK. But at least know that you're doing it. Take responsibility for it. Own it, right? And in the owning can come a kind of freedom. Because then if you recognize through ownership that you are responsible and you are the chooser of the road of war, that means that you can also choose a different road.

[00:23:54] A couple of things in your brain to really be aware of when you try to make this choice. First is that dopamine can get very involved in the mental processes of choosing the road of war or staying on the road of war. Because as we go back to that familiar topic, there's an anticipation of reward. Thinking about how they wronged us is weirdly rewarding. Thinking about how we might, you know, do things differently or how we might criticize them in our mind, you know, anticipated criticism, in a funny kind of way, fantasizing or ruminating about our, you know, grievances and complaints about others, our case against others can feel weirdly gratifying, right? Partly because it can, you know, maybe we think we're going to figure it out. So there's this anticipated reward. Watch that sense of anticipated reward. Dopamine is very involved in the brain about it, and dopamine can be very, in effect, addictive. It's really central to addictive processes, and I'm using the term extremely loosely here, addiction. Watch that sense of, oh, I think there's going to be some cheese down that tunnel. You know, logically, there's no cheese down that tunnel. You've been down that tunnel 100 times, never found any cheese there yet. But still, maybe the 101st time I go down that tunnel of really working my resentment, I'm somehow going to come out the other end happily. Hmm. Watch the sense of reward.

[00:25:32] The other thing is that in your brain, wanting and liking, in effect, are decoupled. So the neurology, the neurobiology of wanting, has a lot of power in persistence because, you know, back in the Stone Age, back in Jurassic Park, back in the primordial seas, being driven toward pleasure and driven away from pain was a great way to keep animals alive to pass on genes that could pass on genes. So the machinery of craving, in a nutshell, of wanting is very strong in the brain and persistent. It doesn't decay very rapidly. It keeps on going. The machinery of liking, of enjoying, is much softer, fades much more rapidly. You can watch this. So it's very important when you decide to take the higher road, to really pay attention to the rewards in it. What feels good about the road of calm strength? What feels good about getting out of the war in your head? And what's meaningful or important to you about it?

[00:26:51] And this is we're bringing in some elements both of wisdom and morality can be really helpful. Wisdom that recognizes that there's no, there's very little cheese down the road or on the road of war. And just recognizing that, recognizing that as poignant as it is, there's not much satisfaction down that road. Recognizing rationally that many wise people have counseled you to take a different road. That's wisdom. Another element is a kind of morality where you realize, you know, I'm harming myself down the road of war. And the road of war, a lot, involves ruminating about or planning or doing things to create suffering for other people, to impact other people, hmm, which violates the moral principle of not harming.

[00:27:53] The Buddha had a lovely teaching that is very pointed that I remember and helps me decide to take the road of calm strength rather than the road of war. He said there are those who do not think they will die. But those who realize that one day they will die settle their quarrels. Settle their quarrels, especially inside their own minds. OK? So decide to take the higher road. And decide again and again. You'll decide to take it, you'll be 10 seconds down it and you're down the road of war for another 10 minutes. Then you realize, whoa, I'm on the road a war. Decide to go down the road of calm strength. Reminding yourself that you're not waiving your rights, you're just exploring this other road, which includes taking action as appropriate. OK.

[00:28:57] Second, open it up and let it flow. By which I mean, get in touch, try to unpack what really happened and how it felt. When we go down the road of war, very often it's a way to keep feelings at bay. Or we go down the road of war because we have not yet thoroughly experienced all the layers and all the depths of the feelings and the thoughts and the early childhood material and the underlying longings and fully experience the body sensations that are there, understandably, as a reaction to what happened to us, including trauma, including trauma. So this second suggestion is a big one. It's important to resource yourself to be able to do this through mindfulness, maybe with a therapist. But basically you're opening it up. In terms of your own experience, especially, what does it feel like to be this aggrieved? What does grievance feel like? What does righteous anger feel like? What does sad, helpless reproach feel like? What does feeling abandoned by those who should have protected you feel like? I'm being real here. You're being real here. You're being real with the real of what it's like to be you as life lands on you. And let it flow, opening it up in all of its layers and letting it flow. Getting in touch, maybe, with the longing for a just world. In the last 10 years for me, one of the pieces of my own journey has been a kind of, what the Buddha talked about as a very important disenchantment. In Pali, the language of Buddhism, early Buddhism, Nibbida. Disenchantment, where we just kind of go, we see things realistically. Not negatively, but realistically, and we realize, wow, a lot of people disappoint. And we can still have relationships with them, we can still even love them, maybe. And wow—or certain longings for, you know, that intuitive sense of the world that could be. Yeah. Really sweet, really sweet. And in the mix of the reaction to events in ways that, you know, may not be so helpful. So this is a big territory. But the headline, the second headline is open it up and let it flow. You know, you're opening and you're letting it flow and you're not using resentment and rumination and aggrieved, you know, case making as a defense against the underlying feelings to keep them at bay. Instead, oh, you're opening it up. OK?

[00:32:09] Third, be kind to yourself. Warmhearted, tender, supportive, backing yourself, giving yourself the kind of support that other people should have, including potentially when you were very, very young. Be kind to yourself. You know? Recognize your suffering. There's a sweetness in compassion. There's a sense of justice bringing in the moral view on your own side as appropriate. Like, yeah, that was wrong. No, no. I wasn't a

little thing. They really dropped the ball. That's medical malpractice. That's negligence. That's a neighbor who lied to you or broke an agreement or, wow, they took your money and you're never going to get it back. That's a big deal. You know? A part of you talking with you, not to rev you up, but in a supportive way, in a supportive, kind way. And also being kind to yourself sometimes involves a certain muscularity, certain moxie and determination that says, yeah, this happened, and I'm going to have to take some time with this to really unpack it and sort it out. But you know, we're not done with this. We're not done with this. You know? I'm for myself here.

[00:33:31] Fourth, see the big picture. This is where bringing in qualities of radical acceptance can come in. It is what it is. It doesn't mean I'm liking it or approving of it or rolling over and doing nothing about it. But I'm not trying to fight the fact that it is what it is. It did happen or it is an ongoing condition or they are like that. You know, accepting other people, right? What's the Maya Angelou, you know, when they show you who they are, believe them, essentially, that's a paraphrase. So like, wow, you really are like that. In acceptance often is mourning and grieving. We don't want to accept it. We don't want it to be true, understandably. But, you know, they really are like that or they really can be like that. Or the government really is that way. Or a third of the people in your country are really that way, like, whoa. All right? You know? Acceptance. Also in seeing the big picture, like I said, sense of perspective, you know, what are the many forces in play, the many, many causes that led to all this? And one of the takeaways from that is to take it less personally. In a funny kind of way, I've talked about that in recent talks, taking life less personally, taking upsets with other people less personally, where you just start to see, you know, there are a thousand things that led this to come into being, maybe a dozen had my nametag on them. The rest of it pretty impersonal processes unfolding. That doesn't mean you're diminishing or dismissing the actual impact, just means you're able to take it less personally. And with that can be a growing development of one of the major guides to practice from the Buddha, the recognition of what's called emptiness. Or maybe a better translation is openness, that phenomena are open. They're not knotted and closed they're connected with each other and continually changing and flowing. And so the edges are blurring. Get a sense of that. The openness, Sunyata in Sanskrit, or emptiness of things as you see the big picture.

[00:36:05] And then last, make a plan. One of the reasons why we ruminate and resent is we don't have a plan. We don't know what we're going to do and we're not taking action as appropriate. Often as we take action we get less angry because we're taking action. Also, as we take action, it's mobilizing. We feel good about ourselves. We don't feel defeated. Now maybe the action is entirely in our own mind where we just say to ourselves, aha, I see them. I get it now. I really get it. I'm not going to make a deal out of it because I can see they have no real ability to process here. I'm not going to write a letter to all my relatives. On the other hand, going forward, guess what? I'm going to gradually let this relationship kind of fade on the vine. Or going forward, this is someone I could have a pleasant lunch with once a year and that's the scale of it. Or, you know, I'm never going to do anything involving money, or I'm going to minimize the intersections between me and this other person. Maybe it's entirely inside yourself, but you know what action you're going to take. And you know where you stand about it, how you see it morally, and you feel good about where you stand. You're claiming not out of attachment or, you know, rigidity, but you're like, yeah, no apologies. I see you, Mara. You know, the personification of evil in the early Buddhist tradition, you know, delusion, and trickery, and lying, you know, falsification, denial. I see you and I know where I stand and I know I'm going to vote. I know who I'm going to support. I know what my plan is going to be. You know? That and then take action based on your plan.

[00:37:49] So that's that's it. It's a huge topic. I wanted to cover the ground. Maybe we'll spend more time with it next week. That might be a good idea, actually. I see a couple of hands already raised. Quick summary. Decide to get out of the war. That's the most important of all. And you're going to come back to that decision again and again because the siren song of the war is very alluring. Come over here. Let's fight some more. You get really drawn that way. Two, open it up and let it flow. Unpack your reactions. Understand your reactions, recognize what turbo charges your reactions, recognize the childhood material and help it flow. That's a big one. Third, be kind to yourself, supportive, compassionate, tender, muscular, recognizing injustice when it's true. Be kind to yourself. See the big picture with acceptance, perspective, taking it less personally, and even recognizing the kind of emptiness of it all. And then last, make a plan that includes knowing where you stand. OK. All right. Good.

[00:39:04] I see—OK. So let's just pause right there. I see three, three hands raised. I'm going to close the line after Rachel. I think I'm going to jump right to people. I know I've covered a lot. I really request that if you're going to talk with me, you have a question that's clear and succinct and you can express in half a minute that's related to what I'm talking about tonight of general interest. No pressure. OK? You ready, Carol? You want to give it a whirl? All right. So I'm going to ask you, Carol, to unmute. Carol Nash. Great.

**Carol** [00:39:42] Oh, I didn't know I had a question.

**Rick Hanson** [00:39:44] Oh, then if you don't, fine.

**Carol** [00:39:46] Sorry.

**Rick Hanson** [00:39:46] You're OK?

**Carol** [00:39:48] I won't take your time.

**Rick Hanson** [00:39:49] Oh, no worries. No worries it all. I'm going to lower your hand, which I can do. OK, great. No worries. OK, good. OK, Jed. Yeah, no worries at all. So if you could mute yourself, Carol, thanks.

**Carol** [00:40:02] How do I do that? Here we go.

**Rick Hanson** [00:40:04] Great. OK, Jed, I'm asking you to unmute. I thank you, Jed. By the way, Jed has offered many, many wonderful comments in the chat. You've been well and supportive, Jed, so I want to give you big props here. OK, what's the question?

**Jed** [00:40:15] Thank you. So earlier this year, I read this book and the name of the author has escaped me, but it was called Existential Kink. And it's an interesting book. I want to get your take on her basic argument, and it relates to what you were talking about earlier about the war and when you're in the state of war, how the dopamine gets flowing, we can be caught up in the pleasurable feelings of maybe feeling energized if you're talking about anger. Her argument in that book, and I think the first part you'll agree with, it's you can recognize that there's a, in her words, kinky pleasure out of anger and other kinds of work called shadow work. But the second part of her argument is when you're real, when you recognize that, you can allow yourself to feel that pleasure and let it be. Let it be there. And then in doing that, the anger or the whatever the shadow work is will just dissipate



because in the background, in your subconscious mind, you really were just chasing that dopamine hit.

**Rick Hanson** [00:41:34] All right, let me respond. That's very interesting. So I haven't read the book. Sounds interesting. The key point number one is there are lots of different methods, and it's really OK to experiment with things, explore different things and then let reality be the jury, right? You'll see what the results are. If I'm following you right, let's suppose that a person is, you know, having a fantasy of suing and humiliating and even beating up somebody or fantasizing about doing some nasty things to them on Facebook, let's say. OK? So they're playing it out. I would myself be very, very leery of reinforcing the association of reward to those kind of fantasies. Now, if a person has a deep mindfulness and they can go into enormous spaciousness in which they're mindfully observing the fantasy at arm's length, disidentified from it and noting, oh, reward, oh, kinky pleasure, oh, sadistic delight, oh. But they're doing it with distance, not getting hijacked by it, not really getting into it, like, yeehaw. No, no, no, no. I'd be very leery of the yeehaw. But the dispassionate, disenchanted, somewhat, frankly, appalled view, you know, you're accepting yourself because we are primal animals. A lot of stuff can just arise from the primal depths. OK. But it's a really different thing to hop on board and go, yeah, this feels so good. Let's do it again. So I'd be very leery of that. OK. And I think that's the key distinction. I suspect she's kind of talking about this more spacious, disentangled, disenchanted, letting it flow with a lot of mindfulness. But I'd be leery of reinforcing it. OK, thanks, Jed. Thank you.

[00:43:44] All right you've muted yourself. Rachel, asking you to unmute great. Great.

**Rachel** [00:43:50] Rick, thanks for another lovely meditation and talk. Something that's rising up for me is, yes, recognizing the need to work on this myself. And yet I also see friends and family who are going to war right now, very prominent in my life and thinking about how can I support these people in choosing the road of peace, without, you know—just doing so in a thoughtful and intentional way?

**Rick Hanson** [00:44:18] Yeah. OK. Very good. That's a fantastically interesting exploration. So I'm responding kind of impromptu here. I find a lot it's, unless someone that you care about is about to do something just irrevocably terrible. You know, some act of violence that will get them in trouble or something really extreme. I find that when people have a real head of steam built up, and they have a lot of momentum, when they're down the road of war going 60 miles an hour driving a tank, sometimes is just really best to just be with them and to kind of almost help them do the open it up and let it flow part. Maybe that's sometimes the best we can offer. And also the kind to themselves thing, where it's not so much we're revving them up, but we're their ally and we go, yeah, you were wronged. Or really hearing them out, or how did that land on you? How has that affected you? How has what they've done cost you? What have the actual consequences been? You know? And just kind of be with them for a while about that. I find for a lot of people, no one has actually really listened to them in that kind of deep way. So, Rachel, somehow you just became the speaker and I'm going to remove the spotlight. No worries. OK, great. So people can go back to what's called gallery view and they'll be OK. OK. All good. So that often is really helpful for people. And then sometimes, you know, as you kind of match the velocity and you let them know to the extent you possibly can, maximize the joining. You know, I totally see it this way, like you do in these regards. I recognize these facts. I recognize these consequences. I recognize the relevant values, the wrongness of it, the standards, the laws, the morality, the principles that were violated. You know, you start there. And then sometimes it can be kind of helpful to explore the possibility of taking

action that is just, you know, moral, effective without a lot of hatefulness in it. Is that a possibility? You know? Can we be angry without being hateful? Right? And then sometimes there's kind of a possibility there, where you're not resisting their sense of being wronged, you're not resisting certain kinds of things they want to take, you're just wondering if it's possible to go down that road without that like hateful identification with the injury.

[00:47:29] And also related to that, and I'll finish on this point, another thing that's possible to do if it's done carefully, especially on the basis of a lot of joining, and that depends on the relationship, including as a therapist, therapists have to walk this line too, where we start with joining, but then we start unpacking it some, to open up the consideration that what happened, whatever it is, including its terrible consequences, including horrible trauma, it is always a part of a larger life. It's not the whole of the life. Again, maybe Maya Angelou, maybe not, who said, you know, what has happened to me has shaped me. But it has not defined me. It's not the whole of who I am. I am not my wound. I have a wound, understandably. They stuck that knife in and twisted, metaphorically, or hopefully not literally. But I am not my wound. I have it, but I'm not necessarily—it's not the entirety of me. So that can be helpful too, you know, to without in any way, shape, or form denying the fullness and intensity of this, right? It's what's the larger frame of the long life a person has had before this and will have after it, the many other relationships they have, the many other things in their life? In no way shape or form trying to diminish what happened, but just locating it in a larger perspective. So I would just leave it there, maybe.

[00:49:13] And being slow and watching your own tendency to want to resist their momentum and divert to them and, you know, and be real careful about that. Be real careful about that. And even an over claiming of your own responsibility, you know, like it's their life. It's their life, you know, staying differentiated even while being loving, if you are. Not feeling compelled yourself. That's a real yellow flag, feeling compelled or pressured yourself, or insistent in any way yourself. Big flags. All right? Great. Very good. Resting in warm hearted, spacious presence. That's a yeehaw. Yeehaw.

[00:50:01] OK. I've really got a wrap up. I know we're going long. I want to see if I could take the first Zoom User and then Margorie. I've never spoken with you before, Margorie or Marjorie, so I want to do this. So I'm going to be kind of quick with Zoom User. So you have your hand up. I'm asking you to unmute, Zoom User. Great. So, briefly, what is it?

**Zoom User** [00:50:28] Is there a correlation, a strong correlation, between the waring in your head that that you're talking about and not feeling comfortable in your own skin? I noticed that when I feel more at peace, happier with things in my life, less groundlessness that it's much easier to say, god bless them, whatever.

**Rick Hanson** [00:51:00] Yeah, it's really true.

**Zoom User** [00:51:01] Or it just doesn't matter.

**Rick Hanson** [00:51:03] Yeah, you're really on to something and, you know, you're describing a warm hearted, spacious presence kind of well-being, resilient well-being, basically. And you're not being complacent about or complicit with what those other people are doing. But on the other hand, we're less vulnerable to getting invaded by it. You may have heard that as the Buddha approached his own awakening, one way he described it was that increasingly things would arise, but they would not invade his mind and remain. That's the real distinction. Is that OK? Can we be complete with that? Sounds right.

Exactly what you're saying. Great point for everybody. Thank you very much. OK I'm going to mute you. And then Marjorie or Margorie, ask you to unmute. Great.

**Sierra** [00:51:55] Hi. My name is Sierra. That's my aunt's username.

**Rick Hanson** [00:51:58] Oh, gotcha. What's your name?

**Sierra** [00:52:00] Sierra.

**Rick Hanson** [00:52:01] Sierra.

**Sierra** [00:52:01] My aunt has been telling me about how great these meditations are. I've been going through this thing where someone you truly love puts a lot of guilt, blame, and shame on you. And it truly hurts you to the point where you just feel like your whole body is just trauma is just juicing through your whole body and you feel like you're almost getting high off of it because you're just like, I can't find peace and I want to find peace.

**Rick Hanson** [00:52:38] Are you looking for a kind of a take from me about that?

**Sierra** [00:52:41] Yeah.

**Rick Hanson** [00:52:42] OK. Deep thing. So if you kind of think about it in terms of the five things I've said, maybe we can kind of walk through them briskly, which would be a good example for other people. And I'll do this really quite quickly. We do record this and we post the recording. Just so you know, your face will not be shown on the recording we post, but your voice will be heard. And also we have, I think we post transcripts as well of these things. Anyway. Or YouTube makes transcripts for many of them. OK, so first, you know, there's this fundamental decision. They're doing that to you, let's say. How do you want to be about it? Right? And there's this fundamental decision that, you know, even though it's hard, maybe, I want to be about it in a way that's relatively strong and calm and on my own side, but not over the top. And I don't want to think about it a lot. And I also want to figure out what to do about them. Like, do I just want to get out of this relationship altogether? So it's that fundamental decision that's so important, right? Do I want to get lost in what I call the red zone? Or do I want to keep strengthening and returning to the green zone of calm strength? All right.

[00:54:02] Then you kind of open it up. They say these things, open it up and let it flow. That's number two. They say these things. They do these things. Why does that make you feel the way you feel? Does it necessarily make it feel the way you feel? What are the underlying body sensations in the impact? What are the thoughts that get involved? You know? Just you're unpacking your experience. You're not trying to change it. You're exploring it. You're unpacking it. You're really understanding what's this about and how big a deal is it? Is this just, you know, they're kind of well-meaning but clueless? Or are they kind of shitty in some way? Are they sort of, is there some agenda they're running? Are they trying to use you in some way? What's going on here? You know, you're just sort of airing it out, trying to see clearly and you're trying to find your footing. Basically, that's the second step.

[00:55:03] And in the second step, sometimes you start to realize that there are some important psychological resources, inner strengths that would be good to have even stronger like unconditional self-worth, or kind of disentangling from people who bring a

criticism to you that may have been brought a lot when you were a kid and it's kind of in you, but more and more you can get some distance from it as an adult. All right.

[00:55:35] Third, be kind to yourself. They're being mean to you or being kind of shaming, well, it's important, especially then, for you to be validating and encouraging and warm. Seeing you as a whole. Anybody who's coming at you like that isn't seeing the whole you. They're picking at something, right? They're not seeing the whole you. So you can, in this third aspect, be kind to yourself. You can bring, you know, you can see the whole you. Maybe they're finding fault with something, yeah, you kind of blew it, or, yeah, you have that tendency. But come on, see the big picture of Sierra as a whole, who she is, right, who you are as a whole. OK. And so be kind yourself.

[00:56:19] Then fourth, see the big picture. How is this person? Are they part of a family system? Are they part of a friend network? Do they come out of a certain culture? Do they have a certain history? Is there a certain relationship model that you're functioning within with them? A kind of paradigm, you know? Is it part of a larger society? Throw in all kinds of stuff, politics, economics, gender socialization, religion, whatever, just the whole kit and caboodle and then extend it out into history, you start seeing the bigger picture. Helps you take it less personally. Helps you kind of, you know, they are this way. I'm probably—you're probably not going to change them. What you can do is get some distance from them. Maybe you can maybe get other people involved. You can maybe be less reactive to it. But you know, there's a certain acceptance, including accepting your reactions. Of course I feel this way given how they're being. You know, see the big picture. And in that, you know, you can kind of see the airiness of it. Instead of it being a tightly knotted sort of brick, big picture.

[00:57:27] And then last, make a plan. OK. What are you going to do, if only inside your own head? How do you see it? You know, how bad is it what they're doing? You know? What's your own considered view? Take your stand. You have a right to your stand. Know what your stand is. Claim your ground. Stand tall. Not in some kind of hateful road of war sort of way, but unapologetically with confidence and dignity. What's my view?

**Sierra** [00:57:58] What if I use the I language, where you say, you know, I was triggered by when you did this. You know?

**Rick Hanson** [00:58:06] Yeah, that works.

**Sierra** [00:58:08] Without blaming them.

**Rick Hanson** [00:58:09] If you want to take—right, that could be part of your plan to use that I language, I statements. Sometimes nonviolent communication, you know, when X happened, I feel Y because I need Z. You know, so you're honoring your own experience and you're taking responsibility for it. Exactly right. What's part of the plan and know what your stand is.