

The Five Ways - A Contemporary Toolkit for Classical Enlightenment ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 I like to organize the meditation techniques that I teach to people into what I call the
00:00:14 five ways.
00:00:16 Five ways are five contrasting approaches to the development of concentration, sensory
00:00:26 clarity, and equanimity.
00:00:29 Each of the five ways is derived from one or several traditions that have existed previously,
00:00:37 but what I've done is I've modernized the vocabulary and I have completely eliminated
00:00:45 anything that is explicitly religious from it so that the five ways can be looked upon
00:00:53 as a, shall we say, a way to bring about a secular paradigm for classical enlightenment.
00:01:05 The five ways are focus in, focus out, focus on rest, focus on change, and focus on positive.
00:01:20 Focus in, the in in this case refers to one's innermost experience of thought and emotion.
00:01:28 This is derived from the classic discovery of the Buddha that if you divide the experience
00:01:38 of self into its atomic components, the sense of self as thing and the sense of being trapped
00:01:47 in self as thing disappears.
00:01:51 So there are many ways in the Buddhist literature for sort of doing this divide and conquer
00:02:00 on one's I am-ness.
00:02:02 I use one that is actually somewhat based on a more Vajrayana point of view, but in
00:02:10 any event, I take as the fundamental elements the somatic component of emotional type body
00:02:21 sensation, the visual component of mental imagery, visual thinking in other words, and
00:02:27 the auditory component of internal talk or conversations.
00:02:32 So I have people tease apart the sense of I as controller or I as observer or I as experiencer.
00:02:41 I teach you how to break it down into these atoms and then this reduces and eventually
00:02:49 eliminates self as prism, thoughts and emotions as a place you can't escape from but are constrained
00:03:00 to.
00:03:01 So that's the focus in approach.
00:03:02 As I say, it's essentially based on one of the core innovations of the Buddha, which
00:03:11 is this untangle and be free paradigm.
00:03:20 Focus out is based on the Zen way of working.
00:03:24 Now there's a lot of aspects to Zen, but one of the aspects is that they would have
00:03:33 to do their practice as they worked.
00:03:35 There was a work ethic from Confucianism that infiltrated into the Zen temples.
00:03:44 So how are you going to have a deep practice while you're doing physical labor?
00:03:48 One way to do that is you anchor yourself in the external sights, external sounds, and
00:03:53 physical sensations.
00:03:55 So by way of contrast to the feel-image-talk of the subjective world, you could let go
00:04:01 of feel-image-talk, let go of the subjective self and anchor yourself in the power of now
00:04:07 as exemplified by touch, sight, sound.

00:04:11 So I call that focus out.

00:04:12 That's really useful for practicing life.

00:04:16 It was developed, as I say, as part of the Zen curriculum exactly because they were called

00:04:22 upon to do so much practice in daily life activities.

00:04:28 So you've got focus in, work with the subjective world, feel-image-talk.

00:04:31 You've got focus out, by way of contrast, work with the objective world of touch, sight,

00:04:38 sound.

00:04:39 Then you have focus on rest, which I've described in some detail in another talk, which is basically

00:04:47 my reworking of the whole tranquilizing side of contemplative practice.

00:04:53 Tranquilizing side of contemplative practice is found all over the world.

00:04:57 It's found in the absorption practices of early Buddhism, but it's also found in the

00:05:04 contemplative practices of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and so forth.

00:05:12 Traditionally speaking, the word contemplation within the Christian context has two meanings.

00:05:17 It is a synonym for meditation, but it's also a special term for deep states of tranquility

00:05:28 that they call the prayer of quiet, but at its extreme end, they called infused contemplation.

00:05:35 So I've drawn from the whole world's contemplative traditions, and specifically the absorption

00:05:43 practices of early Buddhism, reformulated that in a completely secular vocabulary, call

00:05:48 it focus on rest, and that's sort of the tranquil side of the practice.

00:05:57 So that's focus in, focus out, focus on rest.

00:06:00 In ordinary subjective experience, field image talk, ordinary objective experience, touch

00:06:08 sight sound, and these more special, pleasant, restful flavors, all of these experiences

00:06:21 are experiences, and therefore they are of the nature of empty energy.

00:06:28 Empty energy doesn't sound very appealing, but it's incredibly empowering and fulfilling

00:06:36 once you start to experience them that way.

00:06:43 I teach people how to notice how any and all sensory experience changes, and also along

00:06:51 with that, to be aware of the underlying forces that are responsible for that change.

00:06:57 Well, by observing change, both continuous change in the sense of flowing energy and

00:07:03 discontinuous change in the sense of vanishings, that gets us in contact with the energy aspect

00:07:13 and the emptiness, which is the essence of that energy.

00:07:19 So that whole approach to things, which involves impermanence and what the Christians called

00:07:28 kenosis, the emptying out into the source, I call that focus on change.

00:07:37 So that's a fourth way.

00:07:40 And that will tend to deconstruct the somethingness of self and the materiality of the external

00:07:49 world into a kind of transparent energy.

00:07:54 So you could call that a kind of dying into the source.

00:08:04 But if you die, you have to be reborn.

00:08:07 And the whole idea of being reborn is to be reborn better, not just to be reborn.

00:08:13 So then there's something called focus on positive, where you actively generate positive

00:08:18 content in mental image, internal talk, emotional feel.

00:08:22 And that creates a new self.

00:08:26 That new self arises from the nothingness as a better somethingness.

00:08:33 And that's focus on positive.

00:08:35 And so that taken together gives a very complete toolkit for classical enlightenment.