

'Do Nothing' Meditation ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 A lot of the techniques that I give you, the noting techniques and so forth, they require
00:00:13 a certain amount of effort.
00:00:17 It's good to be able to drop effort also.
00:00:25 The techniques I give you involve a certain amount of making decisions, even moment by
00:00:31 moment when you're doing a noting.
00:00:33 If more than one phenomenon is available, you have to sort of choose.
00:00:40 And also you choose sort of what approaches you're working on.
00:00:46 So it's also good to have a practice that involves no choices whatsoever, not even a
00:00:56 choice as to directing what's happening in attention.
00:01:05 So some people call this choiceless awareness.
00:01:08 Some people call it just sitting.
00:01:10 Some people call it the great perfection in Tibetan Dzogchen or the grand symbol in Sanskrit
00:01:24 Mahamudra.
00:01:25 There's different ways of describing it.
00:01:31 I like to call it do nothing.
00:01:34 That's just my name for it.
00:01:38 So there is a way to do nothing, a conceptual framework.
00:01:46 Needless to say, because the verb do and nothing don't go together, there are some subtleties
00:01:55 as to what this all refers to.
00:01:59 The do nothing technique is designed with time.
00:02:06 I cannot overemphasize that phrase.
00:02:10 With time, not when you practice it at a given occasion, but with time.
00:02:18 It is designed to create a sensitivity for a certain circuit in human consciousness,
00:02:29 the circuit that controls attention.
00:02:35 And it sets up an environment wherein that circuit will turn itself off for a while.
00:02:47 If you try to turn it off, obviously that's not going to exactly work, is it?
00:02:53 Because you're trying to turn off, you have to keep it on in order to try to turn it off.
00:02:59 The do nothing technique doesn't involve your hand turning off yourself.
00:03:12 It sets up a situation where nature will grow that hand, reach around and turn off the robot
00:03:21 self for a brief period of time.
00:03:26 At some point, you and the world will come back.
00:03:29 So nothing bad at all will happen.
00:03:31 You don't have to be afraid.
00:03:34 So that's one way to look at the do nothing technique.
00:03:39 With time, it will set the stage.
00:03:44 You'll develop a sensitivity for the part of you that controls attention.
00:03:50 And that's a very, very primitive part of our being.

00:03:54 And then once that sensitivity is developed, it will for periods of time turn off.

00:04:02 A lot of people report when I ask them about their experience in practice, well, I can't

00:04:10 decide what to do certain times.

00:04:13 I'm just confused with all the options.

00:04:18 That's a really good experience.

00:04:20 I know you think it's a bad experience.

00:04:22 But actually, that's a good experience because when you sort of like, I don't know what to

00:04:26 do with my meditation right now.

00:04:29 The part that controls attention is maximally activated at that time.

00:04:37 That's the thing that's going to turn off through the do nothing technique.

00:04:42 But when it's maximally activated, it's good to know because that points you to, oh, that's

00:04:50 the place.

00:04:52 Whatever place this sort of, I don't know what to do and I should be able to figure

00:04:55 out what to do next.

00:04:59 Whenever that confusion about what should I do with the practice arises, that's a strong

00:05:05 arising from the place of choice.

00:05:08 That's good because for a moment, your attention is adverted to the place of choice.

00:05:14 Love that.

00:05:16 Maybe that wouldn't be a bad time to do nothing.

00:05:20 The instruction set for how to do nothing is very short.

00:05:26 Just two sentences.

00:05:29 Let whatever happens, happen.

00:05:33 As soon as you're aware of an intention to control your attention, drop that intention.

00:05:41 So let's go through the inevitable subtleties, the inevitable confusions.

00:05:48 There's nothing in this technique that says that you should maintain an intention to drop

00:05:56 intentions.

00:05:58 It says when you are aware of an intention to control your attention, drop that intention.

00:06:06 You might think that the technique is saying moment by moment, monitor whether you have

00:06:12 an intention or not, and always maintain the intention to drop those intentions.

00:06:22 Well then you'd be doing two things instead of doing nothing.

00:06:27 Let whatever happens, happen means whatever sensory experiences are going to happen, let

00:06:35 them happen.

00:06:38 Thinking that you may be very scattered, maybe that you may get sleepy and go unconscious,

00:06:47 that you may get lost in monkey mind for long periods of time, that you will have very little

00:06:54 concentration, clarity, or equanimity.

00:06:58 Those are some of the things that could happen.

00:07:00 They come under the phrase, let whatever happens, happen.

00:07:06 So there's nothing in this technique that says those things won't happen, and they may

00:07:14 be all that happens.

00:07:18 However, it also says as soon as you're aware of the intention to control your attention,

00:07:25 so if you have an intention to do something about anything that has happened, drop that

00:07:31 intention.

00:07:35 Simple question, what happens if I can't drop it?

00:07:38 Well that goes to needing clarification about what drop means and what intention means.

00:07:46 So the phraseology has been extremely carefully developed.

00:07:54 Whenever you're aware of the intention to control your attention, drop that intention.

00:08:00 We're going to define intention in a very specific way, and we're going to define drop

00:08:06 in a very specific way.

00:08:09 Intention is something that by definition you have complete control over.

00:08:15 You can initiate it, or you can drop it.

00:08:20 I have complete control over the movement of my arm.

00:08:25 I can raise it, and I can decide not to raise it.

00:08:30 Drop does not mean get rid of.

00:08:35 It's in the moment.

00:08:36 You drop the intention, the intention might come back immediately.

00:08:41 That's fine.

00:08:42 When it comes back, drop it again.

00:08:45 If you can't drop it for even a second, then it's not fully free will.

00:08:52 It's not full intention.

00:08:55 So you don't have to drop it.

00:08:58 Something that you might think is an intention to control your attention, that when you drop

00:09:03 it you simply can't, then actually that's not free will.

00:09:07 It's happening to you.

00:09:09 If you can't drop the intention, you don't have to drop it because the technique doesn't

00:09:13 ask you to do that.

00:09:15 And certainly the technique does not ask you to have a restful experience, although that

00:09:24 could be a consequence of the technique, and with time tends to be a consequence of the

00:09:30 technique.

00:09:31 If the experience is horribly agitating and uncomfortable, there's absolutely no reason

00:09:36 why you need to continue with this technique at that time.

00:09:41 The catch phrase that I use is, if noting makes you racy, try do nothing.

00:09:49 If do nothing makes you spacey, try noting.

00:09:53 Notice the phrase, as soon as you're aware of, you may very seldom be aware of the intention

00:10:02 to control your attention.

00:10:04 That's perfectly okay.

00:10:05 I didn't say you'd be aware of it very often.

00:10:08 Specifically, you are not being asked to moment by moment monitor for the presence of that

00:10:16 intention.

00:10:17 You have to wait for the awareness to be there, which might not be much of a wait, or it might

00:10:24 be a long wait while you're lost in reverie and sleepiness.

00:10:33 Perfectly okay as far as this technique goes.

00:10:36 This is gomme.

00:10:39 Last night I gave a Tibetan word, dakme.

00:10:42 I said me means without, dak means self.

00:10:47 Gom is the Tibetan word for meditate.

00:10:50 Gomme means don't meditate.

00:10:55 Of course, you are meditating, though.

00:11:01 The true gomme would be the state of 99.9% of human beings all the time.

00:11:09 They truly don't meditate.

00:11:10 This is a form of meditation, but it's a sort of anti-meditation.

00:11:17 As soon as you're aware of that intention, then drop it whenever that may be, which may

00:11:24 not be very often.

00:11:32 There's no noting or labeling involved, obviously.

00:11:36 Common question, well, what if I have the intention to move my body?

00:11:40 Well, that's okay.

00:11:43 I wouldn't always give into it.

00:11:50 What you're pinpointing with this technique is most specifically whatever it is within

00:12:01 us that decides to initiate thoughts, attempts to suppress thoughts, attempts to direct thoughts,

00:12:15 decides to pursue a thought once it arises or take it in some other direction once it

00:12:21 arises or use thought to do something about thought.

00:12:27 That sort of place within us, whatever that place is, is what this technique will pinpoint

00:12:32 with time.

00:12:37 There are automatic responses of concentration, clarity, and equanimity within meditators.

00:12:52 You don't have to have an intention for those to occur.

00:12:56 They occur automatically.

00:13:02 You don't drop that because you'd actually have to have an intention to stop an automatic

00:13:08 meditator's response.

00:13:12 You absolutely do not interfere with the momentum of concentration, clarity, and equanimity

00:13:18 that you've developed with the other techniques.

00:13:22 In fact, that's sort of the whole idea.

00:13:27 If there's any meditation that occurs, it's because in this technique, it's because of

00:13:32 all the meditation you've done before is meditating you.

00:13:38 You're not meditating.

00:13:40 So two things are meditating you.

00:13:43 The momentum of your previous practice and whatever you want to call it, the nature of

00:13:55 nature, spirit, time, God, God's grace.

00:14:06 Choose your words.

00:14:10 I repeat, you're not meditating.

00:14:14 But two things are meditating you.

00:14:17 The momentum of what you've done previously and whatever you want to call this other thing.

00:14:27 Someday we won't have to use this technique.

00:14:30 We'll have a complete circuitry diagram of the human central nervous system that will

00:14:37 be extremely complex, to put it mildly.

00:14:42 But we'll probably be able to point to that circuit and probably be able to, from the

00:14:48 outside, turn it off for a little while.

00:14:53 Perhaps inducing at will experiences of freedom from limited identity.