

2016-11-06 The Qualities of A Leader Dharma Talk

Fri, 9/25 9:31PM • 38:50

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, qualities, buddhism, leader, greater, oppositional, society, world, non violence, ruler, rulership, works, power, life, ethical, anger, create, buddha, country, live

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Okay. So good morning everyone. And it's been my custom for many years now to the Dharma talk before a presidential election, to give a talk on a list, because Buddhism is famous sports lists the list of the qualities of a leader, ever. The Pali word is Dhamma Raja. So the qualities of a king, that's what they had back then, nowadays, we can say, qualities of a leader. And they're just wonderful 10 qualities that their leader has. A Buddha recommends that people that leaders should have. And so maybe it's nice to be reminded of the of these things. And the, but America is kind of unusual, because we don't have King kings like they'd had in the time of the Buddha. And so we could say that these are qualities of a leader. But America is supposed to be a democracy. And so in a sense, it's, it's, there's a way in which everyone is a leader, here, rather than a follower, there's a leadership role for everyone in our society. And so rather than think of these qualities, as qualities for those people, you know, in Washington, DC, they may be the qualities for each of us in our civic role as being citizens of our society. As you probably know, there are two very general views about political power. And one is that it's top down and one is bottom up, the top down is that there is someone who has absolute authority, someone who sits in a position of power, and everyone else is dependent on their whims and their choices, their decisions. And in the ancient world, if the Buddha was that of kings, Kings had kind of absolute power. Some places in the world now we have authoritarian rulership, where that's pretty much how it works. And so your well being is really at the whim of the person who has the power. And the bottom up form of the of political power, is that those people in leadership roles are there, with the consent of the people who put them there. And there's an election and election puts people there and, and the people in power are dependent on that consent coming from the people themselves. And it's the power by consent or leadership by consent is the one the Buddha championed. But even back in his time, he couldn't, there wasn't much room for him to protest, the form of rulership, they hadn't his time, I think probably anybody who stood up on Town Square and protested the local King probably was executed. So you know, probably was not a very effective way. But the Buddha would regularly, surreptitiously kind of make these statements that were try to probably try to influence the rulers of his time to live more ethically. And one of the things he taught was that the original King, and back in ancient ancient times, and that myth of Indian Buddhism is that the original King was there. By consent by the people who selected him, he was selected by the people, because certain things were just more much more efficiently done, if there was someone in the center of decision making. And so the idea was that rather than rulership being divinely given or being somehow absolute, for some hereditary reason, it was a selection process, like we have in this country, that put someone in a leadership role. And the Power by consent from the masses going up, tends to be much more fragile than power from the top down. When it's certain kind of, you know, we've seen this, you know, in recent years, that some of the longest term longest time dictators or rulers or people have authoritarian power, and who kind of

keep everyone at bay, and some people appreciate that because it creates a certain stability. And that's some reasons why people vote for people like that is to create stability, and not to have a lot of chaos. Whereas the top from the bottom up, it tends to be much more fragile and United States we have this fragility that becomes quite clear before yours.

And you know, and this for and against and, and the parties battling it out. And sometimes it feels like war going on. And this great kind of struggle of, of democracy. And I think I think it's helpful to consider it as being something that's fragile. And that so that when we get exhausted every four years, as many people now are exhausted in this particular one, like get it over with, and the last thing you want is, you know, that somehow it's not over on Tuesday, goes on and on. And in that fragility, it's you know, it's kind of tender to be in it. It's, it's exhausting, it's tiring, it's, it's tense, it creates conflict, sometimes within families within communities. And but this is kind of the nature of the rulership from the bottom is that there's that we're participating in something which is very dynamic, and very tender. And historically, it's worked out. I don't know if it's worked out well, overall in America, but it's keeps working out. And many people are quite inspired by the transfer of power and how this works here. The but I like to think of it that the city of them bottom up, that it is giving authority to us, or we each of us have our own authority to participate and have a role. And one of the powerful ways of participating that is civil disobedience, or, you know, just going to take I'm not participating anymore. And sometimes that's had a great beneficial impact around the world. Some of the things that have inspired me the most is people like the freedom movement in in India, England was a pretty powerful authoritarian ruler of India for many centuries. And there was a relatively peaceful uprising of one that involved a lot of civil disobedience, that somehow undermine the rulership of England and India, good thing is quite impressive. And other places as well. So I raised those issues as examples of individuals banding together from the bottom up and having a voice having a say. So, as I go through these root, kind of qualities of leadership, don't just think that they're for people on you know, and in roles of power, but they're for all of us. I'd like to believe that in the United States, part of what it means to be democracy, you said, it's, it's, we're all civic leaders in our own way, being asked to participate in civic life. So in one, one place, the Buddha talked about four qualities for concerns that the ruler would have won the first and foremost he listed in this particular text is distribution of wealth to those most in need, as being one of the primary qualities of a ruler. And that in fact, the whole stability of society and the peace in society, the Buddha said is dependent on not leaving people in poverty and in need, and that king should provide the food and housing whatever is that people really need. So that there is not that, you know, the challenge of society and disruption of society that comes from when people are desperate. The second is, quality was that to be to speak kindly, kind speech was considered very important for a ruler. And the third was wise conduct, which usually understood to be ethical conduct. And third, the fourth is to be concerned for the common good, the good of everyone. So not one side or the other. But what's the common good? What's the greater good for everyone concerned? And I think this is one of the wisest ways to live our life in general, is not to live a life of us versus them, but rather live a life of us. Just us, them and not not you and I or them, them and us. But all we're all us. And that we should be considered, you know, actively consider and stretch our minds, to think about what is the greater good for everyone involved, as opposed to what's the greater good for me or for my people or for my country. And the idea, you know, that we're now living in a global neighborhood. And, you know, the world is pretty small.

And so everyone in the globe is now our neighbors. In a way they it wasn't 100 years ago or maybe 75 years ago. The idea of a global neighborhood started in about 1963 with Mr. Rogers. And those of you who were raised and Mr. Rogers will appreciate a lot of important values that came through television. The so those four, one text, so the idea of caring for the needy, kind speech, wise conduct, and considering the greater good. So that is another text there were lists these 10 qualities. And the only kind of active political thing I ever did in my life, you know, in terms of going to some kind of real political

event was I went to a dinner of when is it John Kucinich. Is that his first name? Dennis Kucinich, when he was running for president, I was invited to a dinner and I had been to the person's house up in Marin, so it wasn't like a big house, maybe it wasn't, you know, a nice house, but I had the impression they would be, you know, 10 people, 12 people and showed up and there was a catered event and yards everywhere, there were tables, and probably 100 people there. It was a political event, I thought it was going to be a nice little conversation. And but I was asked to do the prayer or the blessing or the benediction or something at this event. So I thought, What do I do in a situation like this. So I evoked these 10 qualities for it, and Kucinich came over and said, those are great, and he can have a copy. So I didn't know, you know, whether he really wanted it, or what the consequences were, I don't know. So here are the 10. So the first is generosity. So to serve in power, with a spirit of generosity. And when I thought about this, as one of the qualities of leader, I thought of how the United States treated Europe and Germany and, and Japan after the war, America poured tremendous amount of resources and money into these people that they beat, they, you know, and usually when you beat someone in war, you pillage them. And you leave them poor. But that's that's the old way. But here, United States came in for the Marshall Plan and other things. And it made a huge difference in those countries and help create lasting peace for them. Up until now, in places like Japan, tremendous act of generosity, we can say was self serving because it created a world that was much more stable than probably would have been otherwise. So generosity. So what's the generous thing to do, because generosity tends to be reciprocal. Once we start being generous, people tend to respond with kindness with care with respect. People tend not to want to take advantage of people who've been kind to them or being generous to them. It's a wonderful kind of leavening for goodwill in our society, to act generously. The second quality of a leader is ethics to be ethical. And this is one of the primary virtues of Buddhism, that we would base our life on ethical integrity, and not to do things that so that includes not involved in killing. So this is a great challenge for governments, of course, because the government's are expected to do the legal killing for us. There's 800 people on death row are waiting for dairy or waiting for state of California to kill them. And then we have, you know, military around the country around the world that we send, and their job is to create peace through unnecessary killing. And the question is, Is that necessary? How necessary is it? And is that the wisest approach to creating peace in our society in our world?

And I think that the traditional teachings of Buddhism would come to the conclusion that generally it's not a wise approach. Generally, Buddhism doesn't come I don't think I've ever seen a clear statement to Buddhism says that a government should not be involved in military action. But certainly, there's a very strong, it's very complicated issue, but very strong predisposition in Buddhism or tendency to emphasize non violence to emphasize non killing. And so if that's in the forefront of a leader, what kind of creative thinking creative reflection goes on, to try to come up with creative solutions that don't involve the military.

Many years ago, when I was living in Palo Alto, a woman came up to me and I were I was teaching Palo Alto and this woman came up to me and said, You know, I've been practicing for a while, and kind of into Buddhism, and but I'm afraid of walking around Palo Alto at night. And so I want to get a gun. What do you think? And now, certainly glad she was asking. And you know, I was kind of reluctant to say what I thought, actually. But what I said in reply more creatively, I said, is my wish that before doing something like that, that you investigate all the other creative ways to keep yourself safe. Maybe there's other ways to do it. And maybe there's other ways, maybe they're better, maybe they're as good or maybe they're good enough, that we don't have to contribute to an over armed society. And so you know, what you know. So there are, there are other ways of defending oneself doesn't have to be only through a gun, sometimes a gun is the easy way, or the military is the easy way. So I think the precepts the ethics or Buddhism, hopefully least slows rulers down. Slow down, wait a minute, didn't realize what you're about to do. So not stealing, not lying, they're all forms of being ethical. The third quality of a ruler is self sacrifice. So if you compare, the more the greater their leadership, the greater responsibility

and role a person has, the understanding of Buddhism is, the more you're kind of sacrificing yourself, you're kind of willing to stretch yourself, it's not for you that you're doing this, not for your sake. It's not for your status, it's not for your wealth. It's not for your just to have power from powers power sake. But it's really a willingness to kind of enter into something and stretch yourself and put yourself aside and your needs your situation aside to some degree, so that you can really devote yourself to the well being of others, and be and have that be in the forefront. The next quality of a leader is to be honest. And honesty is a very high virtue in Buddhism, and so to live as honestly as you can. And we know that politics is full of deceit, or secrecy or not saying what's happening. And it's hard to know always given the complexity of our society and all the different issues when maybe secrecy is necessary. You know, people have to be able to talk privately and work things out among themselves before they make it public. It's hard to know what's you know, what's right or wrong. But to be reminded that honesty is highest virtue high in a really highly emphasized, and they're also to be creative to figure out other solutions. So we can stay honest, other solutions, then lying other solutions, then deceit, to staying honest, the and then others. gentleness is considered to be one of the qualities to be gentle or to have kindness, kindness be in the forefront, to not be harsh to not be, you know, I guess not be harsh or threatening to people, but rather have a gentle approach.

Some people feel that being gentle is a sign of personal weakness. And the only way that you can be strong is if you kind of are, you know, harsh and vehement and aggressive. And I don't know if that creates a good society. I don't know if that creates a world where you know, for the greater good. Sometimes the greater good comes when we see people cooperating or taking a time to talk and work things out and find a way then getting things done quickly. The next one is self control. And that is someone who is in a leadership role should have not act impulsively. They have the ability to kind of hold their whatever impulses they have in check in order to be more considered to or to take time to cooperate and check in with other people. And so to have a strong capacity of self control, and self monitoring of themselves, And then the next one is non anger. And so there's a famous story probably many of you have heard this many times, maybe. But it's worth telling. The Dalai Lama was the first one who told it to the world. Because there was a kind of a senior Tibetan Buddhist monk, who was imprisoned for many years in Tibet. And at some point, he was able to leave and escape Tibet. And he made his way to India and to Dorset Dharma Sala and had an audience with the Dalai Lama. And the Dalai Lama has heard the story and how many you know, he was several decades in prison and he asked This old man, he said, Were you ever in danger? Which I interpret to mean, who was your What was your life ever check in danger where you're tortured, if you want, he was tortured. So we know how much you ever really endanger something? And the old monk said, Yeah, I wasn't real danger. There was a time where I was in danger of losing my compassion for my prisoner by prison guards. That's quite a statement. That's, that's what he saw is the real danger to lose his compassion. And so someone else we might say, Oh, yeah, there was a real danger, I almost got angry. You know, willingness to kind of an anger, anger, the word anger in Buddhism, which has the connotation is a little bit different than sometimes it has an English, the connotation of the Buddhist idea of anger is it involves hostility. And hostility is considered never useful. a certain kind of ferocious No, or you know, is perhaps in English, sometimes it's seen as anger with no hostility. And that maybe has it as a time in place. But the kind of anger that when there's hostility, has no place in Buddhism, Buddhist practice, we're trying to free ourselves from that, because it's a form of suffering. And so to act into the, for leaders to act in the world without anger, and so that has a lot to do with the ability to control oneself and self control. And then I think the ability to reflect about other options again, to control yourself, so you can think creatively. And then the eighth quality is non violence. And Buddhist kings have not historically been non violent. Buddhism has not been an adamant, you know, champion of non violence in the way that I wish it had been. But I think that, from the time of the Buddha, that kind of the fundamental kind of ethical virtue in Buddhism is, in fact, to cause no harm. And the word here in in

Pali, is Ahimsa, which we know from, especially those of you who learned about it from Gandhi means non violence or non harming.

And I think it's really the foundation of Buddhism, because all of Buddhism come out of the precept or they dedication to not causing harm. Because the suffering that we're trying to overcome in Buddhism is a suffering we cause ourselves. And so who's causing the harm then, so to to end, all harm, causing harm is to also, you know, covers that kind of harm we caused ourselves, and the harm and the harm we caused the world around us. And to live a life of harmlessness is one of the phenomenal gifts we give ourselves, and we give the world around us. And I think it's profoundly more inspiring to have a life of harmlessness than and then life of causing harm. One of the, you know, remarkable champions of non violence in this country in the last century was Martin Luther King. And, you know, he was involved as a relatively young man in 1950s, with the bus boycott in Burlingame and Montgomery, different places in the south. And at some point, there was the buses were made segregate desegregated, so everyone could use the buses equally, and they have blacks didn't have sit in the back. And during that time, his house was firebombed and his family was threatened. He was in jail. And when the buses were desegregated, they won that particular battle. He made an announcement about how this is A time now, to reach out to those people and see them see their common humanity and, and come together as a society with goodwill for each other and love. And that's, you know, rather than him being angry at what he had to live through, he was able to put that aside and champion compassion and love at that time. And I'm inspired by that someone who goes through that kind of challenged, you know, having your house firebombed, and young kids threatened and go through so much vehemence and hate directed toward you, that he was able to put aside any anger he had, and be a champion of love after that, to me was a great example. And what if he hadn't? What would have happened then. So non violence. So the ninth quality of a leader 99th Dhamma. Raja, is patience, and tolerance Shanti Conti. and patience is a great virtue. And I think patience is a great protector of our society and ourselves. Because patience means that we don't do things impulsively, that do things that are necessarily later regret or do things because we're, you know, under stress, we were able to somehow breathe and be patient and allow things to take their course when that's the best Avenue. And tolerance is the word. Conti is a very broad word. And tolerance means a broad acceptance. And I think having a broad acceptance of everyone of people is one of the central issues of our society these days. How do we, you know, especially like in American society is becoming increasingly diverse. I would like to hope, I hope, I don't know what to say exactly. But it would be great if, as America becomes more diverse, that we learn how to live together in harmony as a diverse people, as a model for the rest of the world. Because the world is diverse. And so there's a lot of the there's tremendous amount of violence, and, and, and struggle in our world around people who are different from each other different religions, different ethnicities, different nationalities, different races. And so it's one of the big, big, big issues of our societies, how to live with acceptance from all of us. And one of the principles of, you know, acceptance, or really kind of living in a society, which is very important to consider is that it's really not good enough just to accept people or tolerate them, you know, I can tolerate you. ignorant, that doesn't feel so good, it used to be tolerated. And even acceptance can be just in the, the real step is to appreciate to really appreciate others, and even celebrate others, you know, really appreciate the gifts and the benefits that we have from living in a diverse society and valuing the benefits that come from that, I mean, that that, then I think we can start kind of working together and being together in some kind of important, important way.

So I'd like to believe this word here or patience, acceptance, tolerance, translates to the wonderful appreciation of each other and, and actively doing that, looking for that and finding out to do that. Society, they appreciate every member. And then the last of the 10 qualities of a leader is non obstruction, non opposition. And I think maybe this is the most difficult one for a politician is how to rule

without being oppositional and, or create obstruction. And so one of those things is not to see others as the enemy or not to see others as someone that we can't cooperate with, or work with. And so to be able to be in dialogue, and in conversation, and I think one of the important ways of not being politically obstructionist, or an oppositional is to be in conversation, and really hang in there and kind of find it, find common language, find common values, common understanding. And I've been for many years on on kind of a chair of an ethics committee dealing with difficult ethical grievances that people bring. And what I've seen that works and ethical reconciliation or processes is when everyone's listened to everyone's understood, and everyone understands that what we're trying to do is to find the given what happened, given the situation What's the greater good for everyone involved. And sometimes, you know, some real unethical activity happened, you have to make some strong decisions. But by the time decisions are made, everyone understands that this is for the greater good. And what I, in my involvement with the ethics committee, it takes a lot of time to do that. So if you're not patient, you know, it's very easy to think, well, let's get over this, you know, this is pretty black and white, let's just do it this way. And let's, you know, let's get rid of this person, and be done with it and move on. But the work of being non oppositional or non obstructionist doesn't mean we live doesn't mean we have to put aside our strong values. It doesn't mean what we, we put aside our clarity, but what we feel is important, but it means that we don't create use that to create opposition, but rather, we try to be in conversation and try to be creative, to find out, what's the greater good. One of the things I love is, there is a kind of wonderful oppositional way. I don't know if that's the right way, but sometimes, you know, I'm involved with many projects over the years, with other people, and many things, and, and regularly enough, it happens that I'm in situations where we have a disagreement. And so we're kind of like, you know, having somewhat intense conversation about the disagreement. And every once in a while, someone will say, Okay, well, you can have it your way. And I said, No, no, no, we have to stay. And we have to stay in that tension of this, it's really important to stay there and hang in there is not a problem. Because if we stay long enough, and if you keep talking and exploring, we might suddenly discover a third option that works for both of us. And it doesn't have to be my option or your option. And maybe there's a whole other way that we can do it. But we're not going to have the creativity to find that unless we hang in there with the disagreement. So that's like being kind of intense, but not oppositional. It's kind of like being in disagreement, different points of view, but not being obstructionist, but saying let's keep talking and finding it's going on. And maybe there's a way that works for both of us, as opposed to it has to be my way. So 10 qualities of a Dhamma Raja of Dhamma. Here, we're translating as qualities. The word Dharma has many meanings. Sometimes it means mental qualities. Sometimes it means practices. It also can mean the truth, or the kind of fundamental kind of laws of the universe kind of. So exactly how we want to understand it here but the 10 dharmas for a ruler, our generosity, ethics, self sacrifice, gentleness, self control? Or is it the honesty I forgot? I skipped honesty, non anger, non violence patients and non obstructionists non oppositional So, since each of you the benefit of being in this country is that each of you is a leader. Each of you is a civic leader in your own little way, or big way. And don't give away your power to others, but find a way to be civically involved. So that you also will discover how the 10 qualities of a leader are equally relevant for you in your life. nature of you be a leader showing how to live this way in the world. Thank you. So, we have five minutes or so. And Does anyone want to make ask a question or make a comment or offer an example of some fun, some leader who did it maybe did a wonderful example of any of these 10 qualities.

I just wanted to thank you

There are a few politicians that came out of the Indian independence movement that I can think of they had those qualities I from this southern state of Tamil Nadu and one of the earlier Chief Ministers there, His Name Is Khan mirage. He was often like to this day is like very Praise Lord. And like he when he

died he I don't know how to convert in terms of currency probably had something like hundred dollars in his bank account in here, like a very simple life and like everything I've

heard about him, like, you know, has been

I could think he probably met most of this quality. I don't want to say everything. Those one funny incident I once and not incident story I heard where they wanted to build a dam and the engineers were like, the not sure that they can do it. And he said something like light hearted, like not the people are paying you money to do this. So just figure out a solution. And so he had like a very affable nature and they can basically, he is kind of like, considered a good leader. Yeah,

I don't know. I don't know his name. But there was a recent president of Uruguay who lived. I think he refused his salary, I think. And he lived a very simple life. And he had a used car, I think like a Volkswagen Beetle or something. In old car, he had a very small little house, and that he kept living living into as president and, and ran the country for a while. And many people were inspired by his simplicity and his self sacrifice.

I just wanted I just wanted to say that was the most wonderful summary that I've heard for a long time. So I appreciate it on the whole

of Buddhist ethics. Great.

There's a man.

There's a gentleman running for congress in the San Joaquin Valley.

I can't hear him. Try try again.

There's a gentleman running for congress in the San Joaquin Valley that the people who are running against him are accusing him of going after people with the buzzsaw and lots of stuff that would resonate with farmers and people living in a rural district. And he has not come after them in a hard way. He just continues plodding along in talking to people in this poorest district in California. We'll see what happens on Tuesday. His name is Emilio Horta.

Nice. So we have examples in the world. And but we know we need a lot more. So maybe some of you will be that the examples. So thank you all very much for today and I wish you you know, a really pleasant and relaxed and easy Tuesday. Thank you.