

Untangling Sensory Experience Leads to Flow, Unifications, and Dynamic Doing ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 What is your view of the Buddha?

00:00:05 I look upon the Buddha as a kind of spiritual scientist, a great innovative spiritual scientist.

00:00:17 Shall we say the Isaac Newton of spirituality?

00:00:22 After Newton appeared in the world, science really got going.

00:00:28 Newton made some major innovations that set the course for science, or at least physical science as we now know it.

00:00:43 The Buddha made a number of original discoveries that I think are as good as gold.

00:00:51 They will stand the test of time in terms of the issue of ultimate human happiness and human spirituality.

00:01:03 One of those discoveries was the principle of untangle and be free,

00:01:12 which I sometimes, in a somewhat more politically incorrect phraseology, like to describe as divide and conquer.

00:01:22 Some people don't like that language, but divide and conquer means if you can break the complicated system into its natural components,

00:01:33 you will conquer ignorance, suffering, and the screwed up behaviors that come from ignorance and suffering.

00:01:43 Divide and conquer actually is a nice phrase, but if you prefer the more gentle untangle and be free, we can use that phraseology also.

00:01:55 In traditional Buddhist scriptures, early Buddhist scriptures, the Pali Canon, there are actually a number of systems or schemes for dividing and conquering the suffering self.

00:02:14 One of them is the five-aggregate scheme, another one is the four foundations of mindfulness,

00:02:25 and another one is the four great elements—earth, water, air, and fire, or wind and fire.

00:02:35 These were looked upon in those days as basic components of the world.

00:02:41 I think it's important not to get fixated on a particular traditional classification scheme,

00:02:51 but rather to generalize the Buddha's discovery and realize that there are any number of ways of dividing the pie of self,

00:03:05 so that you can apply this general or basic principle of untangle and be free.

00:03:13 The untangle and be free discovery basically says that when the elements that produce the sense of self are not distinct in awareness,

00:03:29 they create qualitative and quantitative illusions that magnify the sense of suffering, and that would be on the quantitative side.

00:03:46 And on the qualitative side, even more important actually, produce an illusory quality within us.

00:03:54 That illusory quality is the perception that there is a thing called a self inside us.

00:04:02 When you untangle the strands, then the somethingness of self goes away, which, by the way, frees up the doingness of personality,

00:04:13 so you don't have to worry that you're going to lose something by untangling and being free.

00:04:20 I use this classification system to apply the general principle of untangle and be free.

00:04:29 I don't typically use the five aggregates of traditional Buddhism for a number of reasons.

00:04:38 They're a little bit hard for beginning meditators to use practically.

00:04:47 In fact, I don't think I know of a single teacher that actually has people make the deconstruction of the self the center of practice based on the five aggregates.

00:05:01 I can generalize the concept of untangling the aggregates to untangling other types of components that are pretty closely related.

00:05:12 We could say that a core sense of subjective self arises in the feel-image-talk system.

00:05:25 I sometimes refer to that as the subjective self or the feeling-thinking self.

00:05:32 The thinking part is in the image and talk. The feel part is here in the body.

00:05:37 To the extent that you can track these in real time and keep them from tangling together,

00:05:44 to that extent the subjective self will be a home, not a prison.

00:05:54 A little broader formulation would be what I refer to as body-mind-self.

00:06:01 In that formulation, anything that happens in the body is a part of self, and anything that happens in the mind is part of self.

00:06:11 From that somewhat broader perspective, we have touch, feel, image, talk.

00:06:20 This is body and this is mind.

00:06:23 I have people learn how to track these four and separate them.

00:06:30 When people work just with the core subjective self, I call that technique focus-in, because you're working with the innermost components.

00:06:39 This is my contemporary reworking of things like the four foundations of mindfulness or the five aggregates and so forth.

00:06:53 After one separates out these elements, what's next?

00:07:00 Well, there's more to the deconstruction than simply the untangling of the strands.

00:07:06 One then looks very carefully at each individual strand, and a unifying principle arises.

00:07:17 Here we have distinction. We distinguish subjective versus objective.

00:07:24 We distinguish somatic versus visual versus auditory. We distinguish ordinary versus restful.

00:07:31 After you've teased out these sensory strands and look very carefully at them individually, you'll see that they're all made out of the same stuff.

00:07:42 After productive kinds of discriminations are made, further careful observation brings us to a productive unification.

00:07:53 It turns out that all of these sensory experiences are, upon very close investigation, seen to be made out of the same stuff, except it's not stuff.

00:08:05 It's a verb, not a noun. It's a doing, a doing that could be described as a vibrant vacuity.

00:08:18 The vacuity is a kind of transparency or refreshing nothingness, and the vibrance is a kind of dynamic flow upon which we ride and live our life in a bouncy and enthusiastic way, having seen beyond life.