

# 2004-11-01 Leadership Qualities

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## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdaal

So since I started teaching during being a Buddhist teacher about 1990 I think it's the fourth presidential election that I teach the night before the night before. And, and this one, there seems to be a lot more anxiety around this one than the other ones that I've been before. And I'm rather impressed by the degree of anxiety that seems to be gripped a lot of people. And in the way it's least, you know, publicized over and over again is that half of the American population are going to be disappointed. They do terribly disappointed It's seemingly the other half the other half, I guess we'll be happy. And it seems kind of sad, but it's set up that way. You know, I don't actually, sometimes I don't like competitive sports when you have two teams and one team wins or loses. It's so sad. Lewis, when I go when I run with my son when he has to race me, so sometimes we raced all kinds of ways. I let him win, I win. But I also like to arrange it so that we tie and then I express great happiness. Look at that. We've managed to tie we don't want that tomorrow, right.

I mean, I'll say impressed. Or things have been very impressive about this curtain election, for me is the degree of which people I know have participated, actively involved. And it seems like there's a huge network on both All three parties, I guess there are how many parties are at least three, right? Two and all the states. And how many people are out there, both both both parties, participating in the whole democratic process with getting people out to vote and calling in a whole whole range of things since quite something to see. And that's kind of my understanding of how the country was founded was the idea of participatory democracy. And the idea that people's votes count here in California doesn't count that much apparently. But in terms of the presidential election, they say but you know, places some places that counts a lot. So I have one for one friend who flew to Ohio to help there another one who went to Nevada, people going different places. And so it's kind of you know, it's kind of a kind of nice in some ways that people feel the counselor much of their position. counseling is important. They feel like you feel so motivated to do something.

And it underscores maybe all of y'all know, this is a tremendous amount of anxiety, the degree of fear that's gripped this country is just astounding. It's kind of like the kind of fear that fear and distress, anger may that sort of feelings that sort of felt after 911. And some people I know, I've talked to people talk to me. You know, actually, one person left the country already left, six months ago. And he said, I'm not going to be around for this. It's too difficult for me, and all kinds of very strong feelings that people have. So it's kind of amazing, amazing thing that should happen this way. So I just want to name it. So people use his name, sometimes useful to name things name what's happening.

And what I'd like to do this evening is to teach you about offer you a teaching sub list that the Buddha had of the 10 qualities of a Raja Raja Dhamma. And Raja is a king, kind of Indian kind of King kind of

person, monarch. But it can be for any political leader. I have participated, participated, very, very little on any kind of American political scene and any activity. But one of the most, for me, one of the biggest things I ever did was I was invited last year a year ago to a dinner with for dennis kucinich. And it was a friend of mine had a house and I'd been to the house so he comes in My house with dennis kucinich. He's running for president as well. That's interesting. That's interesting. I had dinner with my friend I've been I've had dinner table, you know, and your dinner table stuff that not that big. I said, Oh, sure. It was dinner at your table come with GoDaddy presidential candidate. So it was interesting. So I was invited. And then a week before she said, Oh, when you come Can you please do the prayer or the invocation or the whatever at the blessing at the beginning? I said, Oh, sure. You know, I'm kind of designated minister my circles sometimes so sure. I'll do that. And and, and then I showed up there and she had rented all these big tents, and picnic tables and caterer and it was like this huge event. You have like 60 people there. So I was kind of lost in the crowd. was nothing was gonna be an intimate dinner. And, and But anyway, so, but I was supposed to do this blessing, you know so what I'm supposed to do. So what I did was I evoke these 10 qualities, Roger Dharma the top 10 quote I call them the 10 qualities of a political leader as a kind of invocation as the beginning. And but what I said was that as an introduction to the invocation, they said that in America you know that America is a democracy and everybody votes, that in a sense, everybody in america is supposed to be a political leader. And these are qualities that everybody's supposed to carry with them. Everybody has some responsibility in this country for what happens because we vote and participate in all kinds of ways. And, and in that participation, everybody qualities, or attitudes or virtues that we you know, All Americans need to have not just our political leaders. So without his introduction, then I evoke these 10 qualities for the, for the people who were there. And then, and then I got an email or some kind of context saying, oh, Dennis likes that list a lot when you send it to him. Though that's kind of nice, but maybe it'll make its way in.

So

that's my foray into American politics. today's talk is not meant to be political. But the Buddha was relatively shy. Also don't shy is the right word, but you don't see in the records that he had much to do with politics, and probably couldn't back at his time because mostly, most of the places he hung out in were very, very good. Powerful monarchs monarchs are required around conquering other areas. And, and mostly to try to stay out of trouble. Because if you get in trouble with the monarch and kind of say, Well, you know, I don't think I like monarchy. The consequences were quite serious. So the Buddha, I think was, you know, Steve kind of quiet about his political views. But when he did do instead of talking about political theory, or politics that way, what he did was he offered the attitudes virtues, how we are. And you see that over and over again in history of Buddhism, that the teachings of the Buddha, that how we are sometimes more important than what we are. And so, the focus on the how. So in terms of political theory, there's, at least in ancient India, there was no real political theory is kind of what kind of political state you should have democracy or communism or socialism or you know, anything monarch, whatever, but rather, the emphasis was the Buddhist teaching was how people should carry it. So how leaders should be how people should be the virtues, the attitudes, the choices people would make. So like I like to think that rather than some idea of theory or perfect state Buddhism has more the idea of perfect housekeeping. So rather than saying there's if you finally get your house just right in a clean it enough and then you have to clean it ever more. And they the whole focus of our everybody's to get this perfectly, you know, Martha Stewart house and then we can relax. And but that's kind of silly, right? Because basically housekeeping never stops and if you have kids, you never catch up. You just always going cleaning it's amazing my laundry and, and so how you are becomes really important if you're trying to get to some final goal, that you're in trouble. But if you're focusing more on how you know it's doing the housework and how you are while you're doing it. very rewarding, and actually quite profound

experience if you focus on the how you how you are, as opposed to focusing on the goal. And so the same thing with maybe with the, you know, the Buddha's approach to politics, and was the focus was more not on the end goal in a sense, but more on how we are how we carry ourselves about. So as an introduction to these ideas, these this idea of these 10 qualities of political people little bit about political theory that you can pull out of the Buddhist teachings, and that is that the Buddha distinguished as other people, distinguished between two kinds of power between power that comes down from the top and power that comes up from the bottom. So, top down is where you have some authority figure, you have a god or you have a king or you have a dictator or If something and someone holds the power, and that power is, is, you know, is exercised among the people, and the people are live in a state of coherent coercion. They do what they're said they're told to do, and there's no questioning of it. The other form of power of government is that which is dependent on which top bottom up, we just depend, which is government of consent rather than coercion. And, and here people have power bearers leading the government leading them can have a lot of power. But it's a it depends on the cooperation and goodwill of the people who consent for it to be there. And there's some degree of democracy is meant to be that way that, you know, to government of consent, so every four years America votes for the President. And it's, you know, the person who has a position it's, it's been granted that person for four years at a time it's comes from the people in a sense, and that's where they Going up. Now, sometimes the top down approach, when it's really strong where it's held in power, by military force, for example, or fear that they can kind of monolithic and self perpetuating. It can be actually quite stable and strong sometimes in the kind of bottom up approach, which is the approach of consent. It's sometimes quite fragile, because it really depends on many people cooperating working together. And that

Corporation may or may not continue, you know, it's kind of things change. And so people kind of democracy is kind of a certainly messy thing. It's kind of a fragile phenomena. And I think it's always kind of like, kind of sloppy because it requires this level of consent and cooperation, which is always changing. So, Power BI abelian sources powered by consent consent. And so, the Buddha was encouraged or saw or want or encouraged the power by consent. The way you see it is in terms of mythology, in ancient times time of the Buddha, one myth of political power wasn't was missed to come to the top down, that people had certain powers hereditary. The Brahmins, you know, had certain authority in society. And that was kind of divine. It was kind of the universe how the universe was made was divinely sanctioned. And it was passed down from father to son down through the generations, or kingship, were somehow divine. And just, you know, people make sometimes some places people were, you know, children of a god. That's how they got to be king. The Buddha offered a different myth for how political leaders get born originally. And his mythology had a whole story. It's a story he made up he made it up but he talks About. And that's why people become leaders of the society, by the consent of the people, they're elected. And in the first king, the first, you know, back in mythological times got that position, because out of the consent out of the election out of the appointment of the people who are around, so that's what would have kind of been championed was this idea that power by consent. And you see, the only place he had any political would have had political power to formulate a society form of society was in his monastic order. And the monastic order originally was basically democracy, where every monk as soon as you become ordained, had one vote. And it didn't matter if you had been ordained for 50 years or one day, everybody had equal vote within that society. It was kind of a in some ways, it was a very horizontal society, the Society of monks. However, there was also a vertical dimension that some some monks had Greater spiritual understanding and realization. And so somehow that had to take taking into into account. But that didn't affect their vote, the most realized monk, and then least realized monkey both had one vote. So there's a kind of interplay then of kind of a Spiritual Hierarchy or vertical dimension of authority, perhaps, but then as a horizontal approach where everyone participated in decisions in the monastery and in the community.

And then there were complicated rules about voting in the ancient tradition in Buddhist tradition. One of them was that if you were in the monastery, you had to vote. There was no absentee otherwise, everybody had to vote and city really sick and they'd come and get your vote to the carry you to the voting place. And no, there was a provision for absentee ballots apparently. Or, you know, some proxy but vote by proxy.

Now in the interest of ancient tradition to the Buddha, these teachings are the primary function of a political leader was to redistribute the wealth and the interesting

to evenly distribute the wealth in some way. And the reason for the rationale for that is that poverty breeds crime and discontent and strife in society. And so you want to do whatever you can to avoid heavy poverty in your community. And so there he admits, again, Buddha told these myths of what what happened when, when there was poverty and how that was the undermined the health of a community. And then there was a teaching of the four basis of political service before kind of four approaches, you know, of what a political leader supposed to be interested in. One against this distribution of wealth to the needy. There was no so no idea everybody has to be equal equal, but there has to be no poverty. And then a second is the person had to practice kind speech. And the third why's conduct ethical conduct. And the fourth, the person needs to have a feeling for the common good. And I like this a lot, the feeling of the common good. And I think this is where I think submission really seems off to me in America right now, in that it seems to me and I don't know much about politics and even America, I feel but the the, it seems lines are drawn so tightly. It seems like people almost feel like if, you know, if our party gets elected, we have a right to do certain things. We have amended the word his mandate, right? We have a mandate to do certain things. And so if i 51% of the vote, then screw you is a little bit the sense that I get sometimes the way people talk or the way people act and behave your way of interest in in the common good, then I think that it probably wouldn't get become so partisan would be something you're interested in what everybody thinks and how to work together.

So I'll give you these lists of 10. And now, and as I give them to you don't just measure your political leaders by the absence and presence of these things. We can certainly encourage these qualities and our leaders. But maybe more important is that you find these in yourself these qualities and because in America everybody's there is a political leader of sorts, political participant But more importantly, I think that how we carry ourselves is as important as what we want, as are more important than what we want, or how we want our leaders to carry themselves. That the level of distress and fear and anger and hostility that I pick up in society these days for me is a indication that we need to look at our anger and our fear and our stability, not let it get the upper hand. And, you know, and let the hostility and the anger and the fear run, how we see the situation, see what we do, what we do and how we respond. So what we what we call upon in ourselves, we call upon these qualities as an alternative to fear, anger, hostility and these things. I read an article recently about a massive study that the International Committee of the Cross is doing? Well, they went over it, they're going around all kinds of places around the globe, where there have been wars recently, and interviewing people who have interesting kind of common ordinary people about their experiences in wars. And as they listen to all these terrible stories, what kind of surface to the top and we'll release was interesting. And what these interviews were pointing to, was the level of the stories of compassion and altruistic compassion that were found in these different war settings. And how there were people you know, Muslims who help Christians or, you know, people cross the enemy lines in order to help each other and or people, ordinary people, so called ordinary people doing extraordinary things and saying, well, I wouldn't do that. Wouldn't you do that for me if time came for that? situations where you've been offering someone a glass of water was a great act of compassion, maybe quite dangerous. So it convinces all these movements of compassion We're really impressed that in these great times of stress that compassion still seem to be expressed

by many people. And so they're continuing as a long term study to understand what, what's behind these acts of compassion during war. And tentatively, they come up with

four

kind of reasons, the rubber for conditions that seems to be it needs to be in place in order for people to express compassion in times of crisis like this. You know? And first was, they called self efficacy. The person has the ability to do something. So if a person has the ability to do something, that's one condition that their compassion can flow forth. And maybe it seems kind of maybe too obvious, but but it's not so obvious. I think that unless we unless we see where the avenues of action are, then compassion will come and the person can think of where's my compassion? Where's the compassion? Maybe the people had no ability to do anything. But people have had something to do. They acted. There was one story of a, of a Palestinian ambulance driver, who said, if there was a Israeli soldier who was wounded, and he had just killed my brother, I would still take him to the hospital. Because that's what I can do. That's, that's my role. That's my job. That's what I can help. And so people who feel like they have something to do so even offering glass of water or you know, many different things that people can do. That was one of the conditions for the flow of compassion. The second was sense of affiliation with the people. And it talks about how there's all these different ways in which people feel affiliations, affiliation with your family and your tribe and your community and your ethnicity and all that. But the people who have somehow had a kind of more wider, relaxed and broad sense of affiliation with others, so that they saw they had an affiliation with other people, and something in common with them, even if they were the so called enemy tended to have that compassion flow much more easily. So a sense of, you know, brotherhood and sisterhood, perhaps. The third condition, for full of compassion in times of crisis is a sense of reset, reset prosody, prosody, and, and that is the idea that if I was in same situation as you are, you would do this for me. Remember, once in a up in San Francisco outside to the projects up there, I was standing there. And this car Korean to stop in the middle of the intersection. And these big tough guys in the project, you know, the really big football players. I mean, the big to me, you know, I'm six foot one, and they were big and strong. And when the first woman kind of crawled herself out of the car, and these two big guys went after her, and she was yelling, and they were after her, it didn't look very good. So I just went out, I had to do something. So I went up there and stood between them and her. And, and, and I would say, you know, leave her alone and they take you know, two steps towards me and I take two steps away. And then you'd come forward and you know, I was trying to talk with them and have some exchange but I didn't know what to do. And they were big. And you know, there wasn't really was the conversation wasn't going anywhere. Useful I felt and, and then this other guy came walking up. And he said to them, you know, if you were in the same situation as her, I hope if I was in the same situation as her, I hope that you would stop and check out and find out what was going on for me. And that kind of changed the whole thing. They relaxed, she relaxed, everybody relaxed, and then the situation was just became fine after that. But somehow somehow using the sense of reciprocity, since we're all in it together, we all kind of addict turns in different situations. That was one of the conditions of these researchers found was helpful of compassion. We'll all be sick someday. So let's take care of people who are sick around us. We're all going to die someday. And then

the fourth

was

Oh, to in order to regain their moral integrity in order to regain their moral integrity, this is not supposed to be a comprehensive, you know condition. This is a tentative conclusions of these researchers come



to so far they found it really fascinating. But these are the four things they simply identified so far as responsible for the birth of compassion in times of great wars, suffering. So, people are in war, something to lose their moral integrity. He talks about people who kill did all kinds of things, terrible things, and then nor to regain the moral integrity built to feel good about themselves to do some acts of compassion.

So

So even in times of war, people can call forth within themselves great nobility, great beauty. And I think that You know, you listen to these 10 qualities of a leader that the Buddha talked about, maybe you can evoke these qualities in yourself. And then over these next days and weeks and months, or years until we decide when we can be next president, you can kind of call on these these 10 qualities. So the first quality is the leader is generosity to be generous. The second is to be ethical. And Buddhism that means lived by the five precepts at least, ethical life. The third is to practice self sacrifice. And that's a very curious thing for the Buddha to say because in the Buddhist tradition, there's not there's very little language specifically says, focus and self sacrifice. There's a lot of communication and different things, but they are self certify seems totally foreign to most of the way the Buddha taught. But for For political leaders, well for Rogers for kings, it seemed like a good teaching. You know, some some self sacrifice here is pretty good. Some of this and the kings of time acquitted were clearly self indulgent. So self sacrifice. The fourth is honesty. The Buddhist peace fellowship is thinking of coming here, coming today what they want to put out, they've asked us if we could borrow our center here to put on a series of talks, maybe in the spring that will be series will be titled, truth in the public sphere. I thought it was a nice idea. Truth in the public sphere. So what does that mean? That's anyway, so practice of truth telling. The fifth is gentleness. To Be gentle, not harsh. The six is self control. That's pretty obvious. For a leader, the seventh is practice of non anger, of not not acting or from anger and the a is a practice of non violence or the dedication to non violence and the ninth is patience and tolerance. And the 10th is non deviate the non deviation from the Dharma, the Dharma in ancient India was understood much more broadly and just like the Buddhist teachings who is practicing Dharma was kind of like the norm or the law or the truth that the harmonious pattern of how nature works reality works. So, not to deviate from the spiritual truth or truth of how things are

So if we see powers originating outside of ourselves, then these 10 qualities of a political leader are irrelevant to us as individuals. But if we see that the power resides in ourselves as individuals, and society to individuals, then I believe these 10 qualities are important for each of us. So I'll go through them again. So you guys can maybe they can kind of sink in a little bit. So, generosity, ethics, self sacrifice, gentleman gentleness, self control, non anger, non violence, patience and tolerance, non deviation from the Dharma and honesty

So in then and evoking these 10 qualities, then it becomes hopefully clear the value of a practice a life of practice, spiritual practice or a life of inner cultivation, that it's not easy to have to call forth and really rely on these qualities have these qualities really strongly in us. And so what spiritual traditions will say is that you can cultivate these you can develop these qualities, don't leave it to chance that they're there, or don't just kind of let you know. We'd rather these things can be cultivated and developed. And so spiritual life or practice life, meditation, the practice of ethics of practice generosity, the practice of self control, the practice of, of patience, that actually actually kind of develop these qualities of us and the assumption I have He said most people in society have at least a few of these 10 qualities underdeveloped in them. And probably some of you have underdeveloped and so can they be developed and become a resource become a strength, because one of the four, one of the conditions for compassion was self efficacy with some sense of having some ability to act and work in the world.

And so if you have these as strengths, they'd be come back from the resources we carry into situations, we can fall back on them and reuse them in situations that we've quite difficult and challenging for us. I hope that none of you over the next days and weeks find yourself in any kind of situation, political situation or there's challenging and difficult. But if you find yourself in such a situation, I hope that you will reflect on these 10 qualities and see if the best thing you can come out is the best. That each of us can come out. Then perhaps it will ripple out into the wider society and make a difference. That's it would be very different difference than if we respond to causes and conditions to situations with our anger, hostility and our fear. We come from a place of strength by having these 10 qualities firmly under your belt. So those are my thoughts about American politics. The center is supposed to be a nonpartisan place. And so that's about as close to that idea go. So we have about 10 minutes. Does anybody have any comments or questions or reservations? Please,

why not angry

buys a minimum. I think that

I think it's you know, anger and crepes medicine, when we act on it can create a tremendous amount of damage. And so one of the virtues in Buddhism is forbearance and forbearance usually is when you hold your anger in check, but holding your anger in check is not the same thing as repression. And so it's a very important distinction. And certainly when there's anger, it's very important not to repress it, but to actually see it clearly and acknowledge it and in some ways, kind of hold it. But there's very most anger that people have born out of something that is most angry that people have is not really necessary. It's not necessarily response to the situation. There are some times when anger maybe seems necessary, but the function of anger is to be motivating. I think the best of the best function of anger is to motivate people to do something. And hopefully they usually angry that they're motivated to do good. But that's not the primary justification that people have given me why anger is good as it motivates them to get things done. But I found I find it's very sad, because I think they're as as powerful and maybe more powerful sources of motivation, do the same work. I think compassion is can be extremely motivating. And, and you can get you know, it can motivate and get people's strength and power to go and face difficulties are faced challenges just as much as anger can. And it's if we're relying on anger, to get motivated. I feel a bit sad if that's the only thing a person knows if they can learn to work with their anger and get to the roots of it, understand the depths of it. So that maybe doesn't get triggered in the first place. But then there's a greater opportunity to let other motivating forces arise within us. And then we can act in the world from those. So non anger, you know, means a lot. So you either don't act on it or find out how to, not to, don't act on it if you have it. But if you do if you if you can see if you can uproot some of the unhealthy forms of anger that might arise. That okay as an answer, maybe I'll think about it.

Need to let go of tribal beliefs. Because what I see going on

seems to be not

really

human nature. I remember growing up I would ask questions, believe without

my tribe.

We believe this

and maybe very strong. It was natural to make very strong positions about

observing the world, that people will seem to die more and create more wars and disharmony over belief systems.

So it seems to be the dominant

feeling

So Mark says that he wants to know if there's some way in the teachings in Buddhism that helps people overcome group affiliation group identity, that can be quite strong tribal use the word tribal. And because certainly in the name of religion has been a lot of violence in the world, people benefit very strongly, but also different ethnicities and some way of going beyond close identification with a group so we can kind of take in other people. The maybe it's maybe it's kind of, I think, I think that you know, the example of the Buddha who was willing to go and meet anybody. He traveled around India, he met the poor, he met the rich he met all people all conditions through his door was open for everybody. And he didn't seem to discriminate the who we both talked to, but also who he included in the In the mastic order, the monastic order was kind of this, this society, where ethnic and economic and all kinds of different divisions broke down within this nasty community. And so they all live together. So there's an example of a community that's managed to do that. There was that it's not not until really America that we did you see, Buddhist monastic communities where men and women live together as equals. And so that's something that's was probably culturally quite impossible, until recently, to have that the Buddha did create a monastic order for nuns. And they were somewhat separate from the monastic community of monks. And so that division Remain, I like to think of Buddhism as being a as a religion or spiritual tradition as being one that is self destructing. That So, people's, you know, the whole idea of identity in Buddhism is one that personal identity is one that is questioned by Buddhist practice. And you look at any kind of clinging attachment to a sense of self or who what this is who I am some essentially in a central way. So, to hold on to some identity, you know, I am an American, I am a Buddhist or I am, whatever. It's a source of suffering that to hold on tight to that. And so even the idea of being a Buddhist, I'm a Buddhist, Buddhist practice kind of undermines the ability to hold on to that tightly. Isn't that great? religion itself destructs. And so, the Buddha, the Buddha, you know, I shouldn't even talk about the Buddha anymore. But so, that's it. One of the classic examples of stories around this kind of teaching is that of the raft. And Buddha said that if, if a man comes to a river, there's a raft that takes him across the river. And then the path for the other across the side of the river, continues into the jungle. He'd be foolish to pick up that raft and then put it into the shoulders, and then carry it through the jungle path. Once the brass is on, it's tricky to leave it behind. And so, you know, once Buddhism has done the trick for you, you just leave behind go on with your life. So, the idea is not to hold on to Buddhism, you know, keep it as a tight identity.