

Sensory Clarity - 2 of 2 - No Self As Thing ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 You're watching TV and there's like something white on the TV screen.

00:00:13 And this is assuming it's a CRT, a cathode ray tube.

00:00:19 And I come in and I say, there is no thing called white on that screen.

00:00:26 And you say, are you crazy?

00:00:28 Just look, it's white.

00:00:31 And I say, are you sure?

00:00:34 Here is a magnifying glass.

00:00:39 We agree that this magnifying glass does not change what is there.

00:00:46 It does, however, increase resolution.

00:00:51 Resolution is the ability to separate things that ordinarily fall together in perception.

00:00:57 That's all that resolution means.

00:00:58 You all know the difference between a high resolution screen and a low resolution screen.

00:01:05 The large amounts of data coming through allow for separation of points that truly are separated,

00:01:12 but they would tend to fall together.

00:01:15 So we go up and we look at the white and lo and behold, as we get closer, the perception

00:01:23 white goes away and the perception red, green, blue arises.

00:01:31 The Buddha said, if you look very carefully, the perception I am goes away and the perception

00:01:38 five aggregates of identification arises.

00:01:42 Or in another formulation, the perception body goes away and the perception four elements,

00:01:50 earth, water, air, fire, arises.

00:01:55 Another metaphor, chop up a cow.

00:01:56 If you can believe this, it's in the Buddhist scriptures.

00:01:59 It's like, you can't believe this is there, but chop up a cow.

00:02:04 Can you imagine chopping up a cow in public in modern India?

00:02:09 Well, apparently in the Buddha's day it was done.

00:02:11 That'd get you in a bit of trouble.

00:02:14 He said, suppose a butcher went to a public square and took a cow and began to chop up

00:02:23 the cow.

00:02:24 At some point, the perception cow would disappear and the perception meat would arise.

00:02:30 That's actually in the Buddhist scriptures.

00:02:33 What he says is, it's even more interesting.

00:02:35 He doesn't say just any butcher.

00:02:37 He says, suppose a very skillful butcher, who really knew what they were doing, were

00:02:42 to very skillfully chop up this cow.

00:02:45 Then, I guess if you don't know what you're doing, the perception meat won't arise.

00:02:50 The perception of, oh my God.

00:03:01 But a skillful butcher, the perception cow will go away and the perception meat will

00:03:06 arise.

00:03:07 So, I think you see my metaphor here.

00:03:13 The perception white goes away and the perception red, green, blue arises.

00:03:17 Well, I would claim that when you look very carefully at at least your core subjective

00:03:24 self of thought and emotion, the perception that that is a thing and I am it will go away.

00:03:36 The perception feel, image, talk that aren't me will arise.

00:03:44 So that's my metaphor.

00:03:47 Why I think that this is worth looking into is this is 100% a perceptual research project.

00:04:01 There's nothing conceptual in it.

00:04:05 It's not like you have to conceive of the five aggregates.

00:04:09 Like, oh yeah, there must be habit forces within me.

00:04:14 Yeah, there must be a thing called consciousness.

00:04:16 Yes, there's the physical body, etc. etc.

00:04:20 This is a phenomenon of perceptual psychology and therefore is amenable to the research

00:04:29 methods that we would use for any other sensory perception.

00:04:37 We don't know how red, green, blue mix to produce something that is none of them, to

00:04:49 wit white.

00:04:50 We don't know how the visual system does it.

00:04:52 I mean, we know in some vague ways some things about the circuitry.

00:04:58 But we do not really understand how an illusory emergent property arises.

00:05:06 But someday we will.

00:05:09 It is possible, I am choosing my words extremely carefully, it is possible that when a person

00:05:18 resolves I am-ness into feel-image-talk, something like the resolving of white into red, green,

00:05:30 blue takes place.

00:05:31 Notice I said something like.

00:05:34 I don't know because we don't know about the red, green, blue thing.

00:05:39 Is white there or not?

00:05:42 What do you say about something that disappears as soon as you look closely and reappears

00:05:47 as soon as you are not paying close attention?

00:05:50 What is the existential status of that white?

00:05:55 Does it exist?

00:05:56 Well, if you don't look carefully it does.

00:05:59 But then if you look carefully it doesn't, so it sort of exists but doesn't exist.

00:06:06 Something like that may be going on when people that have used my methods get a sense of freedom

00:06:15 from their limited identity.

00:06:18 The perception I am a thing goes away and the perception feel-image-talk arises.

00:06:27 If indeed these are analogous then it is now possible to turn the lens of science on that

00:06:37 perceptual shift.

00:06:39 Well, it's not now possible but it will be possible in the next 50 years, 100 years,

00:06:45 200 years.

00:06:46 And maybe we can come up with a very convincing argument that yes, indeed, the Buddha was

00:06:52 right and Nagasena was right.

00:06:56 If we were to take this metaphor further, if we were to go beyond the perception red,
00:07:03 green, blue and deeply penetrate what is red, green and blue light, where it's light coming
00:07:13 out, right?
00:07:14 There are three different flavors or colors we call it.
00:07:19 If you ask what do they all have in common, at a deep level, what's red, green and blue
00:07:25 light?
00:07:26 What's light?
00:07:27 What's colored light?
00:07:30 These are waves of radiant electromagnetic energy.
00:07:36 And from the point of view that they are radiant electromagnetic energy, they're just different
00:07:41 frequencies of the same phenomenon.
00:07:44 The word vipassana means vipassana, means to see separately in the sense of separating
00:07:53 out strands.
00:07:56 But v in addition to apart, vipassana means to see apart.
00:08:01 But v has another force as a prefix, it means through or into.
00:08:07 So first you vipassana in the sense of separate the strands, but then your awareness soaks
00:08:13 into those strands and you start to experience feel-image-talk as vibrating space, which
00:08:20 is sort of interesting because radiant electromagnetic energy, if you ask a physicist, they'll say,
00:08:25 well, it's sort of vibrating space.
00:08:27 Now I don't know how far we can take this metaphor.
00:08:30 I'm not so naive as to suggest that it's anything more than an interesting parallel, but it
00:08:38 is an interesting parallel.
00:08:40 So after you've teased out the strands, the concentration, clarity and equanimity go into
00:08:49 the strands and the strands start to present themselves as vibrating void.
00:08:56 And then there's no distinction between feel-image-talk because they're just vibrating void.
00:09:03 The focus in technique harkens back to the early Buddhist notion of separate the strands
00:09:13 and then penetrate the strands and see their empty impermanent nature.