

Shinzen Young's Welcome to New Viewers

00:00:00 Shenzen Yang

00:00:05 My name is Shenzen Yang, and I would like to welcome you to my YouTube channel.

00:00:13 Literally welcome. It is well that you have come.

00:00:18 If you're watching this, you probably have some interest in what might be described as the spiritual path.

00:00:28 It is good when a person comes to the place in their life where they are considering taking on the practices of the spiritual path.

00:00:42 Obviously, there are many approaches from which this can be done.

00:00:47 At this YouTube channel, you'll hear me describe one of those approaches.

00:00:53 It's an approach based on what's called mindfulness, and it takes as its model that the spiritual path is a kind of cultivation of a skill set.

00:01:08 It's exercises, in a sense, that will allow you eventually to both see beyond the self and the world, and to, in an optimal way, improve yourself and improve the world.

00:01:26 I would say that those are the two basic themes of a deep spiritual path.

00:01:33 See beyond yourself and the world, in a sense, get over the self and the world, and at the same time, improve the self and the world, and see those as complementary endeavors.

00:01:47 When you can see those as complementary endeavors, I would say that you have reached spiritual maturity.

00:01:54 Mindfulness, as I like to define it, is a threefold attentional skill set involving the gradual development in a natural way of concentration power, sensory clarity, and equanimity.

00:02:09 It turns out that when you develop this skill set, which, by the way, anyone can develop with time, practice, and competent instruction,

00:02:20 when you develop this skill set to a certain critical degree, which, once again, anyone can do, given enough time, ordinary experience becomes utterly extraordinary.

00:02:34 It becomes spiritualized.

00:02:37 In the Christian tradition, this is sometimes referred to as the practice of the presence of God,

00:02:43 meaning that you don't have to go to church anymore because you can't get away from church.

00:02:50 Every place you look is a beatific vision. Every sound of the world is a sacred hymn.

00:02:57 Every ordinary sensation in your body is the message of the Spirit.

00:03:03 So that's ordinary experience experienced with an extraordinary awareness.

00:03:08 That's the essence of the mindfulness approach.

00:03:12 Within mindfulness, there are a number of different traditions, different ways of developing that skill set.

00:03:21 What you'll learn from me is eclectic.

00:03:26 I've drawn from a couple of the Burmese traditions,

00:03:31 but I've also been influenced by something that is historically not part of mindfulness, which is Zen and also Vajrayana.

00:03:42 I've taken the influences from those.

00:03:45 Vajrayana, if you're not familiar, is a practice primarily associated with Tibet.

00:03:50 I've taken from those traditions, but woven them within the framework of the mindfulness way of working.

00:04:01 Why I like to use the mindfulness framework is for several reasons.

00:04:07 First of all, it's possible to present a really deep and complete spiritual path within the framework of mindfulness

00:04:17 without there being any specific religious doctrines involved.

00:04:24 You can just extract it from the background.

00:04:28 Historically, the background is Buddhism.

00:04:31 There is certainly a thing called the Buddhist religion,

00:04:35 but you can extract the mindfulness practice from that thing called the Buddhist religion

00:04:41 and make something that is acceptable to anyone.

00:04:45 I don't know if you can hear in the background, but they're chanting Mass where I am right now.

00:04:51 We're at the Carmelite Spiritual Center in Niagara Falls, Canada.

00:04:56 I'm running a mindfulness retreat.

00:04:58 Why is it that these Catholic priests welcome us?

00:05:02 Well, they realize that we're teaching something that is certainly compatible with their Christian contemplative practices.

00:05:11 The Carmelites are a meditating or contemplative order.

00:05:16 They know that we're not trying to convert people to Buddhism,

00:05:21 even though our technique is derived historically from Buddhism.

00:05:25 We're not trying to convince people to believe in reincarnation or to worship icons of the Buddha or something like that.

00:05:36 We've extracted the essence of the practice, the concentration, clarity, and equanimity skill cultivation.

00:05:45 We've extracted it from the doctrines.

00:05:49 I like to say we give people hardware and we'll let you run your own software, your own philosophy,

00:05:56 which could be Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, or radical, secular Marxism.

00:06:06 It could be whatever you want.

00:06:08 We give you the hardware, you run your own software.

00:06:11 I find that the mindfulness framework makes it very easy to do that.

00:06:15 Also, the mindfulness framework allows us to discard the cultural aspects that are associated with Asia.

00:06:26 I just came back from Israel, where I ran a retreat.

00:06:30 I had 90 Israeli people there. They were all Jewish.

00:06:35 There's actually a law in Orthodox Judaism, and some of those people were Orthodox,

00:06:43 that you're not allowed to have any statues, any idols in the land of Israel.

00:06:50 Well, that's not a problem. That's just a cultural piece of baggage from Asia.

00:06:57 It's not central to what we do.

00:07:00 You don't have to chant in Sino-Japanese or eat with chopsticks in order to attain enlightenment.

00:07:07 So the mindfulness framework allows us to extract the essence from the cultural background.

00:07:16 The other thing that I like about the mindfulness framework is that it is very harmonious with science.

00:07:29 In fact, it's basically like science.

00:07:32 The nuts and bolts of science is to track how much of what, when, and where,

00:07:38 interacting in what ways, and changing at what rates.

00:07:41 Those of you that have a background in science, technology, or engineering know what I'm talking about.

00:07:47 It's the nuts and bolts of science.

00:07:49 Well, it turns out that the nuts and bolts of mindfulness is essentially identical,

00:07:53 except applied to sensory experience.

00:07:56 It's how much of what, when, and where, interacting in what ways, and changing at what rates,

00:08:03 with regards to your experience of self and world.

00:08:06 So the mindfulness perspective fits very well with modern science,

00:08:12 and it is amenable to study through the methods of neuroscience.

00:08:21 Because we can extract from the doctrinal background, we can extract from the cultural baggage,

00:08:28 and we have something that is not only compatible with,

00:08:33 but actually potentiates the scientific point of view,

00:08:40 for those reasons I like the mindfulness perspective on the spiritual path.

00:08:46 So at this channel, that's the perspective that you'll be getting,

00:08:55 and I hope that you'll find it useful and can apply it to the nitty-gritty of your inner life

00:09:06 and your external behaviors.