

Abrupt Flow: Diminishings, Vanishings and Noting Gone ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 Okay, so I wanted to talk about one of the themes of Focus on Change, which is noting

00:00:17 abrupt diminishings. And my simple one-word label for that is gone. But as with all the words that

00:00:29 I use, virtually all the words that I use, we have to be careful because the meaning is not

00:00:35 identical to the meaning in colloquial English. When we say gone, it implies gone for good.

00:00:43 Typically it's like gone and it ain't coming back. But gone is just an abrupt diminishing

00:00:52 of something that you happen to notice has abruptly diminished. So it doesn't mean that

00:00:59 it won't come back instantly, but it's still gone. Also, gone does not imply every part of it is

00:01:07 gone. You could be observing an image and let's say it's a person. So there's a head, there's arms,

00:01:16 and so forth. And at some point the arm disappears, okay, but the rest of the image is there. Well,

00:01:24 the arm abruptly vanishes, evaporates. So that was a partial vanishing. Part of what you were

00:01:32 observing disappeared. You noticed it. You note that as gone. So gone does not imply gone for

00:01:39 good. Gone doesn't mean that every single part of what you were observing disappears. For example,

00:01:45 let's say that you have a widespread sensation in your body. A sensation arises like a burst of pain

00:01:51 and it's got a local and it spreads out broadly. Let's say that you zoom out to cover it. You

00:01:59 implement that option with the noting. And as you're covering it, the left quadrant abruptly

00:02:09 collapses. The rest of the pain is there, but a chunk of it went kachunk. So that's an abrupt

00:02:17 vanishing of part or an abrupt diminishing, perhaps a diminishing to complete vanishing.

00:02:23 So an abrupt diminishing of part of what you're observing, that counts as a gone. So part of it

00:02:30 could disappear and it may, or part of it can abruptly diminish and it may abruptly diminish

00:02:36 all the way to no longer existing or it might just abruptly diminish sort of to a lower level

00:02:44 or a smaller size. So essentially flow is change that in some way is continuous. It's either wavy

00:02:55 or it's like pixelated, you know, so that even though each one of those little vibrations might

00:03:07 in itself be disconnected, they sort of like tend to form something that seems fluid. But abrupt

00:03:17 diminishings at the macroscopic scale, those are, I use the word gone for that. There's a tendency

00:03:26 to assume that this is a very esoteric category and you know, maybe if I meditate for 20 years,

00:03:34 I'll be able to detect this. So disabuse yourself of that notion. Every in-breath comes to an end.

00:03:42 Every out-breath comes to an end. That's a touch sensation and it ends and it's obvious that the

00:03:53 flavor called in-breath, that sweep of sensation stops for a moment and is replaced by the flavor

00:04:01 called out-breath. So don't ever say that I can't detect any vanishings. That's always there. Now

00:04:13 you might say, well that's trivial, but all gons are uncreated equal. I don't know if you quite

00:04:20 catch the significance of that phrase. Maybe that just seems like a very enigmatic and strange way,

00:04:31 maybe you think I'm just wordsmithing to get your attention or to make it sound like I know

00:04:38 something that you don't or who knows what. But all gons are uncreated equal. It doesn't matter

00:04:46 how ordinary and banal it is. An airplane is passing and it's like sound, sound, sound, sound,

00:04:55 sound, gone. You say, well so what? Of course, gone. However, as you are paying attention to

00:05:08 that kind of thing, you are gradually, gradually, gradually, gradually, gradually, gradually,

00:05:15 over a long period of time, developing a sensitivity to detect the unborn source of

00:05:27 consciousness. Each one of those is a little teeny learning that in and of itself would seem

00:05:37 completely trivial. But once you begin to sum that over many, many, many, many instances,

00:05:46 let's be honest, probably over weeks, months, years of practice, you start to notice that

00:05:58 those moments of gone as I have defined it, seem to be momentarily adverting, that is to say,

00:06:07 directing your attention towards something that's actually not a thing. And therefore,

00:06:19 it can't really be sensorially experienced, but can be contacted. Let's put it, it can be contacted

00:06:28 through the senses. It just can't be experienced as a sensory experience. And as you contact that

00:06:36 more and more and more and more, 10 times, 100 times, 1,000 times, 10,000 times, 100,000 times,

00:06:43 if you have that category, it starts to become clearer and clearer and clearer to you. Now,

00:06:58 the clear can only be in your senses, obviously. So you might say that the after effect of noticing

00:07:08 a vanishing becomes more and more and more well-defined in your sensory circuits. And you

00:07:22 begin to discover some things that are intuitively obvious and some things that are actually quite

00:07:32 counterintuitive. What is intuitively obvious is that if you're having an unpleasant experience

00:07:40 in your body and or mind, and you're able to pay attention to the moments when parts of it vanish,

00:07:47 that gives you a sense of relief. What is not at all intuitively obvious is if you're having

00:07:55 a pleasant experience and you notice the vanishing, that that increases your sense of fulfillment.

00:08:03 That is actually quite counterintuitive. However, it is sensorially true, although logically it

00:08:11 doesn't make any sense at all. The Tibetans have their own enigmatic phraseology. I'm not the only

00:08:18 person in the Buddhist world that talks weird. The oneness of bliss and void. What in the world is

00:08:29 that? Well, actually it refers to a whole lot of things, but in the end it's what I just talked

00:08:36 about. And what is also not intuitively obvious is if you have a neutral experience, one that is

00:08:44 neither pleasant nor unpleasant, and you note its vanishing, that there is great sensory fulfillment

00:08:53 in that also. It is intuitively obvious that if you notice vanishings, that that might reverberate

00:09:03 through your senses as a restful experience. That as the result of noticing the moment when a burst

00:09:12 of talk comes to an end, might be followed by some quiet. That's intuitively obvious. That you

00:09:21 can have relative rest states, what I call relaxation, light, silence, peace, blank, quiet.

00:09:28 So someone or a combination of those could begin to pervade your sensory experience as the result

00:09:35 of noticing vanishings. What is not intuitively obvious is that a sense of great richness should

00:09:49 come from noticing vanishings. It would seem like bleakness would come from noticing vanishings,

00:09:55 but actually a sense of richness can result. The way I like to conceptualize that is that

00:10:06 the complexity of self and world is reduced to the simplicity of flow waves, but that then contains

00:10:19 within it all the richness of the self and world is in those waves. And when the wave comes to an

00:10:25 end, in the gone, the richness is still there. The richness is still there. The assumption is,

00:10:37 when you're given this category, that you are supposed to be able to detect gone in all your

00:10:43 sensory experiences. Touch, sight, sound, feel, and miss talk, relaxation, light, silence, peace,

00:10:48 blank, quiet. If you make that assumption, then you are setting yourself up for failure. That is

00:10:57 not the assumption. If you do focus on change, restricted to noting vanishings, noting gone,

00:11:04 the assumption is you will be able to find vanishing somewhere in your sensory experience.

00:11:10 If only in the fact that if you have a lot of chatter, you have a lot of sentences. If you have

00:11:20 a lot of sentences, you have a lot of periods. Each one of those endings is a gone. Talk, talk,

00:11:27 gone, talk, gone. Or you're still alive, so you're going to take another in-breath, and it's going to

00:11:36 come to an end. You're going to take another out-breath, and it's going to come to an end.

00:11:41 The assumption is that you can find gone if you have a lot of chatter, and if you're still breathing.

00:11:47 The assumption is that that's all you ever have to focus on in order to do the technique

00:11:56 absolutely perfect. All gons are uncreated, equal. Soryu's teacher gives people koans.

00:12:08 Of course, it's Rinzai Zen, but he says, I hope I'm not misquoting, but I think Soryu said this,

00:12:15 the very best students don't need koans. They do their entire enlightenment process with the breath.

00:12:24 Noticing that what happens at the moment when the in and the out-breath ends, what happens at that

00:12:34 instant is all there ever is, ever. So that's complete enlightenment. You're living inside zero.

00:12:43 So that's a few things to say about this theme. Ending in Sanskrit is nirodha, n-i-r-o-d-h-a.

00:12:54 That's also a synonym for nirvana. Nirvana means to blow out, literally, but it also means to quench

00:13:08 a fire of suffering, but it also means to quench your thirst in the sense of being completely and

00:13:17 totally fulfilled, hence the rishas in the void.