

Zen, Vipassana, & Becoming Impermanence ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 Impermanence is not just a characteristic of sensory experience.

00:00:12 Impermanence is a kind of energy that is a vital energy that you can learn to ride on.

00:00:20 In other words, impermanence is chi.

00:00:26 And so the idea in the Zen style of experiencing impermanence is, yes, it's the same deconstructive

00:00:35 thing I described, but then you're also interested not just in form as emptiness, but you're

00:00:43 very interested in how emptiness becomes form, moment by moment, bre-ay yesh me-ayin, to

00:00:49 use the Hebrew Kabbalistic term, how there's a rising of something from nothing.

00:00:54 Well, the nothing repolarizes into this kind of energy, and in Zen they want you to ride

00:01:01 on that energy, not just to observe impermanence as an object, but to literally become impermanence.

00:01:09 And there is a kind of bouncy, springy vitality to the experience of emptiness as it is encouraged

00:01:22 in the Zen tradition.

00:01:24 And that was fostered by a certain rhythm of practice, if you've ever been to Zen retreats,

00:01:32 where you're never allowed to fixate.

00:01:34 In Vipassana we move so slow that you disappear.

00:01:39 In Zen you move so fast that you disappear.

00:01:42 And the idea is that you're, I would almost say, although this may sound a little bit

00:01:50 inscrutable, that in mindfulness practice you first observe impermanence, and then down

00:02:00 the line, hopefully, you'll learn to ride on impermanence and live it, have it animate

00:02:11 you.

00:02:12 But in Zen, the style of the monastery, the style of the training, with its spontaneity

00:02:20 and its demand to perform without thinking, what that does is that causes you to ride

00:02:29 on impermanence.

00:02:30 And if you live impermanence in that lifestyle, then eventually you'll be able to see impermanence

00:02:38 in your sensory experience.

00:02:39 It's almost like they approach the same issue from opposite directions.

00:02:44 So Zen has a kind of bouncy vitality to it, and a kind of éclat or creativity that is

00:02:58 characteristic of it.

00:03:00 Sometimes the Hinayana form of Buddhism, the Vipassana, it's sort of like prosaic and sort

00:03:08 of like, I don't know, low-key and dull and boring, but it's like a good, it gets the

00:03:22 job done.

00:03:25 It's like a carefully crafted essay.

00:03:28 But Zen stylistically is like an energetic poem.

00:03:33 So it's a whole different style of enlightenment, a whole different expression of enlightenment,

00:03:38 yet it's the same enlightenment.