

# SHINZEN'S PANDEMIC STRATEGIES

00:00:00 One of the advantages of being 75 years old is I can say,  
00:00:31 in my day, such and such and such and such.  
00:00:35 And the in my day is not just the 1960s.  
00:00:44 The formative period for me was the 50s.  
00:00:49 And I was born in the 40s.  
00:00:52 I was born during World War II.  
00:00:56 So I remember a very different US.  
00:01:07 Very, very different.  
00:01:09 And I know we look out and we see lots of problems,  
00:01:16 sources of frustration and so forth.  
00:01:20 But sure.  
00:01:28 There's also, however,  
00:01:31 the extraordinary shift that has occurred  
00:01:36 that I never in my wildest dreams  
00:01:41 would have thought could occur.  
00:01:43 The US of my formative years  
00:01:50 was a culture that looked eternal.  
00:01:56 I assumed things would be essentially the same  
00:01:59 when I'm 75 years old as when I was five years old.  
00:02:04 So when I was five years old, who was President Eisenhower?  
00:02:08 I think so.  
00:02:15 So that's what I thought,  
00:02:19 that's the way I thought it would always be.  
00:02:24 The notion that what is essentially an import from Asia  
00:02:32 would fundamentally impact  
00:02:36 broad aspects of North American culture  
00:02:43 is completely off the charts.  
00:02:48 Unthinkable that anything like that would happen.  
00:02:52 So for me, because I compare to my youth,  
00:03:02 what we're doing here, what I do every day,  
00:03:06 what thousands of people are doing  
00:03:08 around the world every day with this practice,  
00:03:13 this is miraculous.  
00:03:15 It's still miraculous for me.  
00:03:23 I wanted to show you this very cool book.  
00:03:30 I think it's a cool book now.  
00:03:33 I thought it was monstrous when I was 15 years old.

00:03:41 This book is emblematic of the way things used to be  
00:03:49 vis-a-vis this practice, not all that long ago.  
00:03:54 So this book is by Ernest Becker,  
00:03:58 who it turns out was actually not a small figure.  
00:04:02 He made later in his career some substantial contributions  
00:04:10 to the field of psychology,  
00:04:15 but he launched his literary career with this book,  
00:04:20 Zen Irrational Critique.  
00:04:24 Based on essentially no knowledge whatsoever of Zen,  
00:04:36 but a desire perhaps to make a name  
00:04:40 or create a straw man that's easy to attack  
00:04:46 or what have you.  
00:04:51 He writes this book, now let's see here.  
00:04:55 I read this book and it devastated me when I was a teenager,  
00:05:00 just devastated me.  
00:05:03 Let's see here, what's the date?  
00:05:11 1961.  
00:05:13 Ha ha.  
00:05:20 So let's see what this book says.  
00:05:26 This is 1961, oops, sorry about that.  
00:05:31 Without this, I won't read it.  
00:05:34 Okay.  
00:05:42 The appeal of Zen to a variety of Westerners,  
00:05:47 both dilettantes and professionals has been increasingly  
00:05:51 and to some has been increasingly evident  
00:05:56 and to some has become a matter of concern.  
00:06:07 Appeal of Zen is a matter of concern in 1961.  
00:06:14 Zen typifies an Eastern approach to problem solving  
00:06:18 that is the opposite pole of Western ideals.  
00:06:23 The human being puppet-like manipulates himself  
00:06:26 in the hope of coercing his environment  
00:06:28 steeped in a tradition of magical omnipotence.  
00:06:32 The Zenist seeks to bring other worldly power  
00:06:35 to bear upon this worldly problems.  
00:06:39 To this question, does Zen hold forth anything of value  
00:06:44 to the West?  
00:06:45 This book makes an unremitting negative answer and it goes on  
00:06:55 and on and on and on about how the practice that we do  
00:07:02 is essentially a form of mental illness.  
00:07:06 So this is a book written by a doctor  
00:07:16 and doctors have authority.  
00:07:21 And this was a book written before these kinds

00:07:25 of practices were widespread.  
00:07:27 So I'm 15 years old, I picked this thing up,  
00:07:37 or however old I am, I was young.  
00:07:43 And it's like, oh my God,  
00:07:48 all this stuff I'm interested in is all bullshit.  
00:07:52 Why?  
00:07:53 A doctor says so.  
00:07:55 It took me a long time to recover from that.  
00:08:03 That's why I love this so much now  
00:08:05 because of the sweet revenge.  
00:08:09 Okay, the sweet revenge.  
00:08:13 We who are but of yesterday are now in all your therapy  
00:08:18 rooms and your board rooms and your military training camps  
00:08:23 and you name it.  
00:08:26 So big shift really,  
00:08:34 the notion that not only is this not superstition,  
00:08:39 magic and complete world denying nonsense,  
00:08:47 not only is it not that which people said it was  
00:08:51 in my lifetime, important people,  
00:08:56 turns out that there's a natural complementarity,  
00:09:03 a kind of natural co-evolution  
00:09:08 where the strengths of modern science  
00:09:11 and the strengths of contemplative practice  
00:09:14 can reinforce each other.  
00:09:17 And the weaknesses and dangers in each  
00:09:27 can perhaps be ameliorated  
00:09:35 and managed by the influence of the other.  
00:09:40 So yesterday I outlined four concepts.  
00:09:49 And if you know how to unpack these concepts,  
00:09:57 you'll have a sense of what a science  
00:10:02 informed contemplative based psycho-spiritual path  
00:10:09 can look like.  
00:10:10 So you'll recall, develop the skills,  
00:10:15 optimize the happy.  
00:10:23 So I'm gonna go through these four concepts  
00:10:28 and we talked about techniques  
00:10:38 and you get a lot of instruction in technique,  
00:10:44 but we also talked about the training structure  
00:10:51 wherein those techniques are implemented.  
00:10:54 Retreat practice, life practice,  
00:10:58 get support, give support.  
00:11:00 We harp on these structures,

00:11:03 establishing and maintaining them for the lifetime  
00:11:10 to at least a minimal degree.  
00:11:14 We talked about that.  
00:11:16 Another part that I alluded to,  
00:11:21 but I'd like to just fill out a little more detail  
00:11:26 is the accelerators.  
00:11:30 So you have to have the pillars.  
00:11:31 Without the pillars, you're not gonna have a practice.  
00:11:35 People will say, okay, well,  
00:11:37 are there things that can help speed it along?  
00:11:43 The practice, the progress, and yes, I would say so.  
00:11:48 We talk about this all the time,  
00:11:53 but I just wanted to mention it within the context  
00:11:56 of the online retreat that we're now doing.  
00:12:02 So one of the accelerators is,  
00:12:10 you could call it duration training,  
00:12:12 strong determination set, Adipthana, Yuzha.  
00:12:17 Sometimes we call it heroic sitting.  
00:12:20 So extending the duration of your sit in a gentle way,  
00:12:31 but understanding that eventually every one of us  
00:12:35 will have sits with no bell.  
00:12:40 I mean, guaranteed at the end of life,  
00:12:43 but also stuff happens.  
00:12:47 Where you just are sort of at the end of your rope.  
00:12:54 It's gonna happen.  
00:12:55 Circumstances will arise.  
00:13:00 And knowing that there is an ordering principle  
00:13:05 that is so primordial that it can never be disordered,  
00:13:18 no matter what state arises in mind, body, and outer world  
00:13:25 in terms of sensory impact.  
00:13:29 You can still be ordered.  
00:13:31 You can still be okay.  
00:13:32 It may not be a human ordering,  
00:13:35 but it is an ordering principle that we can abide in  
00:13:40 and merge with that connects us to everything.  
00:13:47 And one of the ways that we learn about that  
00:13:54 is by sitting as though we weren't going to get up.  
00:13:58 It's a kind of attitude.  
00:14:04 Of course we're gonna get up, but each sit,  
00:14:11 at least the way my teachers taught me,  
00:14:16 each sit should be like, I'm not gonna get up.  
00:14:20 What if there's no bell?

00:14:23 That's how I should be sitting now.  
00:14:25 So you're always aiming at finding happiness  
00:14:33 independent of conditions  
00:14:34 at the most industrial strength level.  
00:14:38 So one way to learn about that,  
00:14:46 you don't wanna damage the body.  
00:14:48 I've written and spoken quite a bit about this.  
00:14:51 You can read about it or talk to the coaches,  
00:14:54 facilitators and so forth,  
00:14:56 but no, you don't damage the body,  
00:14:59 but you push the envelope with sensations.  
00:15:03 And if you have a situation  
00:15:05 where sitting is not good for you,  
00:15:08 objectively, there's all sorts of other postures  
00:15:11 you can hold this Qi Gong stuff,  
00:15:14 where you hold your arms out, up, you squat.  
00:15:18 These are standard famous practices done all over China.  
00:15:24 To this day, doesn't necessarily have to be  
00:15:27 that the posture that you break through is a seated one,  
00:15:30 because sometimes our bodies can be damaged  
00:15:34 by very long sets,  
00:15:36 but these other postures are innocuous,  
00:15:40 although they can be very intense.  
00:15:42 So extending the duration  
00:15:46 and also extending the duration of a period of practice  
00:15:52 does not necessarily have to be seated.  
00:15:56 I used to sometimes do a six hour practice periods  
00:16:02 without a scintilla of motion,  
00:16:06 but I would do them lying down.  
00:16:09 I'd get very comfortable.  
00:16:12 In fact, very comfortable,  
00:16:14 like under the blankie,  
00:16:17 and, but I drink a lot of espresso before,  
00:16:21 so I'd be sure to easily stay awake.  
00:16:26 And then I would relax into a corpse posture  
00:16:30 that was as corpse-like still as I could muster,  
00:16:37 and then just try two, three, four, five, six hours,  
00:16:41 just not move a muscle, and just work through that duration.  
00:16:51 So it doesn't necessarily have to be,  
00:16:53 duration training is not necessarily  
00:16:56 about dealing with discomforts.  
00:16:58 It's about extending how long you can maintain quality,

00:17:05 unbroken formal practice  
00:17:08 through various kinds of situations.  
00:17:11 So here in this situation,  
00:17:18 we can still do that,  
00:17:20 and you have the convenience of your own home  
00:17:27 so that you can decide,  
00:17:28 am I gonna do a two hour block?  
00:17:31 Gonna do a four hour block, you know, before dinner, et cetera  
00:17:36 and other people will be in the Zendo.  
00:17:41 Now, when we have these things live,  
00:17:45 Cho, I actually have a question to you.  
00:17:48 I was just, when I was thinking about this talk,  
00:17:52 you know, at the retreats,  
00:17:54 we have people designate themselves as Yusa,  
00:17:59 sort of heroes, you know, that,  
00:18:01 okay, I'm gonna do this four hour block every day  
00:18:04 or something like that.  
00:18:06 I'm wondering maybe we could set something like that up.  
00:18:11 Yeah, we never translated that,  
00:18:13 but we do have virtual sit leaders  
00:18:18 doing half day shifts.  
00:18:20 So sort of their Yusa, you know, like this afternoon,  
00:18:24 Nekoya started at three and she finishes at 10.  
00:18:28 So it's sort of.  
00:18:30 Sort of that.  
00:18:32 Yeah, it was just a thought that occurred to me.  
00:18:35 Someone could say.  
00:18:36 We'll translate that.  
00:18:38 Today, you know, it's maybe under their picture  
00:18:42 or something and it's like, this is a four hour, you know,  
00:18:47 set and then other people who would be joining that set  
00:18:52 might have that inspiration in front of them, et cetera.  
00:18:55 Like we do in the physical retreats.  
00:18:57 I don't know, this is just a straight thought  
00:18:59 that occurred to me as I was thinking about  
00:19:03 things that might be helpful at the retreat.  
00:19:06 Okay.  
00:19:07 So that's a way of pushing the envelope, duration training.  
00:19:15 Then there's trigger practice where you expose yourself  
00:19:18 to sights and sounds and touches that may create states  
00:19:25 and then you apply a technique.  
00:19:27 The technique doesn't have to be a turn towards a technique.

00:19:30 It doesn't have to be focused in necessarily.  
00:19:33 It could be any technique.  
00:19:36 So I'm thinking in the practice at home situation  
00:19:42 that we're in now, there's also a lot of dimensions  
00:19:49 and directions where you could set up trigger practice.  
00:19:55 It might be actually more diversity and flexibility  
00:20:00 in the home situation.  
00:20:03 So once again, just something to consider  
00:20:07 if you have questions,  
00:20:08 but if you don't know what we mean by trigger practice,  
00:20:11 once again, the teaching staff will explain that to you.  
00:20:17 So I'm thinking we can incorporate that  
00:20:20 into the online retreats in maybe some imaginative ways.  
00:20:25 And then maybe we'd get some reports on how that worked.  
00:20:31 Most specifically, motion challenge sequence.  
00:20:38 Usually at retreats, this takes the form  
00:20:42 of just walking practice or maybe the save a time.  
00:20:47 Of just walking practice or maybe the save a tasks  
00:20:56 that are done at retreats.  
00:20:59 But in your home, you have once again,  
00:21:03 a wider range of ordinary life activities  
00:21:08 that you can attempt to stay deep with a technique  
00:21:13 whilst engaging.  
00:21:17 So yeah, you can walk around,  
00:21:22 but you could walk around in different places.  
00:21:24 You can walk in your backyard,  
00:21:26 but maybe you walk through the neighborhood.  
00:21:30 That's a different experience,  
00:21:33 but also you can putter around the house.  
00:21:36 You can really do Chan, Zen style,  
00:21:41 Karma yoga kinds of things.  
00:21:43 Try washing the dishes, try sweeping the yard,  
00:21:47 try even cooking a meal maybe.  
00:21:52 Maintaining a certain technique with a certain goal in mind.  
00:21:58 So once again, I think it will be interesting  
00:22:01 to explore the broader opportunities for motion challenge.  
00:22:13 Here's another thing.  
00:22:14 This is a little bit on the more esoteric side,  
00:22:18 but some of you are familiar with the auto speak.  
00:22:25 We often do it in a very stereotyped way  
00:22:30 in the form of auto chant in the retreats,  
00:22:34 the residential retreats,

00:22:35 but auto speak has, if you're familiar with it,  
00:22:39 you know that it has more interesting forms of practice.  
00:22:47 For example, you can arrange with another person  
00:22:54 to practice speaking from an unfixed place.  
00:22:59 They know that you might be a little awkward  
00:23:01 because you're trying to let it self-organize.  
00:23:04 So you speak from auto,  
00:23:07 but actually have a human conversation.  
00:23:11 Then they speak from auto.  
00:23:14 You could do that with another person at the retreat  
00:23:17 or with someone over the phone, et cetera.  
00:23:22 So once again, there are possibilities  
00:23:26 for other ways of practicing  
00:23:30 that we don't have so conveniently  
00:23:34 in the residential situation.  
00:23:37 So trigger practice, duration training,  
00:23:42 motion challenge sequence.  
00:23:44 And then the final accelerator  
00:23:48 is not actually like those other three.  
00:23:51 It's an attitude thing,  
00:23:54 but it's very important.  
00:23:56 It's an attitude about situations.  
00:24:03 So one aspect of happiness is getting situations  
00:24:10 to be the way we would like them to be.  
00:24:13 In fact, that's the first item on the happiness grid  
00:24:18 because that's the first thing most people think about.  
00:24:23 If there's a situation I don't want,  
00:24:29 let's change that situation, get rid of it.  
00:24:32 If there's a situation I do want,  
00:24:34 let's do what we need to do to make that happen.  
00:24:38 This practice is very relevant to situational happiness  
00:24:43 because of the general principle,  
00:24:45 what goes around comes around.  
00:24:47 If we act effectively as the result  
00:24:51 of having done this practice,  
00:24:53 then there's not the guarantee,  
00:24:55 but there's the higher likelihood  
00:24:57 and indeed the strong statistical force  
00:25:02 that in the long run,  
00:25:05 we're part of the force,  
00:25:12 the better angels of this planet.  
00:25:15 So we want to act effectively



00:25:26 and certainly not be indifferent to situations.  
00:25:32 But situation practice as an accelerator  
00:25:37 is a little different aspect of it.  
00:25:41 It encompasses our actions for the situation,  
00:25:50 but it's a broader framework.  
00:25:53 The broader framework is broadly speaking,  
00:25:56 how am I going to use this situation  
00:26:04 as an expression of my practice?  
00:26:07 So if by situation,  
00:26:14 I mean various levels of scale.  
00:26:21 So a situation can be very private, very individual.  
00:26:25 What's happening with my boil today  
00:26:34 that I have on my leg,  
00:26:35 that's a situation, a very local situation.  
00:26:39 Then there's this person in my life  
00:26:42 or that thing in my career.  
00:26:44 And then there's what's happening in the neighborhood,  
00:26:46 what's happening in the country,  
00:26:48 what's happening in the world, et cetera, et cetera.  
00:26:51 All of the above are situations,  
00:26:54 various scales of situations.  
00:26:57 So if we approach each situation  
00:27:02 with a clear strategy for how we want to grow with this,  
00:27:17 how we're going to use this as an expression of practice,  
00:27:25 essentially that monasticizes life.  
00:27:29 You might say that one of the reasons  
00:27:34 in the old days, people went off to monasteries  
00:27:37 and actually they still do even nowadays,  
00:27:40 although it's not nearly as prevalent as it was at one time.  
00:27:45 At one time, East and West,  
00:27:48 the cultures were completely monastic.  
00:27:50 Now, definitely not that,  
00:27:53 but one of the reasons people go to monasteries  
00:27:58 is not to get away from things,  
00:28:01 but to be forced to confront things.  
00:28:13 So the householders practice  
00:28:18 where we're not off in a monastery,  
00:28:29 what monasticizes the day,  
00:28:32 what turns the householders life into a monastic effect  
00:28:39 among other things, one important thing is,  
00:28:43 okay, sure, this is good, this is bad, we need to do this.  
00:28:51 We should have done that, all of that.

00:28:58 But also, how am I using this situation  
00:29:03 to optimize my ability to be part of the solution  
00:29:14 and take measures, and we do have to take measures  
00:29:23 because it's very, very easy to fall into the problem  
00:29:27 of becoming part of the problem  
00:29:29 by the way that we try to solve the problem.  
00:29:34 It happens over and over and over again.  
00:29:38 So thinking about situations of all types and all scales,  
00:29:47 as they come up for us, having some sense of,  
00:29:53 okay, here's how the practice relates,  
00:29:58 here's how the practice relates.  
00:30:00 This monasticizes the householders life.  
00:30:06 So these are the accelerators.  
00:30:10 So if you establish the pillars  
00:30:15 and then you strengthen things with the accelerators,  
00:30:20 then we're going to be in good shape, big picture wise.  
00:30:31 So that was some of the sort of logistical things  
00:30:38 that are practical things  
00:30:41 that I wanted to make sure we covered.  
00:30:45 I thought it might be fun to have a little bit of poetry  
00:30:56 in addition to my sort of highly organized prose  
00:31:06 with so many charts and so forth.  
00:31:09 So I, hold it just a second, I have an actual printed book,  
00:31:21 the collected poems of T.S. Eliot, says 1909 to 1962.  
00:31:31 So I didn't really prepare.  
00:31:35 Let me see if I can find something.  
00:31:40 There we go.  
00:31:43 That might be an interesting place to start.  
00:31:46 So I don't know much about the field of poetry,  
00:32:10 but I've had a lifelong fascination  
00:32:15 with one poet and not just any poet,  
00:32:24 but the poet universally thought of  
00:32:30 as the creator of modern English poetry.  
00:32:35 So 20th century, which is where I lived mostly,  
00:32:40 20th century was English poetry was dominated by T.S. Eliot.  
00:32:47 And I think for good reason,  
00:32:50 I'm not gonna give you a lecture on English literature,  
00:32:56 but I think there's good reason for that.  
00:32:59 You may mostly know Eliot from his dramatic works,  
00:33:10 Murder in the Cathedral is one, but also Cats.  
00:33:18 I'm pretty sure that the big Broadway hit show Cats  
00:33:24 is based on a work by Eliot.

00:33:27 So he did things in the drama area,  
00:33:31 particularly later in life,  
00:33:34 and was also influential in the theory of literary criticism  
00:33:39 in the 20th century.  
00:33:43 But it's his poetry that mostly attracts me  
00:33:49 because his last statement,  
00:33:54 at least the way I look upon it,  
00:34:00 he wrote many other poems,  
00:34:01 but I think if we look at the arc  
00:34:06 of this person's development,  
00:34:10 where he started and where he ended with his poetry,  
00:34:16 it's really emblematic of the zeitgeist  
00:34:21 or the spirit of the Western world in the 20th century.  
00:34:27 That's quite extraordinary, really.  
00:34:30 So where he ended, most of you know this,  
00:34:34 maybe all of you know this because I use it a lot,  
00:34:39 where he ended was the Four Quartets,  
00:34:42 which is many things as the name implies.  
00:34:47 It's more than four voices.  
00:34:49 And each of the four sections has many subsections.  
00:34:55 So there are many, many things in that poem.  
00:35:01 But the most important voice, the deepest voice,  
00:35:07 and the voice that hardly any of the literary critics  
00:35:11 who gave him a Nobel Prize for literature in 1948 even heard.  
00:35:16 They didn't even hear the really important voice  
00:35:23 in the Four Quartets.  
00:35:25 The really important voice is,  
00:35:29 the Four Quartets is a East-West, mostly West,  
00:35:34 East-West, mostly West, poetic manual for the awkward,  
00:35:44 intermediate zone in contemplative practice.  
00:35:52 There can be actually many awkward intermediate stages  
00:35:59 that we go through.  
00:36:01 In fact, that's one way to look at  
00:36:05 what a lifetime of practice is.  
00:36:08 One, a climatization after another, after another,  
00:36:16 from an in-between zone that was not enough  
00:36:20 in the sense that the old coping mechanism  
00:36:32 that sort of works could be epitomized,  
00:36:37 characterized by the phrase, tighten up and turn away.  
00:36:43 The new coping mechanism that this practice gives us  
00:36:46 could be described as open up and turn towards.  
00:36:49 You can see these are diametric opposites.

00:36:53 So it's difficult to avoid awkward intermediate steps  
00:37:01 where the old coping mechanism has been somewhat shed,  
00:37:06 but the new coping mechanism is not mature enough  
00:37:12 to fully deal with the slings and arrows  
00:37:17 of outrageous fortune that come to us  
00:37:21 from the outer world and the percolations of poison  
00:37:26 and pain that well up from the inner.  
00:37:30 So there can be awkward intermediate stages  
00:37:35 that we have to go through in terms of emotions,  
00:37:40 but also in terms of what I call integration.  
00:37:47 This is just a term that I've been using recently  
00:37:52 for something specific.  
00:37:55 I mean, obviously this whole path is integration,  
00:38:00 but specifically how do we integrate nothingness, no self,  
00:38:12 emptiness, borderless, decentered being?  
00:38:23 How do we integrate that into something  
00:38:27 that is humanly fulfilling  
00:38:34 and objectively admirable in the world?  
00:38:41 How do you integrate?  
00:38:44 How do you use nothing in the service of everything?  
00:38:53 It would seem like nothing would be  
00:38:55 in the service of nothing.  
00:38:57 It would seem if the goal of this practice  
00:39:02 is no self and emptiness,  
00:39:04 that this practice is not a good idea.  
00:39:08 Who wants that?  
00:39:09 And yet we know counterintuitively all over the world,  
00:39:14 East, West, ancient and modern,  
00:39:17 often without any mutual contact,  
00:39:20 the people that have followed this path  
00:39:24 have come to talk about a very special kind of nothing.  
00:39:30 So how is that in service of,  
00:39:35 how is the one nothing in service of the 10,000 somethings  
00:39:39 we need to take care of as a human being,  
00:39:43 integrating the void into a fulfilling  
00:39:48 and effective human manifestation?  
00:39:53 Some people can do it without any difficulty at all.  
00:39:57 It just happens.  
00:39:59 They drink the void and it more or less cures their ills.  
00:40:04 And they don't need any integration training.  
00:40:08 Other people need integration training.  
00:40:12 They need some help, some guidelines.

00:40:16 It's one of the reasons why we give you the,  
00:40:19 the feel great family right at the beginning,  
00:40:24 feel res, feel flow, feel bounce, feel good.  
00:40:27 These are all useful for integrating emptiness  
00:40:34 down the line.  
00:40:36 So in any event,  
00:40:39 the four quartets,  
00:40:46 the last one starts midwinter spring is its own season.  
00:40:53 So midwinter spring, right?  
00:40:56 In between.  
00:40:59 Midwinter spring is its own season.  
00:41:03 Sempiternal, though sodden towards sundown,  
00:41:08 suspended in time between pole and tropic.  
00:41:18 Midwinter spring is its own season.  
00:41:21 So time, but an in between time,  
00:41:26 in between summer and,  
00:41:30 I'm sorry, in between winter and spring.  
00:41:33 But there's also the in between time  
00:41:39 between the winter of humanity's childhood  
00:41:46 and the spring and summer of what I believe  
00:41:50 will be our maturity, our adulthood as a species.  
00:41:55 And Eliot was a conservative Christian theologically.  
00:42:05 So he had a view of history,  
00:42:12 which is that at some point in the future,  
00:42:15 history is gonna take care of itself.  
00:42:18 That would also be the summer, the second coming.  
00:42:26 I believe he was well beyond the mythological version  
00:42:32 of Christianity, but that's neither here nor there.  
00:42:37 Midwinter spring could be the individual practitioners state  
00:42:54 of gone halfway with this practice.  
00:42:59 It could be humanity's state of gone halfway  
00:43:04 to what we're supposed to be,  
00:43:08 either from a purely scientific Darwinian point of view,  
00:43:14 or hey, if you wanna sort of go archetypal like Eliot,  
00:43:19 link it to a religion, fine.  
00:43:24 And of course, and there's the mid,  
00:43:28 just the season between,  
00:43:31 he's describing the countryside in England  
00:43:34 at a certain time of year.  
00:43:39 Hold it just a second.  
00:43:40 That actually wasn't the poem I was gonna read,  
00:43:42 but since I started it, I better find it.

00:43:47 Little Gidding, Yipes 200, okay.  
00:43:53 Oh, opened right to it.  
00:43:58 Maybe I can read this.  
00:43:59 Midwinter spring is its own season.  
00:44:06 Sempiternal, those sodden towards sundown.  
00:44:11 What does that mean?  
00:44:12 Sempiternal is not a common word.  
00:44:15 You might've heard it.  
00:44:19 It means what it sounds like.  
00:44:21 It seems as though it's going to last forever.  
00:44:24 It's half eternal.  
00:44:26 So, sempiternal, seeming to last all day or forever,  
00:44:33 yet sodden towards sundown.  
00:44:37 But at the end of the day,  
00:44:40 we're back to the wet of winter.  
00:44:44 So, a day that could seem to last forever,  
00:44:49 but really is impermanent.  
00:44:55 Suspended in time, this is a great line.  
00:44:59 Suspended in time between pole and tropic.  
00:45:07 He's mixing time and space, isn't he?  
00:45:11 He's treating space-time as one thing,  
00:45:14 the same way Einstein did.  
00:45:16 I have no idea if he knew that that was the case,  
00:45:25 if it's just a coincidence.  
00:45:28 Maybe he knew something about general relativity.  
00:45:31 It certainly was in the air at that time.  
00:45:37 Suspended in time between pole and tropic.  
00:45:40 So, the polar regions are cold,  
00:45:43 the tropical regions are warm.  
00:45:48 So, you have the warm and the cold.  
00:45:52 So, the time and place are being completely woven together,  
00:46:05 space-time as a single thing.  
00:46:09 To be both appreciated and transcended, actually.  
00:46:19 Midwinter spring is its own season.  
00:46:23 Sempiternal, though sodden towards sundown.  
00:46:28 Suspended in time between pole and tropic.  
00:46:34 When the short day is brightest with frost and fire,  
00:46:41 the brief sun flames the ice on pond and ditches.  
00:46:47 In windless cold, that is the heart's heat,  
00:46:54 reflecting in a watery mirror,  
00:46:59 a glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.  
00:47:06 Sorry, I sometimes lose my composure a little bit.

00:47:11 A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.  
00:47:17 What is the early afternoon here?  
00:47:22 What is the glare that is blindness?  
00:47:26 Well, on one hand, it's just the sun doing its thing  
00:47:35 at this time of year.  
00:47:38 But there's these weird words,  
00:47:44 windless cold, that is the heart's heat,  
00:47:48 reflecting in a watery mirror,  
00:47:51 a glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.  
00:47:57 The early afternoon is our early afternoon.  
00:48:02 The early afternoon of our practice.  
00:48:05 And for Eliot, also the early afternoon of humanity.  
00:48:13 Given how he would have viewed what our future should be,  
00:48:22 what is this watery mirror?  
00:48:26 Well, it's the water on the surface of the ice  
00:48:31 that's somewhat melted.  
00:48:33 But a watery mirror is an imperfect vehicle of reflection.  
00:48:41 There's distortion, and yet it is a mirror.  
00:48:46 Some of you may be familiar with  
00:48:51 the Buddhist notion of the five,  
00:48:54 of the great mirror wisdom.  
00:48:57 There's these five wisdoms,  
00:48:59 and one is called  
00:49:02 the great complete mirror wisdom in Chinese.  
00:49:16 So, this is also a metaphor for the wisdom function  
00:49:22 of the teenage meditator.  
00:49:30 A little bit of the wisdom function is arising  
00:49:33 in your midwinter spring of your practice.  
00:49:38 But it's still a watery mirror.  
00:49:40 It's not crystal clear.  
00:49:42 And the blindness that he is talking about,  
00:49:46 about the glare that blinds you,  
00:49:52 is a direct reference to the Christian contemplative tradition.  
00:49:59 What's known as Taboric illumination.  
00:50:03 T-A-B-O-R-I-C.  
00:50:05 What a great word.  
00:50:07 We need to use that word in ordinary conversations  
00:50:11 more frequently.  
00:50:12 Taboric.  
00:50:13 It means referring to Mount Tabor.  
00:50:17 Har Tavor in Hebrew.  
00:50:21 Choshen and I have been there.



00:50:22 We've run retreats there, actually.  
00:50:25 And it features prominently in the New Testament,  
00:50:30 specifically the Transfiguration.  
00:50:33 That's where the Church of the Transfiguration is.  
00:50:38 And what happened there, according to the story,  
00:50:44 is Jesus was there with some of his disciples.  
00:50:47 By the way, it's called a mountain,  
00:50:49 but believe me, it's just a little hill.  
00:50:52 But a very important hill in the history of Western spirituality.  
00:50:59 Iconic, actually.  
00:51:01 So what happened was Jesus was there with some of the disciples,  
00:51:08 and he just rose up into the sky.  
00:51:13 Moses is on one hand, Elijah on the other.  
00:51:18 And there's this light that just knocks everyone on the ground.  
00:51:24 All the disciples are just basically physically knocked down  
00:51:30 by this radiance that's sort of illuminating,  
00:51:36 transfiguring Jesus and the two made prophets  
00:51:42 from the Old Testament.  
00:51:45 Great art, great iconic.  
00:51:49 That light, the blinding light, was called taboric illumination.  
00:51:56 We know about it, of course, from Eastern practices,  
00:52:00 where it's called the clear light of the void.  
00:52:03 Some of you have experienced it.  
00:52:05 It can come during the night or during sitting practice.  
00:52:12 If you've ever experienced it, you know it is quite intense.  
00:52:18 But even just the sea rest, the grayscale blank,  
00:52:22 is a beginning of a hint of that.  
00:52:27 So Eliot is talking about that also.  
00:52:31 In other words, he's describing England in a certain season,  
00:52:35 but he's describing the mid-practice point,  
00:52:42 where you might be after 20, 30 years of practice.  
00:52:48 In terms of, yeah, we're along,  
00:52:54 but we still have a very long way to go.  
00:53:03 Midwinter spring is its own season,  
00:53:07 sempiternal though sodden towards sundown,  
00:53:11 suspended in time between pole and tropic.  
00:53:16 When the short day is brightest with frost and fire,  
00:53:21 the brief sun flames the ice on pond and ditches.  
00:53:26 In windless cold that is the heart's heat,  
00:53:31 reflecting in a watery mirror a glare that is blindness  
00:53:38 in the early afternoon.  
00:53:41 And a glow more intense than blaze of branch or brazier



00:53:49 stirs the dumb spirit.  
00:53:53 No wind, but Pentecostal fire in the dark time of the year,  
00:54:01 between melting and freezing the soul's sap quivers.  
00:54:06 This is the springtime, but not in time's covenant.  
00:54:12 Now the hedge grow is blanched for an hour  
00:54:16 with transitory blossom of snow.  
00:54:32 Of snow, a bloom more sudden than that of summer,  
00:54:39 neither budding nor fading, not in the scheme of generation.  
00:54:49 That light was called the ungenerated light of the source,  
00:54:57 not in the scheme of generation.  
00:55:15 Between melting and freezing, the soul's sap quivers.  
00:55:22 There is no earth smell or smell of living thing.  
00:55:27 This is the springtime, but not in time's covenant.  
00:55:34 Now the hedge grow is blanched for an hour  
00:55:37 with transitory blossom of snow,  
00:55:40 a bloom more sudden than that of summer,  
00:55:43 neither budding nor fading, not in the scheme of generation.  
00:55:54 Where is the summer?  
00:55:57 The unimaginable zero summer.  
00:56:27 The End