

Humility to the Vanishing Point: No Self Around the World ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 Yesterday I wrote out the, it just occurred to me to write the term for no-self in the Islamic
00:00:17 tradition of Sufism which is Fana. Then it occurred to me it might be interesting to write,
00:00:24 to look at all the words that are used by the meditating mystics around the world for their
00:00:34 version of what humility is. So here we go. So we'll start where we started last night.
00:01:00 So this is Arabic. It's pronounced Fana, F-A-N-A. And that's the technical term in the Sufi tradition
00:01:20 for what in the Buddhist tradition is called no-self. So let's juxtapose with that Hebrew.
00:01:32 It's also written from right to left. So this says Bitul Hayesh in Hebrew language. That would be
00:02:01 romanized B-I-T-U-L-H-A-Y-E-S-H. Bitul means annihilation so very similar to Fana. And Ha
00:02:15 means thee and yesh is somethingness. Somethingness of self, somethingness of world,
00:02:21 or existence. Yesh is the common Hebrew word for exist. So the annihilation of the somethingness
00:02:29 of self and world pretty much sums it up. By the way, after Bitul Hayesh comes Bria,
00:02:41 that you once you annihilate the somethingness, then you become the doingness. So you are able
00:02:49 to participate in the flip side of the annihilation, which is the moment by moment continuous arising
00:03:03 of yesh, things, from I am the divine nothing. And Fana in the Sufi tradition has exactly the same
00:03:13 thing. After Fana is something called Baka, which is now you're stabilized with the source and you
00:03:23 can understand how the world is coming from God, Allah, and so forth. So very parallel type
00:03:32 situations. So that's Islam, Judaism. Now let's look at Christianity. Now early Christianity, the
00:03:43 mystical writings were in Greek. They're called the Greek fathers. They lived in the deserts of
00:03:50 Palestine, Egypt, and so forth. And there's some amazing writings from that patristic period. So
00:04:01 what is the oldest of the Christian terms for the no self experience? Wait a minute. I think that's
00:04:15 an omega. Sorry, I think I misspelled it. Not an omicron, but I could be wrong. I should really
00:04:26 check these things out before I present them to the world. Kenosis. If we were to Romanize it,
00:04:39 K-E-N-O-S-I-S. And osis doesn't mean a disease, by the way. It means a process. And kenos in Greek
00:04:51 means empty. Interestingly, directly cognate to the Sanskrit word shunya. Because the k sound,
00:05:02 the veller stop, the voiceless veller stop of the k sound in Proto-Indo-European became a sha,
00:05:14 which is a palatalized s in Sanskrit. So actually Sanskrit is modified from the early
00:05:22 Proto-Indo-European. Greek still preserves the k sound. So kenos in Greek is a direct
00:05:33 Indo-European cognate of shunya in Sanskrit. And interesting, similar spiritual interpretation.
00:05:45 Kenosis is the process of emptying out, emptying out of somethingness that the Christian meditators
00:05:54 sought. And if you could achieve a deep enough kenosis, then you would be able to experience
00:06:06 theosis, which means godding, literally. See, Greek is a very subtle language. There's two words in
00:06:18 God, two words in Greek, theosis and apotheosis. Apotheosis is deification in the sense that the
00:06:28 ancient Roman emperors claimed to be gods. But theosis is deification in the sense that the
00:06:37 Christian who empties themselves out takes on divine attributes, not infinite power and that
00:06:46 kind of thing, but the goodness, the compassion, and so forth. So you become more godlike in that
00:06:53 sense. And culminating in, talk about a subtle use of language and an interesting word, the

00:07:04 culmination of kenosis, according to the Greek desert fathers, is to become isochristos. ISO,
00:07:15 you know what that means in Greek? It means equivalent. Isochristos is Christ equivalent.
00:07:21 Now I like to very irreverently translate that into modern English as you experience what it's
00:07:32 like to be nano Christ, a very, very, very miniature version of dying in order to be of
00:07:41 service to others. Your own personal version as opposed to the cosmic version, which is like
00:07:48 that would be the mega Christ. Okay, so kenosis. So now we've got Islam, Judaism, Christianity,
00:08:01 the Western religions. Let's go to Buddhism. So just to put it in an Indic script for the fun of
00:08:16 it. This is Devanagari, which is the North Indian alphabet used to write Sanskrit, Hindi, and such.
00:08:28 But I just wrote a Pali word in it. Anatta, A-N-A-T-T-A. And this is the famous doctrine
00:08:44 of the Buddha, no self as thing. That gets translated into various Asian languages. Let's
00:08:55 start with Tibetan. Screwed that up. Let's redo it. Not pretty.
00:09:25 In Tibetan, it's called Takme or Tame. If you romanize it, B-D-A-G dot M-E-D and another dot.
00:09:49 But it's pronounced Takme. And it literally means self and M-E-D means without or not. So that just
00:09:58 directly translates. In East Asia, you've got Chinese characters as the classical language.
00:10:14 So that's how you write it. And it exactly corresponds. Now, there's four cultures that
00:10:28 constitute the sphere of the influence of Chinese characters. Traditionally, those four cultures are,
00:10:39 of course, China itself, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. So there's local pronunciations for this.
00:10:49 Let's go down the list. In Mandarin Chinese, it would be pronounced Wu-Wa. Wu means not
00:11:06 existent or does not exist and Wa is self. So that's exactly like Takme in Tibetan.
00:11:15 In Vietnamese pronunciation, same characters are pronounced Vo-Nga. Vietnamese has a very
00:11:35 peculiar creaky tone unique to it. Vo-Nga. You can hear the tones, right? Vietnamese and Chinese
00:11:43 are both tonal languages. So in Mandarin Chinese, it's a rising tone and then a dipping tone.
00:11:49 Wu-Wa. And in Vietnamese, you can hear similar, Vo-Nga. Well, let's write it in Korean script.
00:12:02 Koreans have their own alphabet. I could be wrong about this. My Korean is very rusty,
00:12:11 but I'm pretty, I think it's Mu-Ah. M-U-A. But I know for sure what it is in Japanese.
00:12:19 Similar sounding. Japanese also have their own syllabary. Kana. Mu-Ga. M-U-G-A.
00:12:27 The Taoist also had a term for the nothingness of the liberated person. It's another Chinese
00:12:42 word meaning emptiness, actually. This character here, which is pronounced Xu. And that's sort of
00:12:51 the Taoist equivalent. So there we have sort of the world of the humility to the vanishing point
00:13:08 as cultivated in the Western and Eastern traditions.