

Paradigms of Change: Impermanence, Flow, Expansion & Contraction, Arising & Passing ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 What is the focus of the book?

00:00:04 The focus on change comes from,

00:00:09 originally from the early Buddhist perception of anicca, or impermanence.

00:00:15 But if you look through Buddhist history,

00:00:18 you'll see that over the ages,

00:00:21 the notion of impermanence has been,

00:00:26 has itself been impermanent.

00:00:29 And you're not surprised.

00:00:31 It's changed over time in some lineages.

00:00:35 For example, if you work within the Upa-Khin lineage,

00:00:45 which involves the technique of body sweeping,

00:00:49 where you systematically move the awareness up and down through the body,

00:00:53 and eventually in other patterns also.

00:00:57 So you're making these sort of reciprocal scans of somatic awareness.

00:01:04 This tends to create an awareness of a subtle, vibratory, bubbly flavor of flow

00:01:14 that people find very pleasant.

00:01:16 They are very carefully instructed not to form an attachment to that,

00:01:20 but simply observe what is.

00:01:22 And then sometimes the opposite of that happens.

00:01:24 We think it's very solid and intense and horrific.

00:01:27 Okay, don't form an aversion to that.

00:01:30 Just keep sweeping through.

00:01:32 It's a brilliant innovation,

00:01:34 because it gets you down to a very fine scale of somatic resolution.

00:01:40 And at that scale, the vibratory nature of the nervous system,

00:01:44 the vibratory nature of nature, will present itself to you.

00:01:49 And Upa-Khin talked about that as impermanence.

00:01:54 That's anicca.

00:01:56 But whereas the Buddha talked about it always linked impermanence to dukkha,

00:02:01 right, things pass, and we hold on to them,

00:02:04 and we set ourselves up for suffering,

00:02:06 pinning our happiness on things that aren't going to last.

00:02:09 Here we get, in the Upa-Khin lineage, a positive take on impermanence.

00:02:17 It's a kind of purifying energy that gets activated within you

00:02:21 and starts to work on you,

00:02:23 which sort of links it to notions of the Holy Spirit working on you,

00:02:32 energia, long, long before that was ever used in physics in its present meaning.
00:02:40 It was used by Christian monks and nuns to describe the energia,
00:02:45 the working N, the ergia, the working N within one,
00:02:50 of the Holy Spirit that sort of dissolves the somethingness and the impurities within you.
00:02:55 Well, Upa-Khin calls that activating impermanence,
00:02:59 and he puts a positive spin on impermanence,
00:03:04 while at the same time, of course,
00:03:06 acknowledging the original Buddhist notion of impermanence
00:03:09 as a possible source of suffering.
00:03:13 Like a good scientist, built on the work of the Buddha,
00:03:20 or either he or whoever his teachers were that came up with this notion.
00:03:26 My own teacher, Joshu Sasaki Roshi,
00:03:29 has vastly innovated with regards to the notion of change or impermanence.
00:03:38 He likes to describe it in terms of expansion and contraction.
00:03:45 To say that when you look carefully,
00:03:48 you see that all the different flavors of flow that can occur,
00:03:53 vibratory, undulatory, even inward-outward pressures and so forth,
00:04:01 these can all be interpreted in terms of two fundamental flow patterns.
00:04:09 One expansion, the other contraction.
00:04:13 You can have a sensation that's as solid as a rock,
00:04:17 but if you analyze the pressure,
00:04:20 you can usually find there's an outward pressure and an inward pressure.
00:04:23 Oh yeah, they're banging together and clashing and producing a horrific pain,
00:04:27 but the fact is, if you let the part that wants to press in,
00:04:30 press in, and the part that wants to push out, push out,
00:04:33 if you let that happen, it gets worse, worse, worse, worse,
00:04:35 and at some point, they interdigitate.
00:04:40 And yes, indeed, it's just expansion and contraction, empty space.
00:04:45 So you can take solid experiences and work with them.
00:04:50 And he gives this gigantic list of synonyms for expansion and contraction.
00:04:57 Expansion, or you can call it life, you can call it affirmation,
00:05:02 you can call it future, you can call it outside,
00:05:08 and then contraction, you can call it death, you can call it negation,
00:05:11 you can call it past, you can call it inside.
00:05:13 So all these synonyms, many of which don't seem to have anything in common,
00:05:18 if you get attached to the words,
00:05:21 but then if you listen deeply, you'll see
00:05:25 that there are pairs of binary contrasts
00:05:29 that in some way or another involve the notion of affirmation versus negation,
00:05:34 or bigness versus smallness.
00:05:37 In the path of purification, the Vicitta-manga,
00:05:40 which is sort of like the classic commentary on the Buddhist canon

00:05:45 used in much of Southeast Asia,
00:05:48 there's a place where the author, Bhattachosa,
00:05:52 describes a stage in practice where you're observing
00:05:56 the rising and passing of phenomena.
00:05:59 And then you become aware that no sooner does something arise,
00:06:03 but it also passes.
00:06:05 Udayabhaya is the word that's used in Pali.
00:06:08 Udaya is rising up, vayaya is passing away.
00:06:11 So at some point, there is a simultaneous udaya and vayaya.
00:06:16 But it's described as it's passing as soon as it's arising.
00:06:22 Instead of saying observing phenomena rising and passing,
00:06:27 or even arising and passing simultaneously,
00:06:32 Sasaki Roshi says, be aware of simultaneous expansion and contraction.
00:06:39 Now, why is that a subtle but significant paradigm shift?
00:06:45 Well, if you listen to his talks, he'll sometimes get real emphatic.
00:06:52 He'll get up there and bang his fan, and he'll raise his voice.
00:06:58 It's like, whoa.
00:07:01 And a lot of times what he gets most emphatic about
00:07:06 is something you can't remotely understand.
00:07:11 Either you can't understand it, or it seems like absolutely a banal triviality.
00:07:19 Like sometimes he'll get up there and he bangs his fan and he says,
00:07:24 you must never forget, never forget, never forget,
00:07:29 as soon as you turn to the west, the east is behind you.
00:07:33 As soon as you turn to the east, the west is behind you.
00:07:36 Never forget that.
00:07:38 It's like, what?
00:07:45 It's like, yeah, I mean, but like,
00:07:50 you've got to listen with the wisdom.
00:07:53 As soon as you turn to the west, the east is there.
00:07:58 As soon as you expand, contraction is there.
00:08:01 Any binary contrast to him exemplifies these principles.
00:08:08 In other words, never forget, as soon as there seems to be a rising,
00:08:12 passing is right there.
00:08:13 That's what he's talking about, but he'll never tell you that.
00:08:16 You've got to figure that out.
00:08:19 Then he'll get up there and he'll say,
00:08:24 you'll never get enlightenment doing two-dimensional Zen.
00:08:29 Flat Zen is not Zen.
00:08:31 Real Zen is spherical.
00:08:33 Real Zen is a ball simultaneously expanding and contracting.
00:08:39 Never do flat Zen.
00:08:42 What's flat Zen?

00:08:44 Flat Zen is, I'm over here observing rising and passing over there.

00:08:50 Once you start thinking in terms of expansion and contraction,

00:08:56 the observer gets yanked into the process and dissolved.

00:09:01 So the three-dimensionality of it prevents the fixation of the sense of an observer,

00:09:06 which is the main criticism Zen tends to give to Vipassana practice.

00:09:12 Instead, be aware, as soon as something is arising,

00:09:17 three-dimensional space is expanding and three-dimensional space are contracting.

00:09:22 You and surroundings are a spherical surface being gestated into existence

00:09:27 and annihilated by the simultaneous fountain of the efflux and reflux of the source,

00:09:35 which is not a thing.

00:09:37 It's a pure doing.

00:09:39 Sasaki Roshi sometimes says, a good doctor can cure your illness,

00:09:45 but only the greatest doctors can show you you were never sick.