

The Theme of Expansive and Contractive Flow

~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 What is the relationship between change and force?

00:00:06 It can happen in our sensory experience that we could be aware of change and the forces and energy that produce change.

00:00:21 I call that aspect, that theme, the dynamic aspect of experience.

00:00:32 If the change has the form of an abrupt diminishing, then I call that a vanishing, even if it doesn't completely vanish.

00:00:43 And all the other aspects of change I call flow. Now, there's lots of different flavors of flow.

00:00:53 Flow can be sort of like bubbly or it could be wavy and so forth.

00:01:01 But in the formulation that I like to use, behind all the different flavors of flow are two oppositely directed flavors of flow that we'll refer to abstractly as expansion and contraction.

00:01:21 Sasaki Roshi has a list of several dozen synonyms for this contrast.

00:01:32 Many of the synonyms are confusing, don't seem to have anything to do with the other synonyms, and sort of wig people out.

00:01:42 But what he's trying to do is point out that many things that superficially appear to be unrelated, in fact at a deep level, reflect these two sides of nature.

00:01:57 He'll sometimes call them purasu, purasu to mainasu. Can you understand purasu? Purasu. Mainasu.

00:02:09 Yes, to means and, so purasu to mainasu.

00:02:15 Interestingly, very seldom will he ever say yo to yin.

00:02:26 Yin to yo. Yin is yin and yo is yang. Although clearly these are related to the Taoist yin and yang.

00:02:36 But very seldom does he say yin yo. He prefers to use the English mainasu purasu.

00:02:45 But behind it is obviously the Taoist background of East Asian thought.

00:02:55 Mixed with the Indic element of the notion that there's a cancellation of yin and yang called zero.

00:03:07 Expansion is the principle of increase. Contraction is the principle of decrease.

00:03:15 Expansion is the principle of outward movement, outward force.

00:03:19 Contraction is the principle of inward movement, inward force.

00:03:25 So that means that as you're paying attention to sensory experience, if anything increases, that's expansion.

00:03:35 So expansion isn't this mysterious thing that someday if you finally grow up you'll be able to experience.

00:03:43 If you have a pain and it's getting bigger, that's expansion.

00:03:46 If you're listening to a sound and it's getting smaller and smaller and smaller as the airplane goes away, that's contraction.

00:03:54 Don't tell me you never experienced expansion or contraction.

00:03:58 Any increase, any decrease represents these underlying principles.

00:04:08 So what can increase? Well, intensity level can increase.

00:04:13 Of what? Anything. The talk in your head, pain in your body, hot, cold, light.

00:04:22 So expansion, contraction. No more mysterious than that.

00:04:28 One thing that it can increase and decrease is intensity level.

00:04:32 What else can increase and decrease?

00:04:35 Well, vibrations can speed up and slow down.

00:04:39 The talk in your head can get louder and softer but it can also get faster or slower.

00:04:45 The spiking pain in your knee can spike at a certain level, then it can speed up a whole lot, then it can slow down a little bit.

00:04:54 So the sort of frequency of something can increase or decrease.

00:05:00 In your body you may be aware of pressures.

00:05:04 If you take any pressure, you can analyze it, ask yourself is it outward, inward or both at the same time.

00:05:12 Frequently it's both at the same time and frequently they're clashing, producing a sense of discomfort.

00:05:20 But that's okay, those are still forces, expansion, contraction forces.

00:05:26 Have you noticed that your mind can be scattered in many directions?

00:05:30 And that it can obsess on one thing?

00:05:32 That can be looked upon as a problem or that can simply be looked upon as a manifestation of expansion and contraction.

00:05:40 And not a problem, just part of the flow of nature.

00:05:44 What happens if the attention is scattered in many directions at once?

00:05:49 If the attention is scattered in many directions at once and you're focused on the fact that it's scattered,

00:06:00 then you have high concentration on expansion.

00:06:05 And yes, you let that happen with this technique.

00:06:08 And you give up the need to have order and you just let yourself be sort of always at once kind of thing.

00:06:17 But there is concentration and clarity.

00:06:20 You're clear that you're scattered and you're focused on how you're blown in all directions at once.

00:06:28 So yes, with this technique, let that happen.

00:06:32 And if you can't get off something and you're like nailed to it,

00:06:39 you can parse that as the contractive force and not fight with it.

00:06:44 Most importantly, the spatial scope of a sensory phenomenon can increase or

decrease.

00:06:55 As I have set up these categories, touch, sight, sound, feel, image, talk,
00:07:00 every one of them has depth, width and height.

00:07:04 Now the depth, width and height, I've set up in the first category,
00:07:09 has depth, width and height. Now the depth, width and height might not be
well defined.

00:07:17 It might be sort of cloud-like and nebulous.

00:07:20 But there's a right-left measure, there's a front-back measure, there's an
up-down measure,

00:07:27 roughly for any of the spaces. Even the mind has a front and a back.

00:07:32 There's a visual part that tends to appear in front and an auditory part that
tends to be more posterior, relative to that.

00:07:41 Talk space, not very well defined spatially, but image space,
00:07:46 you've got the images in the center of image space, the images around you,
the images of your own body.

00:07:52 That's space. The space occupied by a sensory event may increase or
decrease.

00:07:59 Usually it does one or the other.

00:08:03 Very seldom do all three dimensions of a sensory volume remain completely
fixed.

00:08:11 So if it gets a little wider, expansion. If it gets a little narrower,
contraction.

00:08:18 If it gets a little larger in the front-back dimension, deeper, depth
increases, expansion.

00:08:26 Depth decreases, contraction. Lengthens, expansion. Shortens, contraction.

00:08:34 Lengthens and at the same time pulls in to the sides in the front and back?

00:08:43 Both. It's expanding in one dimension, contracting along the other.

00:08:50 If you take spaghetti dough or something and you pull it, it will expand and
contract at the same time.

00:09:05 Any change in spatial volume along one, two or all three of the axes counts
as expansion and contraction.

00:09:14 For anything. Touch, sight, sound, feel, image, talk or the corresponding
restful states for that matter.

00:09:23 The increase and decrease in intensities, the increase and decrease in
frequencies,

00:09:32 the inwards and outwards pressures in the body, the scattering and gripping
forces in the mind,

00:09:38 in the end all present themselves, if you look carefully, as stretchings and
or squeezings of the spatial volume of experience.

00:09:54 A spatial volume of sensory experience.

00:09:57 If you have a pain, you can measure it, its width, its depth, its height.

00:10:03 Take that all together, that's its spatial volume.

00:10:05 So things squinch in along one dimension, they pull out along another dimension.

00:10:12 And sometimes the whole spatial volume can increase, the whole spatial volume can decrease.

00:10:18 All three axes at once spreading, collapsing.

00:10:22 When you become very sensitive to the moment of arising of a sensory event,

00:10:29 you see that as that sensory event transitions from non-existence into existence,

00:10:36 it occupies, it creates a volume of space.

00:10:42 And when that sensory event disappears completely, that volume of space disappears, that it occupies.

00:10:51 If you totally, 100% affirm a sensory event at the moment of arising,

00:10:59 if you're just like instantly with it and instantly giving the big yes,

00:11:07 then you'll see that as soon as it's arising, it's not just a moment of arising,

00:11:18 but that as soon as it's arising, it's already passing.

00:11:23 Already passing.

00:11:26 It's arising and its beginning is its end, as T.S. Eliot said.

00:11:32 As it's arising, it's already passing.

00:11:34 That means there's a simultaneous growth of spatial volume

00:11:40 and a shrinkage of spatial volume right behind that in time.

00:11:44 So that it's both moving out and in at the same time.

00:11:49 I just give this to you as a heads up.

00:11:52 There is nothing in the world that you can do to make that experience available.

00:12:00 But you now have a vocabulary and a languaging,

00:12:08 just in case you should ever notice that as soon as something is arising,

00:12:12 it's also passing.

00:12:15 Temporally, its space is expanding and its space is contracting right behind that

00:12:22 at the same time, producing a bidirectional flux.

00:12:31 At a local level, that will often take the form of biflow

00:12:38 and then a complete disappearance, a vanishing.

00:12:43 So both gone, both gone, both gone.

00:12:47 At a local level.

00:12:49 That sums at a global level to an experience of

00:12:53 everything is simultaneously born in between expanding, contracting spirit flow.

00:13:01 And that expanding, contracting spirit flow is peppered with trillions of vanishings

00:13:09 that give it a profound tranquility at the same time.

00:13:15 So it literally goes everywhere.

00:13:20 Everywhere meaning as far out as out and as far in as in can be
00:13:25 and goes nowhere at exactly the same time.
00:13:28 That's the theme of expansive, contractive flow.
00:13:36 Thousands and thousands of human beings over the centuries
00:13:40 have become completely enlightened without ever once using the word expansion
and contraction.
00:13:46 So don't make a big deal out of this.
00:13:51 It's just a theme that can be explored.