

# How to Change Your Life with Mindful Awareness ~Shinzen Young

00:00:00 Recently, I've been coming to think of practice in terms of the distinction between formal

00:00:18 practice and what I call life practice or practice in life.

00:00:24 So each formal practice, what characterizes formal practice is that a period of formal

00:00:35 practice lasts at least 10 minutes, so there's a sort of duration aspect, and all your attention

00:00:43 is going into maintaining the technique.

00:00:46 That makes it formal practice.

00:00:50 There are two basic kinds of formal practice, practice in stillness where you're not moving

00:00:54 much, and practice in motion where you are moving.

00:00:59 You could be walking, you could be exercising, and so forth.

00:01:03 So I would encourage a person who wants to be successful with this path to do a little

00:01:11 bit, a minimum of formal practice in stillness and formal practice in motion each day.

00:01:19 That's a minimum, 10 minutes.

00:01:21 Now that's minimum.

00:01:24 That might sound like not very much, but you'd be surprised how much resistance a person

00:01:30 might have to doing that.

00:01:34 It's not a time thing.

00:01:36 Anybody has 10 minutes here, 10 minutes there to do formal practice.

00:01:42 It's not a time thing.

00:01:44 Then what is it?

00:01:46 You might say that the ordinary coping mechanism, the normal coping mechanism that people have

00:01:59 for dealing with life could be characterized as tighten up and turn away.

00:02:07 The new coping mechanism of this practice is the diametric opposite of that.

00:02:14 It's open up and turn towards.

00:02:17 Now you could think of the old coping mechanism as sort of being like

00:02:30 how you've been getting air.

00:02:34 It sort of works, okay, but not really.

00:02:39 So if you start to challenge that coping mechanism by forcing yourself to have periods of open

00:02:51 up and turn towards, at some point it might seem to your conditioning that you're like  
00:03:00 being asphyxiated.  
00:03:02 You got to get a breath of air.  
00:03:05 In this case, a breath of air is a hit of unconsciousness.  
00:03:11 The practice is it's like your oxygen is being taken away.  
00:03:18 Your former source of nutrition is being taken away.  
00:03:23 You're starving to death.  
00:03:26 You're flailing.  
00:03:29 The only way to get nurtured or to get oxygen is to start to go completely unconscious again  
00:03:36 for long periods of time.  
00:03:39 Formal practice won't allow you to go completely unconscious for long periods of time.  
00:03:46 So it seems like you're starving to death or you're being asphyxiated.  
00:03:53 That resistance then comes up.  
00:03:55 It's not a time thing.  
00:03:57 It's this other mechanism.  
00:04:01 So what to do in that case?  
00:04:03 Well, recycle the reaction.  
00:04:04 Get interested in deconstructing the resistance.  
00:04:09 So in terms of formal practice, 10 minutes of stillness, 10 minutes of motion most days.  
00:04:18 Practice in life, I've been dividing into what I call micro hits and then background  
00:04:24 practice.  
00:04:25 A micro hit is short and it's happening during ordinary life.  
00:04:33 At the end of the day, you can say exactly how many of them you did, how long they lasted  
00:04:38 and when they took place.  
00:04:41 And that's a way of tracking the extent to which you are stopping on a dime, starting  
00:04:46 on a dime.  
00:04:50 So stop on a dime means that you suspend your investment with the content of in and out.  
00:05:05 You suspend your investment with the pull of past and future.  
00:05:15 And you establish an investment, 30 seconds here, 3 minutes there, with maintaining a  
00:05:27 technique.  
00:05:29 What technique could be any technique?  
00:05:32 So what's a technique?  
00:05:35 Name a technique.

00:05:36 Hearing.

00:05:37 Open it up.

00:05:38 Ah, hearing.

00:05:39 Okay.

00:05:40 Hearing was the first one.

00:05:41 Hear rest, hear rest.

00:05:45 There's not going to be much hearing.

00:05:50 I'm doing the technique, okay.

00:05:52 After a while, there might be some hearing.

00:05:54 But I was just showing you, I could start on a dime.

00:05:58 We go a little broader.

00:06:00 See out, gone.

00:06:02 Feel in, gone.

00:06:04 Feel rest, feel rest, see rest.

00:06:07 See out, gone.

00:06:09 See out, gone.

00:06:10 Feel in, gone.

00:06:11 See rest, see flow, see flow.

00:06:15 Okay.

00:06:16 No hesitation.

00:06:17 No, well, I'm going to sit here and count my breath for 10 minutes and then I'm going

00:06:23 to be settled enough to know what's going on.

00:06:27 No, that is not starting on a dime.

00:06:30 Ten minutes.

00:06:33 Even ten seconds.

00:06:36 Ten seconds is too long.

00:06:39 I'd speak, between the stimulus and the response, there is a gap.

00:06:47 And it's not long.

00:06:50 Couple seconds, maybe.

00:06:53 And after that, the terrorists are in the cockpit running the show.

00:06:58 Emotional hijack.

00:06:59 Amygdala, amygdala hijack.

00:07:05 So we need to train ourselves to stop on a dime, start on a dime.

00:07:11 Stop on a dime doesn't necessarily mean that you stop moving around.

00:07:15 It means that you instantaneously suspend involvement with the content of in and out.

00:07:24 And you are involved with the technique.

00:07:28 But it doesn't have to be long.

00:07:29 It can be while you're walking around, even talking to people and so forth.

00:07:36 So that's the micro hit.

00:07:37 It can be any technique you want.

00:07:46 The places where you would tend to do micro hits during the day are dead times when you're  
00:07:53 waiting in line or you're in a meeting and it's this vacuous conversation going on that  
00:08:02 you don't really need all your CPU to look like you're paying attention.  
00:08:11 So it's sort of like the dead times.  
00:08:13 The dead times become the magic times.  
00:08:16 You're waiting for your system to reboot.  
00:08:21 I had this idea once to create a Dharma virus that would cause people's computers to suspend  
00:08:34 operation until I had done 30 seconds.  
00:08:39 They have that on a Mac.  
00:08:40 It's called the beach ball of death.  
00:08:42 The beach ball of death?  
00:08:43 The whirling ball when it's having a hard time.  
00:08:46 That for me is mine.  
00:08:47 Yeah, right.  
00:08:48 So these are the sort of dead times.  
00:08:54 Then there's the times just before and just after what you think is going to be a stressful  
00:09:02 event.  
00:09:04 You can have a stress rehearsal.  
00:09:07 Stress rehearsal is stress rehearsal.  
00:09:15 I have one student that basically his entire life is telephone calls.  
00:09:29 Most of the calls are telling passionate and powerful people no.  
00:09:40 So these are sometimes difficult calls to make.  
00:09:45 So he can use focus in now.  
00:09:50 I taught him focus in.  
00:09:51 Just 30 seconds, okay?  
00:09:54 He just prepares himself, watches the resistance.  
00:09:58 It's, oh my God, I'm calling so and so and I'm telling them news they don't want to hear.  
00:10:07 And then he can just make the call and if there's any after whatever, another 30 seconds,  
00:10:13 clears it, ready to move on.  
00:10:18 So before and after stressful things, micro hits.  
00:10:22 Now the beauty of the concept of micro hit is you can check in on your own practice in  
00:10:30 a very tangible way.  
00:10:32 There's no BS, okay, because how many did you do?  
00:10:39 When did you do them?  
00:10:40 What was the technique?

00:10:42 For how long did they last?

00:10:44 That will tell you how many times during the day you are severing the trammels of time.

00:11:04 Okay, then what do I mean by background practice or having a background technique?

00:11:14 Well a lot of people report something like this.

00:11:19 It's like, well I don't go completely unconscious, but I'm not putting a lot of intention in

00:11:26 having a technique going, but it's sort of going in the background while I'm going about

00:11:32 life activities.

00:11:37 And some people are able to have that going much of the day.

00:11:41 It's not sharp, it's not, there's no mental labels or anything, or maybe not much of that,

00:11:49 but it's sort of going in the background as opposed to just the way I used to be where

00:11:56 I would just completely be lost and unconscious and driven and so forth.

00:12:04 So that kind of thing may or may not come naturally to you.

00:12:10 If it does, it's just something to know about.

00:12:13 It's a component of practice.

00:12:16 If it doesn't come naturally for you, that's okay.

00:12:19 But the one thing everyone can do because it's so well defined and so crisp is the micro

00:12:26 hits.

00:12:27 Like I say, okay, if you're serious about this practice, you're going to have a half

00:12:34 dozen or so micro hits every day.

00:12:38 And the less you feel like stopping on a dime, the more powerful doing so is going to be.

00:12:49 When you least want to stop on a dime, when you're most caught up in the bondage of past

00:12:57 and future, inside and outside, is when it's going to be most powerful to stop on a dime.

00:13:06 You can use spoken labels to ensure quality because it's not going to be quantity, right?

00:13:12 It's going to be short if your life situation allows for it.

00:13:21 For me, often the stop on a dime feels like I'm going to die.

00:13:31 It feels like I'm being marched off to a firing squad or something.

00:13:39 And that's good.

00:13:40 That means I'm doing it right.

00:13:42 That means I really am going toe to toe with the forces of the somethingness of self and

00:13:52 world.

00:13:57 So that gives you potentially four elements.

00:14:05 Formal practice, practice in life.

00:14:08 Formal practice, you have stillness, motion.

00:14:10 Practice in life, you have micro hits, background, practice.

00:14:17 And with regards to the formal practice, for practice in stillness, two accelerators, trigger

00:14:22 practice and duration training.

00:14:25 For practice in motion, the challenge sequence.

00:14:28 It's all described in great detail in the reading we sent you.

00:14:34 If you line up these elements, if you at least occasionally do the accelerators, push the

00:14:41 envelope of the length of a sit at least occasionally, under the parameters described, occasionally

00:14:53 explore systematically triggering hot and cold buttons.

00:15:01 Try to do not just practice in stillness and not just walking meditation, but can I do

00:15:09 focus in while I'm washing the dishes?

00:15:14 How deep can I get with focus in while I'm washing the dishes?

00:15:18 Focus out on the way to work, et cetera, et cetera.

00:15:22 So you give yourself the motion challenge sequence at least occasionally.

00:15:26 So those would be the ducts that you would want to line up for day to day practice.

00:15:34 If you line up those ducts for day to day practice, what else is left?

00:15:42 Well, at least once a year do the equivalent of a one week retreat.

00:15:51 That's absolute minimum.

00:15:54 When I say the equivalent, not everyone in the world can get away for seven days or 10

00:16:00 days to do a residential retreat.

00:16:02 In fact, most people can't.

00:16:04 But there are ways of doing the equivalent.

00:16:07 For one thing, the home practice program, which we created, which almost anyone can

00:16:12 do as long as you speak English and you can get cheap long distance or you have internet

00:16:24 with Skype, then you can have a retreat practice.

00:16:30 You just have to sort of amortize it over the years, spread it out.

00:16:38 But a four hour or eight hour program, if you did enough of several of those, many of

00:16:46 those over a year, that sort of will serve as your retreat practice.

00:16:53 During retreats, as you see, you build up a certain momentum.

00:16:57 Then you go back to your daily regimen.

00:17:01 And instead of that being a peak experience, it may go down a bit, but it becomes a stable  
00:17:06 plateau.  
00:17:07 You now grow gradually with your daily elements and then do your next retreat.  
00:17:15 And then as you look over the big picture of the years and decades of practice, what  
00:17:21 you'll see is as a general trend, the retreats take you to a new level.  
00:17:26 The daily practice backs it up with more modest growth.  
00:17:31 And so you have this sort of stepwise growth curve.  
00:17:37 And if you look at the overall envelope of the curve, at some point it becomes evident  
00:17:43 that it is in fact exponential.  
00:17:50 When does the break point in this exponential curve come?  
00:17:53 The break point means when it goes from looking modest and linear to, oh my god, this is really  
00:18:00 taking off.  
00:18:02 That's the point at which the derivative starts to go infinite.  
00:18:08 The break point occurs when you start to get the immediate taste of purification.  
00:18:28 As soon as you bring equanimity to an experience, you don't have to wait.  
00:18:33 You just bring the equanimity to it and you sense that sources of unhappiness are breaking  
00:18:41 up.  
00:18:42 You can actually taste it happening.  
00:18:45 I can't put it into words.  
00:18:46 It's the Vishuddhi rasa.  
00:18:50 I made up a word in Sanskrit.  
00:18:53 This word should exist in Sanskrit.  
00:18:55 Vishuddhi means purification.  
00:18:58 Rasa means taste.  
00:19:01 There's a taste.  
00:19:04 And it's impossible to put into words, but once the spiritual palate matures so that  
00:19:11 you can taste it, that's the break point.  
00:19:14 Because now you're dealing with operant conditioning, Skinnerian conditioning.  
00:19:21 It's a positive feedback loop.  
00:19:22 It's just classic math.  
00:19:29 The taste of purification can't be put into words, but as I say, its acquisition marks  
00:19:38 the transition to a mature spiritual palate.

00:19:45 There are tastes that kids just don't understand.

00:19:49 Why would anyone drink coffee?

00:19:55 Most kids can't understand spicy foods either, I think.

00:19:58 It's like, why do adults put this in their mouth?

00:20:03 It's bitter.

00:20:04 It hurts.

00:20:05 There's not a taste called spice.

00:20:08 You know what spice is?

00:20:11 Spice is pure pain.

00:20:15 It's the raw nerves.

00:20:20 It's the actual, the same nerves that give you a pain signal are what are stimulated

00:20:26 by capsaicin.

00:20:30 In fact, that's a way of inducing lab pain.

00:20:33 But anyway, that's ...

00:20:39 Why would anybody like something that hurts in their mouth?

00:20:46 Why would anybody like anything that's bitter?

00:20:51 Most kids cannot understand why adults eat this kind of stuff.

00:20:57 But the palate changes.

00:21:00 So there's a taste that comes about when a person experiences pleasure or pain with equanimity.

00:21:11 And the taste is identical.

00:21:12 It doesn't matter whether it's with physical pain, emotional pain, physical pleasure, or

00:21:17 emotional pleasure.

00:21:20 There's a knowing that because of the way I'm greeting this in this moment, the poison

00:21:28 and pain from previous moments is being wiped away and every moment of the future will be

00:21:35 marginally less suffering and more fulfilling.

00:21:40 It's a kind of knowing of that.

00:21:42 When that reward flavor, the taste of purification, which is just the taste of equanimity or the

00:21:50 effect of equanimity, when that comes on, that's when the growth curve goes like this.

00:21:55 Because now the preoccupation with feeling good is starting to go away.

00:22:04 You've got another kind of feel good that's not the old kind of feel good.

00:22:14 It's just its own thing.

00:22:16 And it's available on demand.

00:22:18 So either you feel good intrinsically or you don't feel good and you have equanimity and

00:22:24 you feel good.



00:22:25 So now it just takes off.

00:22:29 That's when it goes like that.

00:22:31 So if you can get these elements in place, then you'll be in good shape.

00:22:46 The day-to-day rhythm, formal practice, practice in life, stillness, motion, micro hits, background

00:22:54 practice, accelerators at least occasionally.

00:22:58 You have that day-to-day.

00:23:01 You have retreats.

00:23:03 If you're fortunate enough to do residential retreats, great.

00:23:07 But some intensive formal practice that's more than just a long sit.

00:23:15 What else do you need?

00:23:16 Well, at least occasionally touch base with someone who's competent to guide the big picture

00:23:22 of your practice.

00:23:24 That's a very specific job.

00:23:27 You can have many teachers.

00:23:32 But you need to have at least one person that knows how to guide people through the entire

00:23:43 range of classical experiences that this practice can potentially bring about.

00:23:54 So you touch base with that person once, twice a year to talk about the big picture of your

00:24:00 practice.