

Touching the Heart ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 So, why did we come here? Why do we do this practice? Well, one way to think about it,
00:00:16 among many possibilities, is that we came here in order to touch the heart, both metaphorically
00:00:29 and literally. So, we know what it means to have one's heart touched metaphorically. It
00:00:40 means to access a place of unconditional love, to love deeply. That's how I would think about
00:00:58 the heart that we're trying to touch when we do this practice, when we come to a retreat.
00:01:06 So that's sort of on the emotional side. However, this is not the superficial meaning of touching
00:01:18 the heart. Not that there's anything wrong with the superficial meaning, but the kind
00:01:27 of touching of the heart that I'm thinking of, that would be the purpose for this practice,
00:01:37 is to love deeply. That would be my phrase. And I would say that the ability to love deeply
00:01:47 is related to the second touching of the heart, which I said is a literally touching of the heart.
00:01:58 So, you might think, oh, literally, then you mean touch the physical heart. No, I mean
00:02:06 touch the heart of the matter. The heart of the matter. And the heart of the matter,
00:02:14 from the viewpoint of human experience, is, well, what is human experience?
00:02:23 What is the essence of our experience at the deepest level?
00:02:31 Whenever I go to Canada, one of the things that I look forward to there is the fact that you
00:02:43 can get really good Indian food, specifically South Indian food. If you're familiar with what's
00:02:51 called the Udupi cuisine, South Indian vegetarian, can't get it very good in the US, but in Mississauga,
00:03:03 near the airport, in the Toronto area, you can get this really, really great Indian cuisine.
00:03:15 And the other great cuisine that I can get in Toronto that I don't get in Burlington or Tucson,
00:03:22 for that matter, is Hong Kong style dim sum. And whenever I go to the dim sum restaurant,
00:03:35 it always has a kind of association for me, because of the two Chinese characters
00:03:48 that in Cantonese are pronounced dim sum. In Mandarin, it's dian xin. So,
00:04:04 we like to represent the heart this way. You see it everywhere. And the Chinese character for heart
00:04:16 is actually fairly similar looking. Not a coincidence, obviously. You can even get the
00:04:25 aorta a little bit, maybe, and so forth. So, originally, it was definitely a picture of a heart
00:04:34 that looked a lot like this. So, what's interesting is the phrase dian xin, or dim sum.
00:04:57 If you're interested, you can look on Wikipedia and you'll see the same history I'm about to tell
00:05:04 you. So, dian could mean to warm, sort of warm your heart. So, that's a snack. But also, it can
00:05:24 mean to touch or to contact something. If you spot it, you touch it, you have a contact. And so,
00:05:35 for me, I always think of those two sides to the practice. The touching of the heart
00:05:45 at the deepest level. This Chinese character sum or shin, it means the physical heart,
00:05:58 but it also means consciousness, consciousness itself. In some languages, consciousness is
00:06:09 a word separate from the word that means heart. For example, consciousness in Greek is nous,
00:06:20 but the word for heart is, you know what, cardiology, right? What is it, cardium, I guess,
00:06:31 in Greek. It's different words. But it turns out that in Chinese, the word that means,
00:06:41 and also Japanese, sen kanji, the word that means the physical heart also means consciousness.
00:06:51 Sometimes you see it translated as mind, M-I-N-D, but that can be very tricky.

00:06:57 Mind can mean mental experience, meaning thought. But sometimes this character can mean that.
00:07:09 But more broadly, particularly within the context of contemplative practice, it means
00:07:18 consciousness. In other words, what I would call sensory experience. So,
00:07:25 what is it to directly touch sensory experience? Well, it's to be in the moment, right, with
00:07:40 sensory experience. So that is literally to touch the heart of the matter in the sense of, well,
00:07:48 every inner or outer heaven or hell that anybody is ever going to experience involves experience.
00:07:59 It involves sensory experience. So, if we know something that is universal to all moments of
00:08:10 consciousness, if we know something about consciousness that is universal and deep and
00:08:17 deep and helpful, well, then we could say that we have touched the heart of the matter
00:08:26 as far as our own personal happiness goes.
00:08:35 But there's also the warming of the heart, the contacting of the emotional self
00:08:45 in a way that one is drawn to service and touching the emotional self in a way that one is able to
00:09:03 deeply love, and based on that, able to effectively act in the world.
00:09:13 I would say that there is a very close relationship between these two forms of touching the heart.
00:09:27 And spiritual grown-upness, spiritual maturity, well, there's many metrics, many ways that we
00:09:38 might measure it, but one way would be the degree to which a person understands the relationship
00:09:51 between these two endeavors of touching the heart. They're very closely related,
00:10:02 because when you touch the heart in the sense of contact the nature of consciousness,
00:10:12 which is just another way to say contact the nature of see, hear, feel, of sensory experience,
00:10:20 that connects you directly to the consciousness of all other beings, not as a concept, not as
00:10:38 a wishful thinking belief, but as a inescapable moment-by-moment reality as you move through the
00:10:51 world. That fundamental alienation, the fundamental separation of inside and outside,
00:11:00 that rock-solid concept that says my identity ends with my skin. Outside the skin is out,
00:11:13 everything inside the skin and inside this head is in, and that's me, and there is a kind of
00:11:21 a brick wall that separates these two worlds and leads to fundamental alienation.
00:11:32 When you touch the deepest part of, or when a person, you, me, anyone, touches directly
00:11:44 the senses, you discover that there's a commonality. All sensory experience
00:11:58 at the deepest level has the same taste, *eka rasa*, the one taste,
00:12:06 and that one taste is universal. You are directly then connected to everyone else's consciousness,
00:12:18 and from that comes quite naturally and easily a sense of
00:12:29 loving towards each thing that manifests in front of you, if it's a physical object or it's another
00:12:42 person. It could be a saint, it could be a sinner, it could be a beautiful flower or a smelly garbage
00:12:50 can, though on the surface of consciousness, though they're all quite different, they're all
00:12:57 quite different, but at the instant of perception, what might be called the now in the absolute sense,
00:13:11 and remember, any duration is just a bunch of nows, so there actually aren't any durations,
00:13:23 there's only the nows. So when you are in the absolute now,
00:13:39 you can be aware of surface distinctions, but they're all pervaded by a deep unification,
00:13:48 and that unification not only unifies mind and body, not only unifies sense and nonsense,
00:13:59 not only unifies pleasure and pain, but also unifies inside and outside, and ultimately unifies
00:14:13 the surface with the source, you might say. True non-dual awareness. So
00:14:28 as one goes about ordinary activities during the day, one sees, hears, feels
00:14:37 the sight, sound, touch of the world, one sees, hears, and feels the image, talk, body, emotion

00:14:48 of the psyche, but they all sort of have, not sort of, they all have the same taste.

00:15:04 And that is, and therefore, each of those experiences comes from and returns to

00:15:20 the same place, and that place has been given many names confusingly over the years.

00:15:32 Confusingly over the years, and across the cultures of the world.

00:15:41 Some people call it the true self, some people call it no self,

00:15:48 some people call it emptiness, some people call it the source.

00:15:53 In the Tan Dynasty in China, they started to call it

00:16:00 in the Tan Dynasty in China, they started to call it

00:16:07 Shin Chi, it means the nature of consciousness, the nature of experience.

00:16:34 It's that same character there.

00:16:39 So, as one sees, hears, feels the world, and as one thinks and has emotions about the world,

00:16:57 if you are in that moment fully, in the absolute now,

00:17:05 then it will seem that all of the surface distinctions arise from and return to,

00:17:17 moment by moment, a single unification.

00:17:24 And that was also sometimes referred to at that same period as the Buddha nature.

00:17:40 There's the very famous story that I've commented on many times.

00:17:47 Does the dog have the Buddha nature? Yes or no?

00:17:58 It's a very famous story.

00:18:01 You can answer yes, you can answer no, you can answer both yes and no,

00:18:10 or you can answer neither yes nor no.

00:18:14 I will accept all of those answers as long as you deeply understand what each one of them refers to.

00:18:23 OK, so if moment by moment we're touching the primordial perfection,

00:18:43 the sound of sound just before you consciously hear sound,

00:18:53 the sensation in your body just before you consciously experience that sensation,

00:19:03 the primordial stirring that precedes the arising of mental talk,

00:19:14 the vibrant matrix from which that arises.

00:19:22 When we touch that moment by moment during the day in our ordinary goings and comings,

00:19:33 we connect.

00:19:36 The fundamental separation between inside and outside goes away.

00:19:42 So that the first thing that one sees or hears or feels,

00:19:48 the very first thing, the actual sparsha, the actual touch,

00:19:56 the actual contact with the now of the senses,

00:20:04 that very first taste is a taste of connection.

00:20:16 We can call that touching the heart literally, if we use heart in the Chinese sense of the word.

00:20:26 The very next thing after that is a spontaneous natural sense of love

00:20:38 for what had hitherto earlier in your life been looked upon as the other.

00:20:51 That's the next instant.

00:20:54 And then what is the next instant after that?

00:20:58 The next instant after that is whatever.

00:21:03 Maybe it's a judgment.

00:21:05 Maybe it's a plan.

00:21:07 Maybe it's nothing in particular.

00:21:10 You just move on to the next thing.

00:21:13 It's what would have been there if you hadn't meditated.

00:21:20 But because you did meditate and you stayed with it

00:21:24 until it took you to the deep end of the pond,

00:21:30 now, before all that ordinary stuff that still does occur just like it did before,

00:21:38 preceding your judgment or your plan or your association or your ignoring and moving on,

00:21:51 because it has been preceded by touching the heart literally

00:22:02 and then the warming of the heart,

00:22:06 the deep love that comes from inescapable connection,

00:22:15 because all the ordinary stuff is always preceded by what I just said,

00:22:27 the actions that we take in the world become more effective.

00:22:36 So we have that ability to love deeply and act effectively.

00:22:46 And it's optimized, it's potentiated, it's empowered by this direct contact.

00:22:55 Direct contact is exactly the same as the now, the absolute now.

00:23:06 So some of you know that a common definition of mindfulness,

00:23:15 due to Jon Kabat-Zinn, is present-centered, non-judgmental awareness or something like that.

00:23:27 But actually, if you wanted to really simplify things,

00:23:31 you could leave off the non-judgmental. It's redundant.

00:23:37 Do you understand what I'm saying? It's redundant to present-centered.

00:23:42 So most people, if you say present-centered or I'm present or something like that,

00:23:51 they can only associate it with what they've experienced.

00:23:56 So what one is likely to think is,

00:24:06 oh, present-centered must mean I'm not thinking about the past,

00:24:13 or I'm not lost in my thoughts. That's what it means to be present-centered.

00:24:22 Or when I eat, I know I'm eating. When I walk, I know I'm walking.

00:24:31 So that kind of present-centered is a good thing.

00:24:36 And in fact, that's pretty much where we start.

00:24:41 I would call that being relatively in the present moment.

00:24:46 And as I say, you've got to start somewhere.

00:24:49 So that's relatively in the present moment is where you start.

00:24:54 Hopefully that will mature to being absolutely in the present moment.

00:25:05 That's a very, very different critter.

00:25:11 You could be thinking about anything.

00:25:13 You could be thinking about the past or the future,

00:25:17 but you're instant by instant so in contact with the image or the talk and so forth

00:25:28 that there's no time to fixate time and space.

00:25:34 You don't fixate a duration.

00:25:39 You don't have the notion I've been thinking for the last three minutes.

00:25:47 To have that notion, you have to have been fixating the overall.

00:25:54 If you're just at the razor's edge of the present, well, that razor's edge cuts both ways.

00:26:05 So there can't be any extension through time.

00:26:11 Likewise, if there's no time, then there's no time for it to spread in space.

00:26:23 And so when you're in the absolute now, you're at the source of time
00:26:29 and the experience of time and space.
00:26:33 But your experience is not embedded in time and space.
00:26:42 So that's another way to think about the endeavor.
00:26:50 It's when you touch the heart, when you touch consciousness directly,
00:26:59 you have an experience that is in a sense outside of the time-space continuum.
00:27:11 Sometimes that's described as abiding in the unborn.
00:27:20 That's an interesting way to think about things.
00:27:25 Okay, so what I've said so far may sound a little bit abstract.
00:27:39 Can I make it more tangible? Sure.
00:27:46 However, I would hasten to mention that just like the metaphor of the blind man and the elephant,
00:28:00 there are many, many, many valid alternative descriptions
00:28:10 of what it is like to be in the absolute now or touching the heart of the matter.
00:28:19 Many valid descriptions.
00:28:21 There's one particular one that I like, and it's just one that I like for a variety of reasons.
00:28:32 I'm used to it.
00:28:34 I like it because it seems to have some relationship to certain things that come up in math and science and so forth.
00:28:43 And that is the paradigm of expansion and contraction.
00:28:51 So if I were to put it into words, if I were to try to describe my own experience,
00:29:04 I would say that one, in the beginning of practice, has to struggle to just keep track of what's going on.
00:29:25 As you get some skill, you're able to keep track of what's going on.
00:29:34 And more and more, you become aware that things arise and then they pass.
00:29:50 Let's say you have an experience of pain.
00:29:57 Your leg didn't hurt, and then it starts to hurt, and then it hurts, and then the bell rings.
00:30:11 That's where you start.
00:30:13 But then as you deepen, you'll notice, well, it's not quite just it started and then it lasted and then it stopped.
00:30:24 There's like a little bit of waviness on it, a little bit of fluctuation.
00:30:47 So the first view is it starts, it lasts for a while, see which side it goes from here, right?
00:31:00 It starts, it lasts for a while, then it stops.
00:31:04 But then as you pay a little more attention, you'll see it starts,
00:31:09 and maybe there's a little bit of fluctuation there. It's not absolutely the same.
00:31:25 And then you start to ask yourself, well, what's the source of that ripple?
00:31:36 It's not really very intense. You wouldn't notice it until you start to really pay attention.
00:31:44 Well, the reason there's a subtle ripple on the surface, and ripple doesn't mean it's necessarily regular,
00:31:54 but there's some fluctuation. It gets a little stronger, it gets a little weaker.
00:32:01 If nothing else, when you get distracted, it diminishes a little bit, and then when you come back to it, it sort of intensifies.
00:32:09 But as you start to fathom whence the ripple,
00:32:15 you'll see that actually underlying that seeming duration of unchangingness,
00:32:24 underlying it is a sequence of arising-passing, arising-passing, arising-passing.
00:32:35 So some of you know what, most of you I guess, are familiar with the concept of a fractal.
00:32:44 So now, okay, we have arising-passing, arising-passing, arising-passing.

00:32:50 But now, look at an arising. Let's look at a single arising under the microscope.

00:33:00 Well, turns out there's a lot of little arisings and passings modulated on that.

00:33:07 And each one of those comes from and returns, comes from and returns, comes from and returns.

00:33:16 So, as you're, if you selectively attend to just the arising phase,

00:33:29 at some point, all of the arisings become a single continuous spread of space.

00:33:42 Because before a surface, see, hear, feel arises,

00:33:52 before it arises as an opaque objectified something,

00:33:58 deep down there has to be a stirring of pre-conscious processing

00:34:06 that sort of creates a space.

00:34:15 And if you notice that space beginning to be created, and you just stay with that,

00:34:23 you are now in the absolute now.

00:34:27 And there is only the spread of the space itself,

00:34:37 while at the exact same time, whatever arises on the surface has no time to coagulate,

00:34:47 and so all of the passings merge into a single simultaneous effortless collapse

00:34:57 of the time-space continuum.

00:35:01 So, in the end, the reason something wells up is that

00:35:10 it is simultaneously spreading and collapsing.

00:35:14 In its beginning is its end. In my beginning is my end.

00:35:18 That's a line from T.S. Eliot.

00:35:21 No sooner is it arising, but it's already passing.

00:35:25 And if all of the arisings, if you're absolutely in the present moment,

00:35:32 all of the arisings become a single spread of space.

00:35:38 And all of the passings become a single collapse of space.

00:35:44 And it's like a fountain that's simultaneously gushing and gathering.

00:35:50 We might refer to that as absolute activity.

00:36:01 An activity that is so continuous that it never turns into a now.

00:36:09 It just stays as a verb.

00:36:15 By way of contrast, sometimes there's no arisings or passings.

00:36:23 Or, put it, put another way, sometimes something passes

00:36:30 and nothing replaces it for a period of time.

00:36:35 And by a period of time I mean the clock on the wall is moving,

00:36:41 but the clock inside is not moving.

00:36:46 So, yes, it's a period of time. You could say 3 seconds or 3 minutes or 3 hours,

00:36:52 whatever it is, something passed and nothing replaced it.

00:36:58 Or another way to put it that might sound a little more feasible

00:37:04 is the tug of the senses goes away.

00:37:08 There's no pull to inner or outer worlds.

00:37:13 So if there's no pull to time, there's no pull to space,

00:37:21 we might call that absolute rest.

00:37:25 So one way to describe the absolute now at a small time-space scale,

00:37:37 using now time-space in the relative sense,

00:37:40 one way to describe it at a small scale is there's a cycle.

00:37:47 There's absolute rest and then that absolute rest breaks apart.
00:37:55 We could call the absolute rest zero because it's not polarized
00:38:00 into anything that's affirmative or negative.
00:38:08 That's the answer to the koan, does the dog have a buddha nature?
00:38:13 If you answer no, that's a correct answer.
00:38:20 But you have to understand that that no, N-O, is not the no of yes versus no.
00:38:27 That's the big capital no.
00:38:55 Inevitably, that absolute rest, that singularity,
00:39:01 that spiritual black hole, in the good sense of black hole, the source,
00:39:13 inevitably it breaks apart because it's unstable.
00:39:21 It isn't a thing.
00:39:26 It's what happens when all the yeses and all the nos,
00:39:30 the relative yeses and nos, all the affirmation and negation,
00:39:39 needed to mold this or any conceivable universe,
00:39:44 when all the binary polarities simultaneously cancel out.
00:39:55 So zero is actually just all the positives and negatives.
00:40:07 When they come together, they give you zero.
00:40:10 In a sense, it's very rich, it contains everything, but it's not a thing.
00:40:19 And because of that fundamental instability, it breaks apart.
00:40:25 When it breaks apart, half of it only knows to expand,
00:40:30 half of it only knows to contract.
00:40:33 They do their thing.
00:40:36 If you stay with that, then you are that.
00:40:43 You're that alternating cycle of absolute activity, absolute rest.
00:40:50 Absolute activity, absolute rest.
00:40:53 So life on this planet is a cycle.
00:40:56 Relative activity, relative rest.
00:40:59 Or no, no, that's not the way to put it.
00:41:01 I take that back.
00:41:05 Phrenetic activity during the day and fitful rest during the night
00:41:13 is the cycle of this planet for many people.
00:41:19 So in a sense, it's a similar cycle,
00:41:27 but instead of being driven activity and fitful, phrenetic activity and fitful rest,
00:41:36 it's effortless activity and absolute, profound, big stop rest.
00:41:53 So don't you experience that cycle.
00:41:59 That's one way to describe what it's like when you touch consciousness directly.
00:42:08 So then, if that's what the source tastes like,
00:42:15 then what does the surface taste like?
00:42:18 The surface tastes like whatever, inner and outer, see, hear, feel.
00:42:24 That surface is like so much foam that's born in the cleft
00:42:32 between expansion and contraction.
00:42:36 Like when you, you know, there's this very expensive property in this part of California.

00:42:46 You're on the ocean, it costs a lot of money, right,
00:42:49 to have like a house that's, right, overlooking the Pacific.
00:42:55 Why is it that people are willing to pay so much money for that kind of property?
00:43:02 Well, one interpretation is so that you can just look out your back window anytime you want,
00:43:09 or your front window, depending,
00:43:11 and you can see the source by watching the waves.
00:43:18 When the wave comes in, you'll see that it's simultaneous expansion and contraction.
00:43:24 The surface of the wave is moving towards the land,
00:43:28 but there's an undertow that's pulling it out towards the center of the ocean at the same time.
00:43:35 And when the wave breaks, you have the, like the famous Hokusai,
00:43:42 like the waves at Kanagawa, you know, that famous ukiyo-e print, Japanese woodblock print.
00:43:52 So you have this like Hokusai wave.
00:43:57 The crest breaks.
00:43:59 The part that is expanding separates from the part that's contracting.
00:44:04 And they create a gap with a bunch of foam and a lot of noise.
00:44:12 And then at some point, you notice the force that's moving towards the shore stops.
00:44:21 The force that's pulling back stops, and there's a cessation.
00:44:26 All the foam and all the noise goes away, and then the cycle starts again.
00:44:32 How is it that D.S. Eliot put it?
00:44:37 Not seen because not looked for, but heard, half heard,
00:44:44 in the stillness between two waves of the sea.
00:44:49 And all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.
00:44:57 Okay, that's absolute rest. And then the cycle starts again.
00:45:02 Polarization, neutralization.
00:45:06 And you're aware both of the undercurrent, or both of the ocean of consciousness,
00:45:19 but you're also aware of the foam and the noise.
00:45:24 But it's just foam and noise.
00:45:28 It's just an epiphenomenon.
00:45:31 The foam and the noise are the inner and outer scenery of the senses.
00:45:45 So that you cannot contact the world through sight, sound, touch,
00:45:55 or contact the world through image, thought, body, emotion.
00:46:01 You can't contact the world or contact your own personal identity
00:46:08 without first contacting that which links everything together.
00:46:16 And that is the first touching of the heart.
00:46:22 And then from that, there will be automatically, whether you want it or not,
00:46:28 a sense of love, just like the little child.
00:46:32 Like Jesus said, lest ye become as little children, you cannot enter the kingdom.
00:46:45 So this is going back to what it was like, if you can remember,
00:46:50 in the very early part of life, the first few months of life.
00:46:59 Now, it's true sometimes, you know, the neonate is upset and crying and uncomfortable.
00:47:08 But not always, okay?
00:47:13 And when it's not upset or crying or uncomfortable, where is it?

00:47:18 What is it experiencing?

00:47:21 In recent years, I've started to remember, I mean, vividly remember,

00:47:27 my earliest experiences.

00:47:31 And they were absolutely the experience of simultaneous expansion and contraction

00:47:36 when I was okay as a little infant.

00:47:39 And at maybe around the age of two or three or four, five, six,

00:47:50 I'm not quite sure exactly where, but I can remember that going away

00:47:59 and something replacing it.

00:48:04 And I actually remember thinking, something's wrong.

00:48:11 Something's wrong.

00:48:13 What happened?

00:48:16 Everything was okay.

00:48:18 And now I'm worrying and I'm afraid and I'm always thinking about everything.

00:48:28 And I'm never really happy for no reason now.

00:48:34 I can remember losing the kingdom of heaven.

00:48:42 That I've actually remembered all my life,

00:48:44 but what I didn't remember was specifically what the kingdom of heaven felt like.

00:48:51 Of course, because I'd lost it.

00:48:54 After many decades of practice, oh, yeah, that's what it was.

00:49:00 Now I remember.

00:49:02 And fortunately, I encountered this practice that allows me to go back

00:49:10 and sort of do it again, but this time do it right.

00:49:17 Or another way to put it is be in the enviable position of having your cake and eating it too.

00:49:24 Meaning when everything's fine for the infant, well, they're in this primordial perfection,

00:49:33 but they don't know how to negotiate the world,

00:49:37 so they're likely to hurt themselves or do something inappropriate.

00:49:41 So you go through these life experiences, good news, bad news.

00:49:46 Good news, you become adult, you know not to touch fire or run out into the street or what have you.

00:49:56 You know how to negotiate the world as an adult.

00:50:00 Bad news, you lost the primordial perfection.

00:50:04 Having your cake and eating it too is the best of both worlds.

00:50:09 You're a competent adult that can act effectively in the world.

00:50:16 And yet while you're doing that, actually literally while you're doing that,

00:50:22 you don't lose contact with this primordial perfection.

00:50:28 So if you touch the heart that way, in other words, touch the nature of consciousness,

00:50:44 then your heart will be touched because it seems in the emotional sense,

00:50:51 because it seems like you're always looking at yourself.

00:50:56 And that's a very emotional experience.

00:51:01 If the self that you're looking at is a garbage can,

00:51:09 or let's say somewhat more melodramatically,

00:51:16 a human being that smells to you like a garbage can because of the way they act,

00:51:26 you do experience oneness first, you do experience unconditional love next.

00:51:34 But if you need to take an action to correct that person,
00:51:40 well, that action is going to be more effective if you've touched the heart
00:51:48 in the two ways that I just described before the action.
00:51:54 And touching the heart in the two ways that I just described takes a fraction of a second.
00:52:02 In fact, it's always there, whether you notice it or not.
00:52:06 So the effect of that on how one acts in the world, the decisions one makes,
00:52:14 the actions, the words that one speaks,
00:52:18 the effect of touching the heart in two ways is with time to make us
00:52:28 much more effective in the world. That's the phrase I like to use.
00:52:40 And that could be described as a balanced practice.
00:52:49 So we can speak of what I just described as the deepest,
00:53:03 as one way to talk about the taste of consciousness at the deepest level.
00:53:15 One way to talk about it. However, we don't have to use the phrase deep.
00:53:24 I like that phrase. It comes natural. However, it is a spatial metaphor of going down.
00:53:31 And in fact, that's quite a good metaphor for the process.
00:53:35 We can describe this path as a kind of journey from surface to source.
00:53:41 We don't really turn away from the senses. We sort of turn at right angles
00:53:47 and auger down into consciousness. So between surface and source,
00:53:53 some people encounter unusual phenomena, other people don't.
00:53:59 But certainly one way to think about it is, well, we're augering down
00:54:04 into the center of consciousness. It's like a sphere.
00:54:10 However, in other traditions, Western traditions, it's thought of as going up
00:54:18 because God's in heaven. So we are sort of transcending this low earth existence
00:54:28 and we find this spiritual thing that's considered to be above.
00:54:34 Now, it's fine if you want to think of it as ascending to Shalom Bim Rumav,
00:54:43 the peace of God's own heaven. You could think of it that way.
00:54:48 St. John of the Cross talked about Subida del Monte Carmelo,
00:54:54 the ascent of Mount Carmel. So that's a sort of going up.
00:54:58 But he did say when he drew the picture of climbing Mount Carmel,
00:55:06 he actually drew it like, you know, a picture of it. It's been preserved.
00:55:11 And written on this picture is nada, nada, nada, nada,
00:55:18 that every place along the journey up is nothing, nothing, nothing.
00:55:24 And then at the very top, he has y en monte nada.
00:55:29 And when you finally reach the peak, that's the nothing because it's not a thing.
00:55:38 It's either absolute rest outside of time and space or it's absolute activity
00:55:47 that is the cleft that we call time and space,
00:55:56 within which self and world arise and are reabsorbed,
00:56:01 arise and are reabsorbed over and over again.
00:56:04 So if you want to think of it as going down, you can.
00:56:08 If you want to think of it as going up, you could think of it that way.
00:56:16 However, the more scientific and somewhat prosaic way to describe it,
00:56:27 and if I wasn't being allowed to talk poetry and be metaphorical,

00:56:35 if I was constrained to speak to a group of scientists, which I often am,
00:56:42 I wouldn't use this language at all.
00:56:45 I would not talk about deep or high.
00:56:51 I would talk about just before.
00:56:55 I would use temporal language.
00:56:57 And that is not metaphor, that's not poetry, that's actually physical science.
00:57:04 Here's what I mean.
00:57:13 There's a standard test that is done for newborn children
00:57:23 where they test the auditory system of the child.
00:57:31 And the way that they do this is through what's called brainstem auditory evoked potential.
00:57:42 So brainstem means what it sounds like really deep down in your brain.
00:57:50 Evoked potential, well a sound will evoke a voltage change
00:57:59 in a processing center in the brain.
00:58:03 And a sight will do the same.
00:58:07 Any kind of sensory event creates changes in electrical patterns in the brain.
00:58:18 And those are typically monitored through voltage.
00:58:22 You don't actually look at the electrical field directly,
00:58:27 you don't look at the current.
00:58:35 You monitor volts, which is called electrical potential.
00:58:41 So when you have a sensory experience, inner or outer,
00:58:46 it causes a pattern of electrical, or it's associated with a pattern of electrical activity in the brain.
00:58:54 And if you monitor that electrical activity in voltage,
00:58:58 then the change in voltage that's caused or associated with the sensory experience,
00:59:05 that's called an evoked potential.
00:59:07 In other words, it's a potential that happens because of something,
00:59:12 some experience you're having.
00:59:14 So an auditory evoked potential means a voltage change,
00:59:22 in this case associated with external hearing.
00:59:26 So they'll expose the infant to a sound,
00:59:31 and they have electrodes placed so that as the sound is being processed,
00:59:47 first the sound strikes the tympanic membrane, the eardrum,
00:59:54 and then that causes the inner bones to move,
00:59:59 and then that causes pressure changes in the organ of Corti,
01:00:06 and those then create a first voltage in the spiral ganglion.
01:00:13 And then there's a next voltage a little further up,
01:00:17 which I think is called the trapezoid body, but I could be wrong,
01:00:21 and then there's another voltage, I should have reviewed my neuroanatomy before this talk,
01:00:27 in one of the, let's see, it must be the, I think the inferior colliculus,
01:00:36 then maybe the next is the, what's it called?
01:00:45 Forgetting the name.
01:00:52 It'll come back.
01:00:55 And then you have the primary and secondary auditory cortices that are in the temporal lobe.

01:01:03 So there's, you know, about at least a half dozen processing stations,
01:01:08 and there's only a few milliseconds between, you know, tens of milliseconds,
01:01:14 that's a thousandth of a second, right, so literally it takes a fraction of a second
01:01:21 to jump from each of those processing stations.
01:01:26 Yeah, pretty sure it was the medial geniculate body.
01:01:33 Oh, right, right.
01:01:37 Okay, so I told you I'd remember.
01:01:43 So each one of those is a processing station, and you can actually track it physically in time.
01:01:53 And if the infant has a problem, you can actually tell exactly where the problem is,
01:02:02 where neurologically there's a break in the processing.
01:02:10 So over a period of maybe a second or two, from the very first striking of the,
01:02:19 from the very first evoked potential in the spiral ganglion
01:02:27 or the final evoked potential on the secondary acoustic cortex,
01:02:41 there's these sequences of processing.
01:02:44 And this isn't just true for hear-out, it is presumably true for all sensory experience.
01:02:53 So as your detection skills increase with time, you're actually sort of able to hear,
01:03:08 maybe you go from the, I don't think it's literally this, but something like,
01:03:14 first you only consciously hear on the secondary auditory cortex,
01:03:21 and then you start to hear what the primary hears, which you'd never heard before,
01:03:27 except it's a little different from sound, but it's obviously sound.
01:03:33 And then maybe you're able to hear into the geniculate body,
01:03:38 and then you're able to hear into the, what did I call it, the colliculus,
01:03:47 and then into the trapezoid body.
01:03:50 And then finally maybe you can actually hear in the ear itself,
01:03:56 except by that time it's no longer sound.
01:04:01 It's the origin of sound, which is the origin of visual and auditory in you
01:04:12 and in all other sentient beings, in everything.
01:04:17 At some point you hear back to the unstruck sound, the anahata shabda in Sanskrit.
01:04:31 Also, that's from South Asia, from East Asia, exactly the same concept,
01:04:39 the sound of one hand. There's no clapping, that's the English version.
01:04:48 The Japanese version and Chinese version is one hand sound.
01:04:59 So you hear the unstruck sound, you see the unilluminated sight,
01:05:13 you feel the incorporeality of the corpus.
01:05:20 And what do you see, hear, feel?
01:05:27 This alternating cycle of absolute activity, absolute rest.
01:05:35 So you're able to simultaneously tune into what is temporally the earliest
01:05:43 that connects you to everything. You touch consciousness, you touch the heart.
01:05:49 But you're also able to tune into all the other stations, including the surface.
01:05:56 And on the surface you experience love for no reason other than the all reason.
01:06:06 And then you do what you need to do in the world.
01:06:12 As human beings develop the ability to do that, and I do suspect that if we survive,
01:06:20 we will, as a species, develop the ability to do that.

01:06:26 I think we are the early adapters, or early adopters, I guess that's the phrase.

01:06:34 Also early adapters, actually, historically. We're the early adopters.

01:06:40 I suspect if there is a future for us, this is going to be a major feature of the future.

01:06:47 So, absolute rest breaks apart into absolute activity, and then returns.

01:07:10 On small time-space scales, that's what it's like. It's cyclic.

01:07:15 Absolute rest, absolute activity, and then the relative experiences born in between.

01:07:24 However, at large time-space experiential scales, it's always simultaneous expansion and contraction.

01:07:35 It's an eternal fountain.

01:07:46 How well I know that fountain that gushes and flows, although by night,

01:07:54 because of course you're in the formless, it's in the emptiness, it's the activity of emptiness.

01:08:07 So, you could, St. John of the Cross, who said those words in Spanish in the 16th century,

01:08:16 this is what he was referring to. So, there's this eternal fountain that for everyone

01:08:25 is constantly gushing and gathering, and giving birth to and reabsorbing

01:08:33 the inner and outer scenery. And to the extent to which this is a reality for you,

01:08:55 to that extent you know, oh, this is what I am at the deepest level.

01:09:01 This is what everyone is at the deepest level. This is the heart of the matter.

01:09:10 And therefore, to the extent to which that's a reality for a person, to that extent,

01:09:23 the horrors of old age, sickness, and death are much less troubling to one.

01:09:39 Because this deeper identity is eternal. It's ironic. The non-thing that is a doing

01:09:59 of impermanence, it's permanent. And to the extent to which you have this figure-ground reversal,

01:10:12 instead of being the product of this activity, you can, to a certain extent,

01:10:19 say, I am that activity itself. The extent to which one can say that, to that extent,

01:10:32 one's own frailty, physical frailty, mortality, and so forth, well, you can somewhat

01:10:43 sidestep that. You have this place to go to.

01:10:57 So, to touch the heart in the sense of liberation, and then to touch the heart

01:11:11 in the sense of a call to loving service and effective action,

01:11:24 pretty much sums up why we came here.