

Recycle the Reaction - Beginner, Intermediate, & Advanced Examples ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 I define mindfulness in my own personal way as bringing a three-fold attentional skill
00:00:14 set to experience.

00:00:16 So the three skills are concentration, sensory clarity, and equanimity.

00:00:23 As a result of bringing mindfulness to a sensory experience, that experience might change.

00:00:31 The change in the experience that occurs is what I call the reaction.

00:00:36 The reaction could be pleasant or the reaction could be unpleasant.

00:00:41 The idea in the Recycle the Reaction axiom is to always remember that one of the things
00:00:51 you can do with the reaction is be mindful of it.

00:00:56 So you take the reaction and you recycle it into being an object of the practice that
00:01:02 caused the reaction.

00:01:04 So if you can remember that axiom, that deals with an awful lot of situations that come
00:01:11 up in practice that cause people to have questions.

00:01:15 Because it's like, okay, I did this technique and it caused this wonderful pleasant experience.

00:01:23 What should I do?

00:01:24 Well, apply the technique to it.

00:01:27 I did this technique and it caused this horrific experience.

00:01:31 What should I do?

00:01:32 Well, one of the things you can do, apply the technique to the reaction that the technique
00:01:36 caused.

00:01:38 At a beginning level of practice, one of the most common phenomena that people have is
00:01:50 that they'll do the technique and then they'll go to a certain level.

00:01:57 They'll feel like they've dropped into some sort of state.

00:02:02 And then if they attempt to maintain the technique further, they just are thrust out of that
00:02:11 and they pop back into what seems like square one.

00:02:14 It's like they're just back to ordinary consciousness.

00:02:17 I call it the 20-minute glass ceiling, sometimes jokingly.

00:02:24 You ask people, how long do you sit for?

00:02:26 Oh, I sit for 20 minutes.

00:02:27 Now, there's nothing shabby about sitting for 20 minutes.

00:02:30 In fact, I give people an even smaller minimum for daily practice.

00:02:36 But people will often say, I sit for 20 minutes and then it's just time to get up.

00:02:45 I'm back to my ordinary consciousness again and it's time to get on with the day and whatever.

00:02:53 And it's like I'm not meditating anymore.

00:02:56 And if I try to meditate beyond that, I'm just into scattered mind and ordinary consciousness.

00:03:03 So the reaction to attempting to meditate beyond the 20-minute glass ceiling is you're
00:03:10 back to the state where you started.

00:03:16 So recycle the reaction says, that's fine.

00:03:19 You don't need to do anything like that.

00:03:20 You don't need to get deeper again or struggle to get back to where you were 10 minutes before

00:03:29 that.

00:03:30 You just take that reaction.

00:03:31 It's coming up in feel, image, talk, activity, and you focus on that reaction.

00:03:37 You recycle it.

00:03:39 You make use of it.

00:03:41 And then you will grow through that, even though it doesn't seem like you have that

00:03:50 deep state that you might think is the sign of quote good meditation.

00:03:55 So that might be a representative sort of common thing that happens to beginner meditators.

00:04:03 At a more intermediate level, it's actually sort of the opposite.

00:04:09 Often people will come to me and they'll say something like, I was meditating and I dropped

00:04:20 into this deep state and then.

00:04:26 Now when they say and then, I pretty much know what they're going to say.

00:04:32 I give it 80% probability that they're going to say, and then I became terrified.

00:04:39 In other words, they spontaneously dropped into a deeper state than they'd ever been

00:04:47 in, and there was a kind of no self experience.

00:04:53 The reaction to that was fear, which is actually a very common reaction.

00:05:00 What to do?

00:05:02 Recycle the reaction.

00:05:04 Really love that fear to death, know that fear to death.

00:05:10 Just let it happen.

00:05:12 It's coming up usually primarily in feel space, that is to say the emotional body.

00:05:17 So you apply your technique to it.

00:05:20 And however long or short that fear reaction to going deep comes up, you just work with

00:05:26 it and that's sort of your task.

00:05:30 You recycle the reaction.

00:05:33 At some point you've worked through the fear.

00:05:36 The depths of your being knows that there's nothing objectively dangerous in that experience,

00:05:43 and so you are able to continue to progress.

00:05:51 Another thing that happens to intermediate meditators where they have to recycle the

00:05:55 reaction is, as the result of doing the practice, they develop an aversion to being around a

00:06:03 ordinary people, their former friends, their family, because they realize how different

00:06:10 they've become and it's like they can't relate.

00:06:14 That's definitely an intermediate phenomenon.

00:06:19 That's not where this practice is meant to lead.

00:06:21 In fact, this practice is meant to lead to the very opposite of that, a joy in being

00:06:26 with ordinary screwed up people in their screwed upness, just hanging out with them because

00:06:33 you know that you have something to give to them at a subtle level just by who you are.

00:06:39 So if you get that reaction of not wanting to be around non-spiritual, screwed up ordinary

00:06:46 people, then you see that that reaction is coming up in your own feel-image talk and

00:06:55 you apply your practice to it until you work it through.

00:06:59 Among advanced meditators, you get this very tricky thing called the dark night of the

00:07:04 soul or the pit of the void, where everything is very flat.

00:07:11 It's nice because there's not the horrific drama and suffering that you had before, but

00:07:17 it seems like your humanity has been taken away and the old edge and the old fire isn't

00:07:25 there anymore.

00:07:26 That's also a reaction to this practice.

00:07:29 When you bite into emptiness, the first thing you encounter is the skin of the apple.

00:07:36 It's not representative of how juicy the fruit actually is.

00:07:41 So if you sort of freak out because the enlightenment has a bleak side to it, then you watch your

00:07:51 reactions to that.

00:07:52 You work that through.

00:07:54 You recycle that reaction and the true spring and bounce and vitality of the void will eventually

00:08:03 manifest itself within you.