

Ordinary Consciousness is the Way - Part 1: Mindful Awareness & Varieties of Flow ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 I decided a long time ago that I would talk about all the kinds of experiences that may
00:00:23 happen to people, even though there's a certain danger in that because it sets up expectations,
00:00:30 cravings, aversions, comparison mind, desires, and so forth.
00:00:38 So I just give you the little heads up.
00:00:41 Nothing that I'm going to describe tonight in terms of sensory experiences are required
00:00:49 for the classical path to enlightenment.
00:00:53 You may have experiences like what I'm going to describe.
00:00:56 You may not.
00:00:58 There's lots of different arcs that people go through in traversing the territory between
00:01:08 surface and source.
00:01:11 So one of the themes that can come up for a person is the theme of impermanence, anicca
00:01:20 in the Pali language, anitya in Sanskrit.
00:01:24 I have a set of techniques for working with this theme.
00:01:32 I call it focus on change.
00:01:35 There's nothing mystical, schmistical, or special about the fact that sensory experience
00:01:43 changes.
00:01:44 If you've ever noticed a sensation get stronger or get weaker, anybody ever notice that?
00:01:54 Then you've noticed impermanence.
00:01:55 It changed.
00:01:58 Intensity levels vary.
00:02:02 You may think that my back's been aching in an unvarying way all afternoon.
00:02:12 You say, my back hurt all afternoon.
00:02:16 So my back's been hurting all afternoon.
00:02:22 Sort of sounds like that, right?
00:02:23 The afternoon started.
00:02:25 The afternoon is over.
00:02:29 Sounds like it's a constant function.
00:02:31 But if you pay close attention, it's not exactly a straight line.
00:02:38 It's sort of like, well, it was a little more, then a little less, and a little more, then
00:02:42 a little less.
00:02:43 There's maybe a little bit of ripple on that if we speak more accurately.
00:02:53 As we begin to look a little bit more accurately still, this changingness may become more evident.
00:03:07 A sense of rising, passing begins to appear.
00:03:13 Remember last night I said that the more you focus on the impermanence, the more sensitive
00:03:25 you become to it.
00:03:29 That's sort of like the clarity and the concentration piece.

00:03:32 But the more equanimity you have with things, since equanimity makes you more flexible,
00:03:43 I would compare concentration to muscle strength, and maybe clarity is like definition in training.
00:03:54 So equanimity would be analogous to flexibility.
00:03:58 So as you become more flexible, of course, you can reflect the flow of impermanence,
00:04:06 spirit if you wish.
00:04:08 So at some point, you may actually get a sense that what was just the hint of a ripple or
00:04:16 became peaks and valleys, that actually there's rising, passing, rising, passing, rising,
00:04:25 passing, rising, passing, like that.
00:04:31 I sometimes like to ask a rhetorical question.
00:04:41 Do mountains dance?
00:04:44 And I would suggest to you that there's three possible answers.
00:04:48 Yes, no, and it depends.
00:04:54 And I would say it depends.
00:04:56 It depends on how patiently and how carefully you look at a mountain.
00:05:05 If you look with the patience of centuries, in other words, great equanimity, timeless.
00:05:13 Equanimity is a kind of timeless world.
00:05:15 Some of you have gone into this.
00:05:17 You may have had an experience either under conditions of great ease or under conditions
00:05:25 of great peril.
00:05:28 Time sort of slows down, and there's an altered sense.
00:05:39 Well when you drop into equanimity, the deeper levels of equanimity, you have the patience
00:05:46 of centuries.
00:05:48 And viewed with the patience of centuries, in other words, in time-lapse photography,
00:05:53 what does the surface of the Earth look like?
00:05:56 A roiling, streaming protoplasm, really alive with flux.
00:06:07 So it depends on how patiently you look, in other words, how much equanimity there is.
00:06:12 It's also how carefully you look.
00:06:15 If you look at anything beyond the level of the atom, or the molecule for that matter,
00:06:20 it's just a dance of energy, a mountain.
00:06:25 But if you don't look really finely, or you don't look so there's not the clarity piece,
00:06:31 if you don't look patiently, there's not the equanimity piece, then the mountain seems
00:06:35 solid as a rock, as the expression goes.
00:06:39 So subtle is significant.
00:06:42 If that hint of ripple is an entire world rising, passing, rising, passing, rising,
00:06:51 passing, there are different flavors of impermanence or change.
00:07:03 One is change in intensity.
00:07:06 I just sort of graphed that.
00:07:10 Another very significant way that sensory experiences change is they sort of shift in
00:07:15 shape.
00:07:16 Remember, we've made a big thing about the spatial nature of experience, that you can
00:07:20 localize, perhaps not with great precision, but you can sort of get a general sense of
00:07:26 size, shape, and position of body sensations.

00:07:30 And indeed, even auditory thoughts have a sort of size, shape, and position in your
00:07:37 head, visual thoughts up in front, in image space, and so forth.
00:07:43 So if you sort of zoom out and cover the whole area of, say, a sensation, you may notice
00:07:53 that it shifts a little bit here, shifts a little bit there.
00:07:56 Subtle is significant, may not be all that dramatic, but it's like a millimeter here.
00:08:03 It sort of like moves over here, moves over there.
00:08:05 And as you're watching that little waviness and whatever, and you're infusing it with
00:08:11 equanimity and time is passing, those shifting shapes can become much more significant and
00:08:21 fascinating.
00:08:22 You can get so fascinated with how it moves that you become less concerned with whether
00:08:32 it's pleasure or pain.
00:08:34 It all starts to feel good.
00:08:35 Even uncomfortable sensations feel good because of the way they move.
00:08:40 There's like a fascination with it, almost a massage to it.
00:08:44 Marshall McLuhan said the medium is the message, right?
00:08:49 But I would take it one step back.
00:08:53 The nature's deepest message is not the medium.
00:09:02 It's the movement of the medium.
00:09:05 That's a primordial message that flows through all of nature.
00:09:12 And since our sensory systems are part of nature, flows through us.