

10 Minute Community (Sangha) Sit Chanting Om Mani Padme

Hum ~ Shinzen Young

Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Om Mah Ki
Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me
Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah
Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah
Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om
Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Me Om Mah Ki Mah Ki Mah Ki Mah Ki
Mah Mah Ki Mah Ki Mah Ki Ki Ki Ki Ki Om. Om. Om. Om. Om. Om. Om. Om. Om. Om.
Om. Om. Om. Om.

10 Minute Sit w. Shinzen "Just Sitting" ~ Shinzen Young

[illegible]

6 Buddhist Consciousnesses & the 12 Sensory States ~ Shinzen

Young

I wanted to talk a little bit about how this classification of sensory experience that I like to use relates to some of the more traditional Buddhist categories. In early Buddhism, sensory experience was classified into what was known as the six consciousnesses.

Here the word consciousness is *vijnana* in Sanskrit or *vijnana* in Pali. So the traditional six consciousnesses are hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, body sensation, and thinking. What I've done is, we have sound and sight, so that's the external hearing and the external seeing. I've broken thinking as a sensory experience into two components, the auditory thinking, talk, and visual thinking, image. The reason for that is that if we ask people to observe their thinking, this is very intangible. How do you observe the thinking process? In order to make it tangible and sensory, it's very helpful to have a visual image. So if you have a visual image, you can see the thinking process. In order to make it tangible and sensory, it's very helpful to ascribe qualitative and spatial tangibility to thinking.

Here's what I mean by qualitative tangibility. There's an auditory quality to thinking in words and so forth. You can sort of hear it, so it has a sensory quality of auditory. There's a visual quality to thinking in pictures, so it has a sensory quality of visual.

That makes thought qualitatively tangible. Also, the talk tends to be located in the head at the ears, and images tend to center in front of, behind the eyes, although they can occur elsewhere. If your eyes are closed, images of your surroundings will tend to be projected out around into the ambience. Images of your own body tend to be where the body is. If we take the sort of mental screen in front of, behind your eyes, and also include the locations of the around you and back on the body, this gives a spatial position to visual thinking and makes visual thinking spatially tangible, localizable. That allows us to track the thinking process in terms of sensory whats and spatial wheres, locations in space as it unfolds moment-by-moment in real time. This allows us to make the surface of mental experience quite tangible and observable.

We'll talk about the depths later on. I break body experience into the emotional type body sensations and then everything else. The emotional ones I call feel, and then everything else I call touch. The reason for this feel category is that when a person has emotional experience, and we're constantly having emotional experience, it's important to be aware that there will often be a somatic component, a body component. A lot of times we tend to conceive of emotion as mental only.

Certainly it is the case that emotional experiences can have a mental component. It's important to be able to detect the body component, especially when the body component is subtle, because subtle is significant. Very wispy, subtle, emotionally colored body sensations can have an enormous effect, a distorting effect on people's perception and behavior. I needed to have a word that meant body sensation that's emotional in nature, so I call that feel. Then everything else, which is most of what's in the body most of the time, is touch. I further subdivide the traditional Buddhist category of body, and then the more physical type sensations. I subdivide the traditional category of mind into image, talk. For simplicity's sake, I consider smell and taste to be a form of physical body sensation that allows us to have this nice symmetrical system.

I'm going to talk a little bit about the body, and then I'll talk a little bit about the symmetrical system. A person might say, well, I can sort of appreciate that the surface of the mind is talk and image, but what about the depths of the mind? Well, it turns out that as

you become intimate with talk space and learn how to find that space and listen to it, and likewise image space, when the surface conscious talk and image sort of goes away, you become aware of subtle undercurrents of processing that are going on, a kind of vibratory matrix out of which conscious talk and image arise. That's the subconscious. Those are the depths. Those circuits are, the phrase I use is, massively parallel and fleeting in their processing.

Massively parallel means they're processing a whole bunch of stuff at once, and it's very fine, very subtle, and very fleeting. It just disappears very quickly. It's actually a kind of vibratory energy. By looking at the surface for a while, you can then develop a sensitivity for monitoring in real time the general level of activation of the subconscious mind. This system allows us a way to not merely work with surface thought, but actually directly in real time eyeball the subconscious mind. That's sort of how the six basic sensory spaces that I work with relate to the traditional Buddhist category of the six consciousnesses.

A Deeper Freedom: Experiences of Selflessness ~ Shinzen Young

The experience of selflessness comes about in several ways.

One is when you're able to distinguish the sensory components that create that sense that there is a self inside me. The model that I like to use, of course it's only one of many possible models, the model I like to use involves three sensory components. Visual thinking, auditory thinking, and emotional type body sensation. I call emotional type body sensation feel, and the visual thinking image, and the auditory thinking talk. So when feel, image, talk get tangled together, then that's one of the factors that produces the conventional sense that there is a self here. When you're able to untangle them, then something of the somethingness of that self goes away. A deeper level of the no self comes about when after you've untangled them, you realize that there are actually waves, the they meaning the feel, image, talk.

They aren't solidified things, they're wave forms. That creates a fluid sense of self, which is another level of approaching the no self. There's the no self experience that comes through just purely disentangling. Then there's the no self experience that comes through decoagulating the elements that you've disentangled. Then there's the no self experience that comes about when those flows stop, and there is zero. That's a kind of absolute no self experience.

And then I would say that the highest freedom comes about when you can experience from that zero, the feel, image, talk re-arising. And you totally allow it to re-arise as an unblocked activity of personality. Or when they arose, they were a coagulated something called self, or ego in the sense of ego problem, as opposed to ego in the sense of ego strength, which is a whole other meaning of ego. But when we say we have an ego problem, that's self as a coagulated now. The deeper freedom is when the self re-arises, but we experience it directly coming from the nothing. And it re-arises as an uncoagulated verb called a powerful and rich human personality. Coming from the nothingness and never really fundamentally separate from the nothingness. Returning to the nothingness in a cycle. So I would call that a fully expressed self. And I would say that that would represent a healthy experience of self.

A Mindful Birth and Zen Parenting, Part 1 of 2 ~ Shinzen Young

Now I seem to remember last time we talked you were talking about a baby possibly. Do you have any questions about mindful giving birth? Absolutely, yes.

Could you talk about giving birth in particular? Well, you know how to work in feel space. You know how to work with uncomfortable touches. You've done it with your migraines. You know how to work with challenging emotions.

Well, that's all that's going to come up, right? You've already done it. You know that things tend to break up into flow. That will be even more evident in the birthing process, probably. What I mean by probably is there's a statistical tendency for anyone, even someone that hasn't done practices and whatever, there's a force in nature that pushes mothers into the experience of flow when they give birth. But they may or may not be able to detect how nature is sort of moving them in that direction.

But it's highly probable that you will be able to detect that, given your background. There will be these challenges, and you'll apply the procedures that you're familiar with. In addition to the fact that it's extremely challenging, you've also got all these forces of nature that are sort of trying to help you out, right? Women have been doing this since the beginning. So the body is designed to go into equanimity and flow states during the birthing process.

As I say, due to various circumstances, in modern civilization, people don't know how to detect that natural tendency, so they may not exactly go with it. But you will. You've got the challenge level growing. But then you've got what your body naturally knows, your consciousness actually naturally knows to do, which is to drop into equanimity and flow. So those are going to race a little bit, and they do in anybody. But because you have a practice, that gives a huge advantage to the forces of nature that are trying to make it into a good experience. So it's likely that the equanimity and flow will be able to keep well ahead of the rising challenge level.

Likely. Okay? The contractions start. At first they're mild and they're spaced. And then they get more intense and closer together.

You understand what I'm saying, right? And that sort of builds to a point where they're extremely intense and very close together. Nature is trying to create a rhythm and get you into a rhythm. And it starts out very gentle and mild and without too much challenge level. And you can get in sync with that rhythm from the get-go.

By the time it reaches full-blown intensity, you'll have become the cosmic womb of space itself giving birth. There's a peak and there's a valley. There's a peak and there's a valley. Pain where the change is subtle takes a lot of work to dissolve. Pain that comes in well-defined peaks and valleys is much easier to deal with because you can get into a rhythm with it. And pain that starts out hardly pain at all and with long intervals, but then it's going to eventually get to maximum possible. I've been told it reaches the maximum the nervous system can produce. Yet women do this, okay? So that means that the potential for transcendence, for permanent transformation of consciousness is just incredible.

But you see how nature is trying to make it easy on you. It's like it's mild and spaced. So you get into this rhythm with it. And there are various ways that you can get into the rhythm, which I'll describe in specific. And then when you finally sort of reach the periods of intensity, there's a high probability that you'll be in an ecstatic state. So what happens when a discomfort intensifies? Well, it may spread. When a touch expands, there is a tendency for the mind to contract and to turn off. Except if the mind freaks out. If the mind freaks out, then as the pain expands, the mental reaction expands. If you sort of look at what the

natural tendency is, it's simultaneous expansion and contraction of the body, the physical sensations, the touch expands, and there's a natural tendency for the image and talk to sort of go into blank and quiet at that time.

That's a tendency. Now if you can notice that tendency, then each time there's a peak. So you let the pain expand, and you simultaneously let the mind contract. And so that peak drives you into blank and quiet in mind space. And then you let the sensation expand.

But since there's no mind, or little mind, there's little sense of the self. It would be like literally becoming a flow. If you can start that rhythm off fairly quickly, by the time things are getting intense and coming fast and furious, each expansion of sensation, like the body expands more, but the mind contracts and arrests more.

So each spike of contraction drives the mind into a restful state. Now, there are also valleys in between the peaks. What's the natural thing during the valley is to physically relax the body.

Because now the pressure's off. When the valley comes, you go into relaxation, which is totally natural, because the pain's not there, right? So then you relax. And then when the peak comes, you let the peak drive you into blank and quiet. And then during the valley, you go deeper into relax.

And then in the peak, you're in blank, quiet. There is a tendency to, when touch expands, sometimes emotion can react to it, but sometimes feel gets turned off too. And that could be a natural tendency. Feel arising by way of reaction, like fear that can happen.

But you can also see that it will sometimes turn off feel and produce emotional peace. It's just like only so much real estate in the body. And if touch is big enough, there's no room for feel anymore, no room for emotion in the body. The cycle is touch expands, feel, image, talk, self.

Thought and emotion, self, contracts at the same time. So you're aware of peace, blank, quiet at the peak, and then you're aware of physical relaxation in the valley. Then you get into a rhythm with it, and the body is now being controlled by that rhythm. At the peak, the feeling, thinking self is just gone. It's just in peace, blank, quiet. And at the valley, it's easy to physically relax the body. The cycle takes you into a state of relaxation, peace, blank, quiet.

You may have trouble focusing your eyes and ears at some point, like you're going to pass out and your eyes start to swim. That creates light and silence. So the whole thing is just driving you into restful states, and then the restful states flow. And then your expansion and contraction and the universe's expansion and contraction become a single expansion and contraction. And God gives birth to the baby through you, so to speak.

And you experience that directly. Wow. That's beautiful, yes. That's how I coach women through the birthing process. Wow. Wow. Or one of the strategies.

If that doesn't work, there are other strategies. The flow of having a baby. Wow. Oh, that's beautiful.

A Mindful Birth and Zen Parenting, Part 2 of 2 ~ Shinzen Young

That's Zen birthing, or mindful birthing. Then there's Zen parenting.

That's your monastery. So the source blasts you away in birthing and then expects you to function immediately and big time. So just function. You become the... It's like Zen, okay? You get blown away in your San Zen interview and then you have to go do a job. But there's no you left, so you just do the job. You become the activity.

You just function. I mentioned in Zen you have these interviews with the Zen master, right? Mostly what you go for in an interview, people think they're going to solve these koans, like what's the sound of one hand clapping and things. And you are, but mostly you're going to have an experience of merging with the expansion, contraction, and emptiness of that Zen master. So it's sort of like some of their dynamic nothingness rubs off on you each time you do a San Zen interview and then you carry that back to the meditation hall.

That's how that works. But then, unlike the Shakti part that the Hindus do, where you sort of get zapped and then you just sort of sit around and sing and worship the guru and have some grub, in Zen you get the zap and then you got to go bust your ass in the meditation hall and it's cold and they're beating you and they're yelling at you. You got to apply it right to this like, you know, you may think you got some energy or picked up something, well now let's see if you can use it with your aching legs and your aching psyche in this Zen torture chamber.

Now we'll see, did you really get it? And of course, why that's so cool is that then you're not a leaky capacitor that just like gets charged and then loses it. You develop the strength, you can hold that and you don't become dependent on the teacher for that energy. So because you're forced to use it and you're forced to be strong, it's not just, okay, we're going to let the gurus zap us and then sit around and talk about how great the guru is.

You have to like apply it to real stuff right away. So that's why I like the Zen approach to it. They talk about transferring the consciousness but not in quite explicitly the terms I'm using with you now. So you go, you pick up something of the dynamic nothingness of that Roshi and then you carry it back. So when I look at Zen parenting, using Zen here in a sort of metaphorical way, is that your baby is the Zen master. Because the baby is dynamic nothingness.

It's still linked to the source. So every time you're interacting with the baby, you are, you're having a Zen interview. That's your little Roshi, okay? And you can see the flow of expansion, contraction and zero inside the baby and it rubs off on you. So you're getting shaktipat from your own baby through touch, sight, sound. Then you ride on that and you're able to use it for the challenges of taking care of the baby.

That's one way to think about the parenting. So it's pretty cool, huh? It's very cool, yeah. Any questions about any of this? You've talked about, and forgive me if I don't phrase it correctly, but sometimes we will, like the raw fear will come up and you've said it's like an infant state of fear. Does that make sense? I understand what you're talking about.

And I really appreciate you bringing that up because I've had an experience like that and now it gives me so much compassion when a baby cries or gets upset and we may or may not know why that is, but by me experiencing that and by you letting me know that that's the raw feel emotion that an infant feels, I think it will let me have a lot more love and compassion for that child when they experience something like that. Let me ask you. I want to make sure I know what we're talking about. Is it having the experience of a sort of chaotic activity within feel space inside yourself, like you dropped into a very primitive level and there was just sort of like a chaotic feel for no particular reason, just sort of like an

amoeba doing a thing deep down there? Is that what you're alluding to? Yes, but it was a huge chaotic fear. Was it just fear or was it other sensations mixed in? I think it was just fear, but it was really big and then I just went grasping for an image or something to equate how big that fear was to something that I could identify with and it was a terrible criminal situation, it was the image that just came in my mind. That's how big the fear was, but it was just the fear at the beginning. So you experienced like raw fear in feel space for no reason whatsoever? No reason, no. And it was just like a chaotic arising and then you applied the practice to that? Let me think back, it was a couple retreats ago.

I'm not sure if I applied the practice or not. I think I was just shocked because it was so strong. You were shocked at how primitive and irrational feel space can be. But now you know that when you watch the baby sort of doing its stuff, that's its feel space expanding and contracting, so this gives you a sense that you have an experiential sense of what the baby is going through when it's in its primordial freakout.

Yes, yes. And instead of going, what's wrong? It's like all of a sudden there's a huge amount of compassion because of what I experienced. Well that's excellent. When time gets closer to that event, I'd probably like to talk to you about it, about the birthing process.

Sure. Again, you have left me with a lot of excitement and I was on another retreat with you when someone went into I think labor on an online and then went to the hospital and she came back and described it during the talking circle. I think she was in labor for a huge amount of time and she talked about how the nurses and doctors were completely shocked at how she was in labor for so long and they were amazed at how well she did. It was absolutely amazing. Well, this is good. So I think we're good? Yes, thank you.

A Mindfulness Path Arising Between Empowering Contrasts ~

Shinzen Young

I'd like to think the way that I present mindfulness is based on significant distinctions, or perhaps a better way to put it, significant contrasts, empowering contrasts. Viva la difference.

Between what? Well, a whole bunch of things. There's a place on this path for making discriminations. There's a place on this path for destroying discriminations. There's a place on this path for breaking down the self and the world. There's a place on this path for building up the self and the world. There's a place on this path for bearing down. And there's a place on this path for easing up. So that means that the path isn't a path.

It can't be fixated. It arises in between. A whole bunch of empowering contrasts.

Maturity on the path could be defined as learning how to work those contrasts, how to get rid of the notion that they are somehow contradictions, see them as complementarities, and to know how to do what at what time for optimal efficacy. And that's just practice. Practice, practice, practice. You get the hang of it.

It's a matter of alternating. If the labeling makes you racy, okay, then try dropping the labels. See if you can still have clarity.

If that makes you spacey, then you have to label again. There's no answer to this except to constantly remind people that there's no answer to this. In other words, you have to constantly talk out both sides of your mouth at once and say there's a place for bearing down, there's a place for easing up. When a person needs to ease up, they don't hear that you said there's a place for easing up.

They only hear. And conversely, there's just no way around it. Sasaki Roshi has this great expression, *shirini megusuri*. It means that people tend to apply eye wash to their anus. Right medicine, wrong place. So in other words, if we say there's two sides, you can bear down, you can ease up, you can label, you can drop labels. You can even not note and do nothing for a while. Unfortunately, there's some perverse principle where if we say, you know, you do one or the other, whatever one is the most convenient one for that person's impurities to grab onto, that's what they'll hear. So if they've got ego around performance, they'll hear, I gotta perform.

If they've got ego around, hey, I need to cool out and just feel good and not work too hard, then they'll hear that, well, I'm supposed to not do anything. So there's no way around it. It always happens that way. No matter how many times you point out, do it this way or this way. There's something to learn from this, there's something to learn from that, until finally people figure it out. Like the metaphor used by the Buddha of tuning the lute, how do you tune a lute? Well, you tighten the string, but then it's a little too tight, so you loosen, you tighten, you loosen. And between the tightening and loosening, you just get a feel for where the lute should be. So between these empowering contrasts, you're able to work and optimally use the various sides that are available to you.

A Psycho-Spiritual Workout Routine ~ Shinzen Young

You can start with focus on ordinary and just sort of deal with the ordinary sensory experience. Then you can shift if you want to a focus on restful states, which is a kind of thinned out and attenuated version of the focus on the ordinary.

And often after you do that, the dynamic aspect will be present. Then you can focus on flow, vanishing, and then the vanishing will point you towards that which is outside of time and space, that which is beyond the human, which could be called zero or nothingness or the source. When a human being touches that nothingness, the natural reaction to that nothingness is joy, love, compassion, and a call to service.

So from the nothingness will arise the positive feel-image-talk in a very natural way. And that sort of completes the cycle. It's sort of like a psycho-spiritual nautilus workout. You know the nautilus equipment, you exercise all the main muscle groups. Well focus on ordinary, rest, the dynamic, and then the intentionally creating of the positive. This sort of hits all the main psycho-spiritual muscle groups, so to speak, and gives a nice complete workout for your soul.

A.D.D. & the "Do Nothing" Technique ~ Shinzen Young

I would say in theory, yes, it is okay, and yes, you can do just it for the rest of your life. However, I would put a little addendum onto that. You want to make sure that you're doing it in an optimal way. The way to make sure you're doing it in an optimal way is, at least occasionally, touch base with someone who's competent in guiding you with that technique. In other words, as far as just using that technique, hey, that's a classic path that will take you all the way to classic enlightenment. All around the world, what I call the do-nothing approach has been discovered and rediscovered, and therefore it's known by various names. Dzogchen, rikpa, gomé, the path of non-meditation, those are some of the Tibetan names. Some interpretations of Zen, just sitting, shikantaza, are that.

Papaji calls it, call off the search. Krishnamurti called it choiceless awareness. So yeah, it's a powerful form of practice, but I think you run a real danger if you try to practice it just on your own without occasionally having input from someone who's competent to guide your progress with that technique. So if you have ADD and you find that what I call the do-nothing approach works for you and it's the only one that works for you, certainly that in theory is sufficient. Go for it. But try to get some input from someone familiar with that, once or twice a year at least, so that you know that you're on course. Also if it works, a sign of that would be that somewhere down the line your ADD will have improved to the point where you can implement other more systematic or organized techniques.

Abrupt Flow: Diminishings, Vanishings and Noting Gone ~

Shinzen Young

Okay, so I wanted to talk about one of the themes of Focus on Change, which is noting abrupt diminishings. And my simple one-word label for that is gone.

But as with all the words that I use, virtually all the words that I use, we have to be careful because the meaning is not identical to the meaning in colloquial English. When we say gone, it implies gone for good. Typically it's like gone and it ain't coming back. But gone is just an abrupt diminishing of something that you happen to notice has abruptly diminished. So it doesn't mean that it won't come back instantly, but it's still gone.

Also, gone does not imply every part of it is gone. You could be observing an image and let's say it's a person. So there's a head, there's arms, and so forth. And at some point the arm disappears, okay, but the rest of the image is there.

Well, the arm abruptly vanishes, evaporates. So that was a partial vanishing. Part of what you were observing disappeared.

You noticed it. You note that as gone. So gone does not imply gone for good. Gone doesn't mean that every single part of what you were observing disappears. For example, let's say that you have a widespread sensation in your body.

A sensation arises like a burst of pain and it's got a local and it spreads out broadly. Let's say that you zoom out to cover it. You implement that option with the noting. And as you're covering it, the left quadrant abruptly collapses. The rest of the pain is there, but a chunk of it went kachunk. So that's an abrupt vanishing of part or an abrupt diminishing, perhaps a diminishing to complete vanishing. So an abrupt diminishing of part of what you're observing, that counts as a gone. So part of it could disappear and it may, or part of it can abruptly diminish and it may abruptly diminish all the way to no longer existing or it might just abruptly diminish sort of to a lower level or a smaller size. So essentially flow is change that in some way is continuous. It's either wavy or it's like pixelated, you know, so that even though each one of those little vibrations might in itself be disconnected, they sort of like tend to form something that seems fluid. But abrupt diminishings at the macroscopic scale, those are, I use the word gone for that. There's a tendency to assume that this is a very esoteric category and you know, maybe if I meditate for 20 years, I'll be able to detect this.

So disabuse yourself of that notion. Every in-breath comes to an end. Every out-breath comes to an end. That's a touch sensation and it ends and it's obvious that the flavor called in-breath, that sweep of sensation stops for a moment and is replaced by the flavor called out-breath. So don't ever say that I can't detect any vanishings.

That's always there. Now you might say, well that's trivial, but all gons are uncreated equal. I don't know if you quite catch the significance of that phrase.

Maybe that just seems like a very enigmatic and strange way, maybe you think I'm just wordsmithing to get your attention or to make it sound like I know something that you don't or who knows what. But all gons are uncreated equal. It doesn't matter how ordinary and banal it is. An airplane is passing and it's like sound, sound, sound, sound, sound, gone.

You say, well so what? Of course, gone. However, as you are paying attention to that kind of thing, you are gradually, gradually, gradually, gradually, gradually, gradually, over a long period of time, developing a sensitivity to detect the unborn source of consciousness. Each

one of those is a little teeny learning that in and of itself would seem completely trivial.

But once you begin to sum that over many, many, many, many instances, let's be honest, probably over weeks, months, years of practice, you start to notice that those moments of gone as I have defined it, seem to be momentarily adverting, that is to say, directing your attention towards something that's actually not a thing. And therefore, it can't really be sensorially experienced, but can be contacted. Let's put it, it can be contacted through the senses.

It just can't be experienced as a sensory experience. And as you contact that more and more and more and more, 10 times, 100 times, 1,000 times, 10,000 times, 100,000 times, if you have that category, it starts to become clearer and clearer and clearer to you. Now, the clear can only be in your senses, obviously. So you might say that the after effect of noticing a vanishing becomes more and more and more well-defined in your sensory circuits. And you begin to discover some things that are intuitively obvious and some things that are actually quite counterintuitive. What is intuitively obvious is that if you're having an unpleasant experience in your body and or mind, and you're able to pay attention to the moments when parts of it vanish, that gives you a sense of relief. What is not at all intuitively obvious is if you're having a pleasant experience and you notice the vanishing, that that increases your sense of fulfillment. That is actually quite counterintuitive. However, it is sensorially true, although logically it doesn't make any sense at all. The Tibetans have their own enigmatic phraseology.

I'm not the only person in the Buddhist world that talks weird. The oneness of bliss and void. What in the world is that? Well, actually it refers to a whole lot of things, but in the end it's what I just talked about. And what is also not intuitively obvious is if you have a neutral experience, one that is neither pleasant nor unpleasant, and you note its vanishing, that there is great sensory fulfillment in that also. It is intuitively obvious that if you notice vanishings, that that might reverberate through your senses as a restful experience. That as the result of noticing the moment when a burst of talk comes to an end, might be followed by some quiet.

That's intuitively obvious. That you can have relative rest states, what I call relaxation, light, silence, peace, blank, quiet. So someone or a combination of those could begin to pervade your sensory experience as the result of noticing vanishings. What is not intuitively obvious is that a sense of great richness should come from noticing vanishings. It would seem like bleakness would come from noticing vanishings, but actually a sense of richness can result. The way I like to conceptualize that is that the complexity of self and world is reduced to the simplicity of flow waves, but that then contains within it all the richness of the self and world is in those waves. And when the wave comes to an end, in the gone, the richness is still there. The richness is still there. The assumption is, when you're given this category, that you are supposed to be able to detect gone in all your sensory experiences.

Touch, sight, sound, feel, and smell, relaxation, light, silence, peace, blank, quiet. If you make that assumption, then you are setting yourself up for failure. That is not the assumption. If you do focus on change, restricted to noting vanishings, noting gone, the assumption is you will be able to find vanishing somewhere in your sensory experience. If only in the fact that if you have a lot of chatter, you have a lot of sentences. If you have a lot of sentences, you have a lot of periods. Each one of those endings is a gone. Talk, talk, gone, talk, gone. Or you're still alive, so you're going to take another in-breath, and it's going to come to an end. You're going to take another out-breath, and it's going to come to an end. The assumption is that you can find gone if you have a lot of chatter, and if you're still breathing.

The assumption is that that's all you ever have to focus on in order to do the technique absolutely perfect. All gons are uncreated, equal. Soryu's teacher gives people koans. Of course, it's Rinzai Zen, but he says, I hope I'm not misquoting, but I think Soryu said this, the very best students don't need koans. They do their entire enlightenment process with the

breath. Noticing that what happens at the moment when the in and the out-breath ends, what happens at that instant is all there ever is, ever. So that's complete enlightenment. You're living inside zero.

So that's a few things to say about this theme. Ending in Sanskrit is nirodha, n-i-r-o-d-h-a. That's also a synonym for nirvana. Nirvana means to blow out, literally, but it also means to quench a fire of suffering, but it also means to quench your thirst in the sense of being completely and totally fulfilled, hence the rishas in the void.

Advanced FAQs: Regarding Emptiness ~ Shinzen Young

From advanced students, the most common question is, how do I deal with the pit of emptiness? How do I deal with the dark night of the soul? How do I deal with the seeming loss of my humanity and the loss of my edge and my dynamic motivations that have come about because of experiencing emptiness? And I've talked at length in other segments about how one deals with that. Essentially, it's a combination of, if you're freaking out because of emptiness, see that the freakout is empty.

That's number one. And number two, balance the emptiness with practices like focus on positive, where you're intentionally recreating a new self from the emptiness, a new and positive self. So the combination, if you're, for the advanced student, that frequent question, what do I do about the seeming negative consequences of the void, is number one, well, if you're having some sort of fear or other kinds of disorientation or freakout as the result of the void, then see that that reaction is itself void. That combined with, okay, well, emptiness is only half the picture, focus on positive, intentionally creating a new self out of the emptiness, but intentionally by holding, manifesting, and radiating positive feel-image-talk as a consistent practice. Those two things, you sort of negate the negative reactions to the void, and then you affirm a conditioned arising by creating a new self intentionally, a new and better self. Those two are what I suggest for dealing with the so-called pit of emptiness, which is, I think, the most frequent question from advanced students.

After enlightenment, what's left, what's the point? ~ Shinzen

Young

So, we're rolling with the question, what's left after enlightenment? What's the point? The best way to deal with this question is to look at the question itself. Actually, it's two questions. What's left after enlightenment and what's the point of the whole thing? Let's analyze the questions themselves because they contain certain presuppositions and looking at those presuppositions will be helpful in answering the questions. If you say, what's left after enlightenment, the implication of that language is that there is a single moment of enlightenment and that basically enlightenment is this binary system. You're not enlightened and you are enlightened and it's these two things.

However, it has been my experience that it's not at all like that. Although some people have a dramatic moment of enlightenment, it does happen. For most people, it sort of sneaks up on them and unless it's pointed out to them, they might not even be aware of quite how enlightened they've become because they've acclimatized to it. So, enlightenment experience does not necessarily involve one or a sequence of dramatic, sudden experiences.

It may, but it doesn't have to. Sometimes it's a more gradual process. In fact, usually it's a more gradual process. If you look at nature, you'll see that some processes in nature are discontinuous, they jump.

Some processes in nature are continuous and it took mathematicians quite a long time to develop an advanced form of calculus that could simultaneously deal with both continuous and discontinuous functions. But they had to because the nature of nature is that way. And since enlightenment is part of nature, it's a natural process. It's even called seeing your nature, can show to see your nature.

So because it's part of nature, we shouldn't be surprised that there are both sudden and gradual components to the endeavor. So if you say what's left after enlightenment, it implies that there's this single sudden thing that somebody goes through and there's a before and an after. Even if one had one of the sudden types of experiences, there's still a lifetime of working out the consequences of that, improving behaviors, working through negative patterns. In my own case, I did have a sudden experience, that is true, as the result of systematic cultivation. Some people have sudden experiences without even having practiced. That's quite extraordinary, but it does happen just out of nowhere.

Suddenly they see what in Buddhism we call the no-self. It happened to me a rather long time ago. I'm 65 now and it was a while back. But I've had to spend my entire life refining the implications of that, realizing how screwed up I was in so many areas, even after that experience. It wasn't all that many years ago that I saw a psychotherapist, a psychiatrist, an MD, for 18 months to work on some behavioral issues that I felt I needed something besides the meditation practice. So one shouldn't think that there's enlightenment and then there's this after-enlightenment thing. It can be more gradual, for one thing, and even if it's sudden, you've got a long, long way to go after you've seen the no-self. That's just seeing the ox.

Look at the ox in 30 pictures, you've got to get on that ox, you've got to ride that ox in daily life. So part of the problem is the formulation of the question, implying there's enlightenment and then there's after-enlightenment. There's enlightenment and then there's a lifetime of after-enlightenment, if it's a sudden one.

So it's still a lifetime. Now we can, having cleared that away, we can talk about, well, what's left, if you want to say what's left. Well what's left is a whole bunch of screw-ups and bad habits and the effortless flow of emptiness. And as time goes on, the effortless flow of emptiness more and more eats up the screw-ups and the bad habits, etc., etc. So as time goes on, more and more of what's left is the effortless flow of emptiness, which doesn't sound all that appealing until you actually experience it.

And then it's like, well, if you had a choice of living one day that way or living your whole life not that way, you'd say, well, I'll take the one day and you could kill me at the end of the day. That's how good the effortless flow of emptiness is. More and more of what's left is less and less something and more and more doing. What's the point? Well, that also sort of goes to an issue of meaning. It's asking what's the meaning? What's the ultimate meaning? What's the meaning of the path? What's the purpose of the path? But the funny thing is that you have to work through the need to have meaning.

And I've given some talks about that. So that in a sense, the answer to that question, what does it all mean or what is the purpose, once again you have to look at the question and realize that there's an implication there. As you begin to work through the need to find the purpose, the purpose arises spontaneously. Now could I put a word to the point? If you asked what's the point, could I put a word to that point? Where the ox takes you would sort of be maybe the point of it. So yes, I can put a word to that point. That word would be love. That's the point.

Authority, Opinions and the Buddhist Canon ~ Shinzen Young

I hear that sometimes people ask, well, what would Shinzetsu say about this? That gives me pleasant sensations in a sense, pleasant self-referential sensations, pleasant feel. But also, immediately when I hear that people say things like that in my talk space is, don't they realize these are just my casual opinions about things? Don't they realize how little I know about enlightenment? Don't they realize how little any teacher knows about enlightenment? I understand that people want to appeal to authority.

It's convenient in a sense. Basically, there's traditionally in India and also in the Western world, three bases for knowing things. There's direct experience, there's logical inference, and then there is reliable authority. What is distinctive about the Buddha as a teacher is that he rejected reliable authority as a basis of knowing.

He essentially said it's direct experience and logical inference. Just because a very good person says something doesn't mean it's necessarily true. Just because some ancient scripture that everybody believes in says something doesn't necessarily mean it's true. And just because somebody that's meditated for 50 years or 60 years says something doesn't necessarily mean it's true. It's their casual opinion.

It's the best they can come up with. And I think it's really important to keep that in mind. Does that mean that you shouldn't listen to what these teachers say? No. We have to listen because, yes, there's a lot that can be learned. But it also has to be taken not as some sort of authoritative pronouncement. It's at best a finger that can sort of point, and yes, this person has some experiences that I don't, or has more experience than I do, so yeah, I can listen to what they say. But to go beyond that, to think that, to make it carry more weight than just that person's casual opinion or best that they can come up with, I think is to miss the point. We just do our best to formulate things as best we can.

So I just wanted to say a couple words along those lines. Yes, you can make use of authority to a certain degree, but I don't think that we need to give it more clout than it really deserves. Also it's sometimes asked, well, how does what this teacher or that teacher say map onto what's in the scriptures or what's in the canon? I guess the Western religions, the Abrahamic religions, tend to call it the scriptures, but in Buddhism they call it the canon.

Means the same thing. Unfortunately, the people that are responsible for the Buddhist canon, the Buddha, his immediate disciples and so forth, are not now alive, meaning we can't dialogue with them. If you ever come to a retreat with me, what you'll see is characteristic of the way I teach is that when people ask me questions, very seldom do I just give an answer.

I sometimes do. But in most cases I find I have to ask a little more. What did you mean by that? I think I understand what you're saying, but it could be this or it could be that. Could you clarify? It's very difficult for me to just answer a question directly. I find that interaction is needed. A back and forth is needed. There is no way that we can have a back and forth with the Buddha or his immediate disciples.

It's one way. All we've got is what is in these books. These books were not written down right away. It was quite a while before they were written down. Some people might claim, well, it was all perfectly memorized word for word. There is something of that memorizing tradition in the Indic way of doing things. But the fact is, even if it was word for word, that's still not enough.

Not really. There would have to be a back and forth to see really how does what, say, I, as Shin Zen Yang, am teaching, how does that map on to the Buddha? I'd have to be able to dialogue with him. And I can't.

He's gone. So we can look to the scriptures, and yes, we can get a lot from it, and we should. But once again, I have rather modest expectations with regards to how really sharp the communication can be between the scriptures or the canon and us, given that it's a one-way street. And so it's a kind of humility to understand that, yeah, you can make use of it, but you can't dialogue with it. And therefore, don't impute more to it than it can deliver in terms of you understanding the path to classical liberation.

Bear Down or Ease Up in Meditation? ~ Shinzen Young

What are the great masters of the past? The great masters of the past have never really been able to get around this. Some of them will emphasize the bearing down aspect.

Certainly the Buddha was in that camp. Some of them will emphasize the easing up aspect, like Papaji. I love the title of his book, *Call Off the Search*. That's my term for the sort of like ease up and stop striving for enlightenment. So the Buddha talked about the noble quest.

Papaji talks about *Call Off the Search*. Which one is right? Well, they're both right. So then the question, well, how do you know when to bear down? How do you know when to ease up? I don't have any magic formula for that. I can tell you how I, in my own teaching, attempt to deal with the paradox. My way of dealing with it is to give people techniques that allow them to bear down, that would emphasize that aspect, but also to give them a very clear description of how to practice in a non-efforting way. And the non-efforting practice, which you can read about on my websites, I call *do nothing*. It's basically my reworking of that whole choiceless awareness, dzogchen, just sit, what some people would call just sitting anyway, that whole approach to things, the *Call Off the Search* approach.

I call it *do nothing*. And so my way of dealing with the paradox is say, okay, I'm going to give you these techniques that involve noting, touch site sound or feel image talk, etc., etc. And there's some effort involved in that.

You're trying to separate phenomena, and you're trying to soak your attention into the phenomenon when it arises. So here are some techniques within which it's natural to somewhat bear down. Here's another approach, which gives you a description of how to let go of the intention to do anything at all, without having an intention to let go of the intention, which is sort of tricky.

If you read the description of how to *do nothing*, you'll see how I try to get around that. I give people both approaches, and I encourage them to do both, to try both. My stock phrase is, if the noting makes you racy, then *do nothing*, as I define *do nothing*. If the *do nothing* makes you spacey, then go back to the noting. So now you have both approaches worked into the system, or worked into a system, so that they can sample both and work with both. I think because it is a paradox and because both are true, that the single most important thing is to not get one-sided. I see this all the time.

Yes, indeed. One of the characteristic dangers that you can get with mindfulness practice is that people get goal-driven, and there is a drivenness in the way that they do it. You can actually get that in any spiritual practice. The medicine for that would be to learn that you don't have to practice that way.

On the other hand, I have also seen people get addicted to the have-no-goal approach. They spend their whole life, in daily life, they are unconscious and driven, but they are afraid to do any noting technique in their formal practice, because somehow that is going to pollute their consciousness. They actually develop an aversion or a phobia of any bearing down whatsoever in formal practice. As I say, it is sort of ridiculous, because in daily life they are constantly giving in to those kinds of forces of drivenness, but they are afraid to have any even hint of a goal in practice.

That is a kind of phobia. I think that my way of trying to deal with this is, well, get familiar with both ways of working, so that there is a kind of freedom that you could do either one. In fact, I would say that the test for either of the approaches is your ability to do the other approach. If you have been doing a high-efforting approach, how do we know it is working? Well, you should be able to drop all effort if it worked, and do a no-effort, no-meditation form of meditation. If you have been efforting and you claim that it has been successful and

productive, then you should be able to do a non-effort practice without any problem at all.

It works the other way, too. If you claim that you have been productively doing a non-effort practice, a call-off-the-search practice, then the result of that should be that you have this very high concentration, clarity, and equanimity skills, even though you have had no particular goal to develop those in any systematic way. Therefore, the gold standard for testing, in my mind, the efficacy, the progress in a call-off-the-search approach, would be can you implement highly systematic focusing techniques like noting? Are you able and willing to do this? Well, then your call-off-the-search has been successful. Conversely, if you have been searching very hard and bearing down, that should result in the ability to completely let go of all direction and goal in practice. If not, then you have been making efforts without the progress that you should be making, and maybe you need to balance by doing the other approach.

Becoming a High-Wattage Broadcaster of Human Positivity ~

Shinzen Young

This was way back at the end of the Vietnam War. I was living in a Vietnamese Buddhist temple, but not in Vietnam. It was a Vietnamese ethnic temple in Los Angeles. You may remember the news footage of the people clinging onto the helicopters in Saigon, trying to get out and whatever. What happened was that there was this huge influx of Vietnamese refugees. They were sent to marine camps, dedicated marine camps throughout the United States. One of the big places they were sent was Camp Pendleton, which is near San Diego in Southern California. The temple where I was living, the International Buddhist Meditation Center, was in L.A.

It was really interesting to see the marines in action. They realized that at least half of the people that were coming into that camp would be Buddhist. The other half would be Catholic, because that's sort of the religious breakdown in the country. They could handle the Catholic, because that's international. You just get Catholic priests. But they were smart enough to know that there were Buddhists, Buddhist clergy in the United States. They were smart enough to, in fact, know that there were Americans that had been trained in the Vietnamese stuff.

The U.S. Marines contracted with the temple, our temple, to hire a Buddhist clergy that would be there when those refugees arrived. They went out and they bought Buddha statues. They had these tents set up. It was there for these people that the night before had been hanging from the helicopters. They were that organized.

That was actually quite impressive. What happened was that a whole bunch of us went down the morning after the thing of the people on the helicopters. We went down on a bus to Camp Pendleton. We could see people coming in buses. The people we'd seen on the news the night before hanging from the helicopters were being bused into this.

It was amazing to see the look on their face when they saw Americans of all races in Vietnamese Buddhist robes and able to chant and do the liturgy in Vietnamese. There's this expression, to meet the Buddha in hell. For them it's hell. It's the last thing in the world they would ever expect going to the United States on a military camp. The first thing they're going to see is native-born Americans that are capable of working within their tradition as Buddhist chaplains. The reason I thought about this was there were among those refugees a certain number of Buddhist monks, as you might imagine.

They would want to get out of the country if it was going to go communist. I noticed that among all the Buddhist monks there, there was one that was young, but no matter where you would see him, he would always be surrounded by people. He was like a people magnet. His English was pretty limited, but through a combination of his limited English and writing in Chinese characters, because I can write Chinese and the monks in Vietnam learn how to write classical Chinese. Through the limited English and us writing back and forth with Chinese characters, I was able to talk to him.

His name was Thich Dung Nguyen. I said, it's like, what's the deal? People seem to relate to you very differently from any of the other Buddhist clergy that's here. They said, well, my teacher taught me loving-kindness practice from the very get-go. Loving-kindness is a traditional version of the focus on positive feel. From the time he was just a little kid, he was trained to radiate this out. You could see the objective impact it had on the people around him. Anyway, at an advanced level, it's not just going to be in your body. It's going to go out of the body in all six directions. It would be just like a high-wattage broadcast of human

positivity. Sound like a plan? Yeah.

Beginner FAQs: Why Are We Doing This? Why Meditate? ~

Shinzen Young

Certainly, one of the most frequent questions from beginner students is, why meditate? What's the whole point of it? Why are we doing this kind of thing? I've given actually a fairly elaborate classification of the reasons to meditate in terms of the notion of total human happiness, that we meditate for our own personal, unconditional happiness as well as for our personal happiness. And we also meditate so that we can best contribute to the conditional and unconditional happiness of others.

That's sort of the model that I give. From beginners, the question would be, why should I even bother doing this? And essentially, the answer is, well, this particular case is mindfulness practice, a certain form of meditation. And this form of meditation elevates your concentration, clarity, and equanimity. And if you elevate your baseline of concentration, clarity, and equanimity, then you'll elevate your baseline of human happiness in the broadest and deepest sense or senses that a human being can be happy.

So in all the different ways that a human being can be happy, including the deepest possible ways a human being can be happy, for all of the above, we do this practice. You might say that the centerpiece is sensory happiness independent of conditions. And sensory happiness independent of conditions comes about when you're able to have complete sensory experience of your body and your mind. And you have complete sensory experience of your body and mind when you cross a certain threshold of intensity of concentration, clarity, and equanimity applied to body sensations and the thinking process. Then your experience of ordinary body-mind becomes utterly extraordinary. And your relationship to your body and mind change from your body and mind being a prison to your body and mind being a home where you abide but can leave any time you want.

Born Between Expansion and Contraction: Responding to the Needs of Your Larger Identity ~ Shinzen

In the Visuddhimagga, which is the classic text on vipassana practice used in many of the Southeast Asian countries, the path, the stages to enlightenment are enumerated as seven, referred to as the satta visuddhaya, or seven purifications. Now this is only one of many, many possible formulations of the path, and I think it's useful to study these things, but it's also extremely dangerous to study these things because then we get an idea that, well, it has to conform exactly to what's in this book or in that book. Then we get caught in studying the maps and not making the journey, or we're still spending our time arguing with people about what the right map is.

However, having said that, there's also things we can learn that can give us a heads up, that can be useful. Rather close to stream entry, which is where it culminates in enlightenment, initial enlightenment, one of the stages rather close to that is called an awareness of udayabhaya. That means rising, passing. That is followed by an awareness not of it rises, then it passes, but rather an awareness it is passing as it is arising.

It's very clearly stated. That's a stage different from awareness of rising and passing, and one of greater sensitivity or awareness. There are things that people are typically aware of and things that people are typically not aware of. People are typically drawn to the moment of arising and typically miss the moment of passing. It's a very deep training to learn how to detect the moment of passing.

As you develop a sensitivity to that, you get to this experience that Buddhaghosa, the author of the Visuddhimagga, was referring to, whereby as soon as any event is arising, you detect within it, it's passing. To paraphrase T.S. Eliot, in my beginning is my end. It's like no sooner has it begun, but it's palpably ending, not theoretical. The ending is absolutely as salient. The passing as it's arising is as salient as the arising. That seems to have something to do with the timing of sensory processing in the brain.

Quite what it has to do with that, I'm not sure. But to me, I would conjecture that since there's nothing really mystical about that notion, that might be a good place to begin an investigation, a scientific investigation of enlightenment, since awareness of passing as soon as it's arising is so near to enlightenment in that formulation. What's interesting is that the temporal metaphor of it's passing as soon as it's rising leads to a spatial metaphor. Because remember, every sensory experience, as I like to look at sensory experience, every sensory experience has spatial volume.

It has width, depth, and height. Perhaps not well defined, but even mental events, you have images, they occupy space. You have talk, it's sort of in your head.

You can listen on the right, you can listen on the left, you can zoom out and see how far the talk goes and discover that, hey, it's like bigger than your head. It has spatial qualities. So that means when something is arising, it's space is growing. Now if something is also passing as it's arising, then it's space is collapsing at the same time.

And I know it's pretty subtle, but it's detectable. And that gives you a perception of what Sasaki Roshi calls father and mother pulling apart and giving birth to the present. So temporally, if we take the model of the Visuddhimagga, I give you the heads up, there may come a time in your practice where as soon as things are arising, they're passing, and that's not a concept.

It's salient. Heads up, that's a temporal perception, but since all experience is spatial, that means as soon as space is being born, it's also collapsing. So it's spreading out and pulling in at exactly the same time. And that would be true with regards to any sensory experience. So specifically, feel, image, talk individually, and then collectively, all three at once, born in between this flow of space. Then you remember the koan that Sasaki Roshi frequently gives when you see the flower, how do you experience your true self? So let's say that you've been habitually paying attention to how feel, image, talk arise subtly, all three at once, and they arise in this expanding, contracting force field.

So that's now becomes, you've got a momentum of that, that sort of second nature. So when you look at an object that's external sight, well guess what? It does exactly the same thing. Each little shift in the external visual is an arising and a passing. That means a spreading and a collapsing.

That means since each little part is that way, the whole experience is that way. Then your three fountains, and I don't mean linear fountains that go up and down, gushing and gathering, I mean in all six directions. It's like fountains that gush and gather in all the directions of space. The self is arising in that as feel, image, talk, and each thing you look at has exactly the same flow of space. And those two waves, the simultaneous expansion and contraction in fit, and the simultaneous expansion and contraction in it, meaning any touch, sight, or sound, they cannot be held apart. They simply cannot be held apart.

They automatically become a single expansion and contraction, and there is an absolute union and the separation between subject and object, inside and outside, are annihilated for a moment. And there is only the activity of the source. That activity, so one theme, temporarily passing as soon as it's arising. Spatially collapsing as soon as it's spreading. Exact same thing.

Now one other theme. There is a kind of absolute spontaneous effortlessness to the way space spreads and collapses. So at the very arising, as soon as an experience occurs, begins to occur, there's a kind of effortless refreshing spontaneity, a kind of just happening-ness to it. These themes of spatiality and spontaneity are hugely emphasized in the Dzogchen tradition of Tibetan practice.

They're linked. So that there is a kind of refreshing dynamic taste of effortlessness that is present inside the spaciousness. Problem with the word spacious, though, is it implies, oh, there's this giant space that's always there. That's why it's spacious. But spaciousness means has the nature, the elastic nature of space to be able to spread and collapse at the same time.

So the spreading and collapsing is, it's sort of effortless. And you can get a sense that you're just riding on it. In Zen they call that riding the ox backwards. Because you don't know where you're going, but you don't have to know where you're going. You're mounted on the ox of the source. This could be described as literally praying continuously.

With each sensory event, there is a tangible contact with the source. What determines the life of a star? What's the big picture as to how a star lives? Well, there are two forces that dominate the physics of a star. A contractive force of gravitation, which is universal. But then what happens, so that gathers hydrogen and other, I guess basically hydrogen, maybe a little helium. Let's say it's a primary star, so it gathers hydrogen. But what happens when you compress a gas? Well I mean a lot of things happen, but what's the main thing that happens that you first think of? It heats up. But what happens when things heat up? They expand. So there's a thermophoton pressure that is constantly pushing out against the gravitational force that's constantly pulling in. So it's a contest between expanding space and contracting space. The star goes in cycles, where one dominates, the other dominates. So if a star had sensory experience and were to report on its sensory experience, it would say I am born in between expansion and contraction. That's what it would say if it could say anything.

So a star might say that. And isn't it interesting that at each expansive contractive cycle, there's a nurturing process. What gets nurtured, what gets given birth to, are the heavier and heavier atoms.

How did we get from hydrogen to all the other atoms, including the silicon and the oxygen and nitrogen and carbon that we need for planets and life and so forth? Where did that come from? It was cooked inside stars, primary stars. And if the stars were big enough, at the end of their life, they experienced total simultaneous expansion and contraction. So intense that a part of the star collapses either to a neutron star or a black hole, and the other part accelerates at unbelievable velocities out into the universe and showers all the universe with those heavy atoms, which then can recoagulate in secondary stars like our sun that can then have planets around them. Because of the heavier elements, there's carbon, oxygen, life can arise. So we are literally made of stardust, quite literally.

The carbon, the oxygen, the nitrogen, the atoms of life, everything but hydrogen is born in between. How about galaxies? Well, it's now believed that galaxies are a giant cloud of stars, and in the center of them is a supermassive black hole. So there's a contractive core and an effusive cloud. How about an atom? Same deal. Really massive nucleus, contractive core, effusive cloud of electrons around.

So if you ask a galaxy, who gave birth to you? If it could speak, it would say, I'm born in between expansion and contraction. So what an atom? As small as an atom may seem, it's gargantuan relative to the Planck scale of length. When you get down, and then of course there's the ultimately large, there's the size of the observable universe. Major theme, okay? What's the holy grail of modern physics is to somehow unify the theory of gravity, which deals with the largest conceivable structure, with the theory of quantum physics, quantum field theory and so forth, which deals with what happens when you look at very small parts. There's no theory at this point that is unified, no unified field theory.

So I find it intriguing that the edge of physics is somehow related to this issue of small and large. What's the fate of the universe? Well no one knows. But people, a common conjecture is that it will depend on something called the cosmological constant. And would you believe it? The cosmological constant is actually a ratio of two physical quantities. And what do you suppose? One of those quantities expands the universe, and the other, what do you think, contracts.

And no one knows what that ratio is. It seems to all involve these weird flavors of interplay of expansive and contractive things and somehow what's born in between will be either virtual particles that come out of nothing in the quantum soup of the ultimately small or seemingly the universe itself. Now I may just be projecting this, you know, based on my own experiences and points of view. In which case fine. And there's no great cosmic meaning to this paradigm of enlightenment that I'd like to share with you. But maybe it's not a coincidence.

Let's put it this way. Whether this born in betweenness that we can experience in deep mindful states, whether that's related to these larger sort of principles of nature or not, in a sense it's irrelevant because we're doing this practice not in order to validate science or to have science validate us. We're doing this practice so that we can be happy in the deepest and broadest sense of the word. So it's pragmatic, not theoretical, why we do this practice.

But if in some way it relates to deep theory, well, I think that's sort of cool also. Our source, the source of moment by moment experience in my nervous system, is the same flow of nature that is the source of moment by moment experience in everybody's nervous system. Therefore, if you on a regular basis experience life this way, you're constantly having an experience of the oneness of inside and outside.

Therefore you naturally, spontaneously, in a sense whether you want to or not, cannot help but respond, respond to the needs of your larger identity. So to meditate and to give to

others the fruits of meditation. How do you give to others the fruits of meditation? Well you teach them. How do you teach them? Well you teach them at a subtle level by the unconditional positive regard that channels through your affect because you're seeing them as you.

So there's just a good vibe that comes out that people feel happy and in safety just by being in your presence. That's a subtle level of teaching. Another subtle level of teaching is people that know you and see you change for the better over the months, years, and decades.

That's a very powerful sermon. You teach by describing what you do when you meditate. People say, hey, we went to a meditation retreat. What did you do? You're not going to instruct them in meditation.

You're not even going to necessarily encourage them to meditate. But if you can give a coherent description of the meditative endeavor, a coherent description is a cogent description. Coherent means what you say is your words are well defined and they make sense logically and they're reasonable given evidence. So you give just a coherent description of what you do. Or put alternatively, you give a non-blabbering muddled description of what you do.

You'd be amazed how easy it is to blabber and be incoherent when people ask you what you do in meditation. It's hard to explain. It's intuitive.

It's like a finger pointing to a hazy moon. That may be Zen poetry, but I don't call that a coherent description. The Buddha said that the Dhamma is sanditiko. It means crystal clear and ehipassiko of the nature of try it for yourself and you'll see.

Anybody can see it. So if you give just a coherent description in 30 seconds, well, we did this, we did this, we did this, that's a powerful teaching. So you should at least be able to describe in a way that a normal human being can get some sense of what you're talking about coherently what you do. The simplest coherent description that I have found just about anyone can understand, any adult can understand is, well, you know how in daily life sometimes you're more focused, sometimes you're less focused, have you noticed that? Most people say yes. Well, did you ever notice that in the times when you're more focused, you're more effective and you feel better, and then when you're less focused, you know, less, yeah, most people, they've experienced that. And then you say something like, well, you know how if you like systematically develop a skill, you get better and better at it? Most people have developed a skill. Well, meditation is like that. We do systematic practice that develops a skill that increases our baseline of concentration in daily life so we have more experiences naturally of being focused and therefore we're more effective and more fulfilled.

Most people can follow the logic of that. So that's a coherent description that takes 30 seconds or a minute. When you are a teacher, you have taught at the descriptive level. Then there's teaching at the, what might be described as the prescriptive level.

You prescribe. In other words, you say, okay, I'm going to teach you this technique, do it this way, report back to me. In other words, you're explicitly teaching meditation. You're a meditation facilitator or a teacher.

That's sort of the explicit level. So the way that, so a consequence of continuous contact with the source is that you realize you share the source with everyone you want to serve. You can serve in the ordinary sense of helping people's conditional happiness.

That's good. You can also serve in the extraordinary sense of teaching. You can teach by your affect. You can teach by your behavior changes. You can teach by just describing how meditation works. And some of you, probably many of you, will want to move on to the

explicit level of teaching at some point. And that's as good as it gets.

Classic "Dark Night" or Clinical Issues? ~ Shinzen Young

If a person seems to be perennially in Dark Knight territory, I will first sort of ask them questions. I do my own little differential diagnosis and try to determine if what they're going through is 100% an artifact of the experience of emptiness through their practice, or whether it's possible that there's just an element of regular old-fashioned depression, anxiety that's involved. I'll try to make a guess. If I suspect that it's 100% based on practice, then I'll give my standard treatment regimen for that, which is twofold. If the fact that everything is empty is freaking you out, well, clearly there's something that's not yet empty, which is your freak-out.

Use the momentum of emptiness to empty your freak-out. That's sort of the first element in the prescription. The second element in the prescription is, well, good. Now you're nothing whatsoever, and this will give us a natural basis from which you can literally reconstruct a new and better self through focus on positive practice. I look upon myself in that case as something like a physical therapist that's going to have to constantly be prodding that person to do the exercise that strengthens their atrophied human muscles, so to speak.

We rebuild those muscles in a new and better way through a focus, assiduous and continuous focus on positive-feel image talk. That's what I do if I suspect that it's really the classic dark night of the soul or the classic pit of the void that is described on one hand in the Christian and on the other hand in the Buddhist traditions. However, usually that is not the case. Usually if a person is bummed out, burned out, freaking out, and so forth, they're subject to unreasonable anxiety and unreasonable paralytic sadness and so forth, usually that is actually the result of psychological elements. What I do is I never tell people that they should use psychotropic medications or anything like that. Often people will come to me with that question, you know, should I go on Celexa or Lexapro or what have you.

I never tell people, oh, yeah, I think you should do that because I'm not qualified to tell a person that. But if I suspect that they may have a clinical depression or an anxiety disorder of some sort, in other words, if I suspect that it's not 100 percent based on their practice, and usually that is the case. Usually I suspect that there could be just a plain old psychological, even clinical, biochemical aspect here. If I suspect that that is possible, I strongly encourage people to go to a mental health professional and consider the possibility of standard treatments for these things, which at this point is usually medications. I don't advocate the medications, but I definitely advocate being open to the possibility that they may need them and encourage them to find a competent expert who can give them a differential diagnosis based on Western medicine and if need be, prescribe the meds.

Now, a lot of times people think, oh, well, I shouldn't take these medications because it covers over the stuff. I should just let it come up and deal with it. Well, yeah, if you can productively deal with it, sure. But remember, the metaphor is exercise. It doesn't make any sense to attempt to bench press 200 pounds the first day in the gym. You want to take manageable weights.

If you have a clinical depression situation, that is probably too much weight to try to be lifting on your own without some reduction in intensity through appropriate medication. And anything that needs to come up will come up. I tell people that if you do have a clinical situation, you're already in an unnatural state. The meds will get you in some way closer to a natural state wherein it will be easier to do the meditative practice. Now it's true that psychotropic medications can have side effects. A person has to decide whether those side effects are worth the main effect.

That's case by case, person by person. But if they decide that the good effect is sufficient to justify the side effects, then I would say this. Those side effects only come up in touch, feel, image, talk. You can use the mindfulness practice very productively to work with those side effects to purify consciousness, to gain insight, to reduce the suffering that they cause, and so forth.

Classical Enlightenment: Healing the World and Screw-ups ~

Shinzen Young

Oh, I think it would definitely heal the world. If we take, if by that we mean stream entry and we mean millions and millions of people having that experience. I don't have a scintilla of doubt. Well you have to look at the big picture. You have to look at all the people that were ever enlightened as they have been in the world and then you have to compare that to as they would have been if they hadn't been enlightened. And you have to take all the people because most enlightened people are not public figures.

And there may be indeed a certain push to the ones that do become public figures that also is related to whatever. So I didn't say it would heal the world right away either. Because remember, I use classical enlightenment as a rough equivalent to stream entry. So that's the first out of four steps. And usually about 20 years after stream entry you realize how unenlightened you really are and that the work is now just starting.

But you're guaranteed success essentially. So after a few hundred years of millions and millions of stream enterers, I think that the course of this planet would pretty much take care of itself. Now of course, I mean if you want to think really ambitious, maybe if we had a really deep model of enlightenment we'd be able to figure out how to churn out our hots with consistency. That's only maybe five times as ambitious as turning out stream entries.

Who knows? Now if you start having millions and millions of our hots on the planet, it's very quick. So yeah, plenty of people that have seen the no-self screw up, but then you have to look upon it from the big picture. How badly would they have screwed up if they hadn't done that? Well I can think of maybe that I know personally of maybe a dozen people that have seen the no-self, were authentically enlightened at least to the stream entry level, and had major public screw ups. Maybe a dozen, okay? But there's probably a hundred times that many enlightened people on the planet.

That's one percent that we know about. But even those screw ups are, I can only think of a couple that I would say are really horrible relative to the normal human screw ups. When the teachers screw up, by and large it's just normal human screw ups. People have sexual harassment bosses. So it's sort of like things people do, right? I can only offhand right now maybe think of one or two that I would say were really bad.

Consciously Decoupling, Dropping Out & Eadem Mutata Resurgo

~ Shinzen Young

So when I have you work with things like tight sites, that kind of thing, and we're working in the objective spaces, you might say, well, like sight and touch, if your eyes are open, sight and touch are always there. I mean, obviously, right? Your physical body is always there.

The world is always there. But what can happen is that you can disconnect. That's just decouple is just my geek way of saying disconnect. There can be a, let's say you're working in the sight touch system. It's possible that you could, for a moment, disconnect from that system, either because you're about to go into reverie or you're getting sleepy, so forth.

So that disconnect actually causes an arrestful state. You're not looking at things anymore, even though your eyes may be open. And all those sensations may be arising in your body. Your attention is going elsewhere. So all you can be aware of in your body is that it's there in the lab.

So it causes a restful state to arise for a moment. And that's your tell. You understand in poker, you know what a tell is? It's a giveaway. It's like, you know what's going on by some external sign. So I want to train people to detect the moment when they're being pulled away from their object of meditation. The way you detect that is by noticing that for just a brief moment where you had been focusing on active states, it's now gone restful because you've disconnected. And I sometimes sort of obscurely call that decoupling because it's like in magnetic fields, there will be a coupling and then they just disconnect like that.

So that flux lines decouple. And you notice that, and then you come back to whatever your object is. So you've got like one or two seconds where it goes restful right before you're either sinking or thinking. And if you note that, then that will bring you back to your focus space.

Yeah, you would drop it. Now, of course, you have an option if you're decoupling and you're dropping into really deep restful states, then maybe it's time to focus on rest for a while. Because you have a conscious dropout, because you have the categories, the restful categories to work with, what for a beginner meditator would have been a nod out. It would have been a nod out for a beginner, but because of all the long years of practice, it was a dropout, a dropout of the time-space continuum, a moment with the source. So when you drop back in, the world was, or we could say, we're in a Catholic place, so Latin's good. This is Christian, Christian phrase. Eadem mutata resurgo. I was resurrected the same but changed.

Creating Feel Good in Emotional Body Space - 1 of 2 -

Introduction ~ Shinzen Young

How did you discover positive feeling? We started with having you explore just the spontaneous presence of positive feel in your body, which you did, and actually you were able to do that to a certain extent.

But then it went away and it didn't come back, which is not uncommon. Finding positive feel is only one way to go about the technique of working with positive feel. Another thing that you can do is you can intentionally create positive feel and then focus on it.

One of the easiest ways to create positive feel is to briefly, intentionally make a positive thought that's likely to make you happy or loving or joyous and so forth. Thought is something you have control over. Thought is your mental image and your internal talk or both at the same time. So you briefly think a thought that's likely to give you a pleasant feel, and it could be anything of your choice. Then you sort of drop that and you tune into how that pleasant feel may continue to resonate in your body even after you've dropped the thought. Then you focus in on it, the same way we focused in on the pleasant feel that was just there spontaneously. But in this case, if the sort of resonance of positive feel goes away, then you think the same thought or a different thought just briefly, just enough to get the body vibrating again with a momentum of pleasant feel. I call that triggering the positive feel by a brief intentional thought.

Does that make sense as a concept? Yes. You may have to make the intentional thought frequently, or it may be that your body is emotionally very resonant. So just like you think a positive thought and maybe for 30 seconds or 3 minutes, your body continues to resonate, and now you're focusing in on it with concentration and so forth. The metaphor that I use for that is if we imagine that your emotional body is a bell. This is your emotional body bell, and it's sort of passive.

It just responds, and this is your thought, which you have control over. If you briefly think a positive thought, that's going to resonate. That's like striking the emotional body bell. Then you can tune into the resonance for as long as it may last, then strike again if need be. We're going to do it for the fun of it with external sound. I'm going to strike it, and then I'd like you to listen to it until it's completely—there's no more resonance anymore. I'll do the same. Gone.

But we could strike it again as need be. Does that make sense? Very good. We'll call that triggering positive feel. But our focus isn't the thought. Our focus is still pure body. We're training your emotional circuits to strengthen the positive emotional muscles, so to speak. It's like physical therapy. A lot of people, if they don't exercise muscles, they atrophy, and then you have to give them physical therapy, and then those muscles get strong. There's sort of like positive emotional circuitry within our brain, but if we don't exercise it, it might atrophy.

People that are depressed, for example, or whatever. This exercise that I'm showing you is a sort of emotional physiotherapy. It strengthens the atrophied circuits and gives you a tendency—it imparts to your body a tendency to go to positive emotional experience as opposed to negative. So should I be trying to aim it at different parts of my body? As a general principle, when you detect the pleasant feel with this technique, you try to intentionally spread your attention as broadly as you can within it. In fact, if possible, you try to experience it over your whole body.

If possible, but you can't force that. So however wide it may be present in your body—right, left, front, back, up, down—you sort of stretch your attention over it. If it gets really strong, which it will with practice, it will fill your whole body. Then when it gets really strong, it will seem to be larger than your body, like it's radiating out into all six directions. You're sort of like this high-wattage transmitter. Then you start walking through the world like that, and that has an influence. That's an advanced level of the practice. Make sense? At least conceptually. Sounds like a pretty good idea, right? Yeah.

Creating Feel Good in Emotional Body Space - 2 of 2 - A Guided

Meditation ~ Shinzen Young

Let's explore it. So once again, take a moment to stretch up and settle in. And now this time, we're going to actively create positive feel, if possible. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

We'll just see. So I'd like you to think some thought that's likely to produce a pleasant feel in your body, and then focus in on that. And it will either continue to resonate or it will dampen and die away. If that happens, rethink either the same thought or a different one. And then drop the thought and focus on the pleasant resonance in the body for as long or as short as it may last.

Does that make sense? Yeah. Now one thing that can help this is to intentionally smile just a little bit, like the Buddha smile, a little hint of a smile. Notice how that produces a pleasant feel. And that can fortify the process.

Better? to do that to a certain extent? Excellent. But stay with it for a few more minutes. Laughter counts as positive feeling. Let it spread as broadly as you can. That might go out of your body.

As you do this, try to actually taste how it develops a concentrated state. You're very focused. You're in samadhi.

You're in the zone. And your object of focus is this pleasant experience. And the more concentrated you become, the more pleasant it becomes, motivating you to become even more one-pointed with this pleasant flavor. That creates a positive feedback loop that revs up your concentration power.

Does that make sense as a concept? Excellent. Now, stay with that concentration in your pleasant emotional body. But open your eyes.

Eyes open, but awareness back into the positive feel. Good. And now we'll make eye contact. Let's see if you can just keep some awareness during the social interaction.

Takes a little bit of practice. So, any final questions or comments? Well, I think this was an excellent session. There's actually a lot more to say about the technique, but you can read about that at basicmindfulness.org. Look, there's a reference guide to all the different aspects. I just taught you some parts of it, but clearly you have enough to implement it, and that's excellent. Thanks for helping out to make this video. Thank you. Okay, that's a wrap.

Depth & Breadth of Concentration - Part 1 of 3 ~ Shinzen Young

I take concentration power to be one of the three core skills that constitutes mindful awareness. Probably my very first discovery that sold me on the meditative endeavor is I started at the end of an hour of meditation of focus on breath, I started to notice that I would go into these states of, it was a light concentration, but for me it was a highly altered state since like most people I had lived my life in a very scattered way. I started to notice that at the end of a period of breath counting, which is what they gave me in the Zen temple, that I would drop into these concentrated states and my teacher told me well that's good, that's called zammai, zammai is the Japanese pronunciation of samadhi, that's good, but you now need to try to maintain that in all aspects of life as you go about daily life.

I said how to do it and he said well you start with simple things, the temple tasks that you have to do, the washing the floor, the washing dishes, raking the sand, those are pretty simple things, just focus on that and then it will extend out to more and more complicated life activities. And in fact I found it was true. Over the years that eventually became over the decades, it has developed in two directions, it's gotten deeper, deeper, deeper and it's gotten broader, broader, broader, meaning able to maintain it in more and more complex life situations. And as I said I noticed it was intrinsically rewarding. There was just something, it didn't matter what I was focusing on, if I had a high concentration that in and of itself was a reward, it was, maybe I shouldn't use the word, but it was a high. That sort of sold me on this, it's like how cool is this, I could just do this, I'll never waste any time again in my life. If I'm just sitting around waiting in a doctor's office or something like that, I won't have to waste my time waiting for a plane, I'll just like, you know, get into this concentrated state. See all my life I was afraid of being bored, I hated being bored and I discovered that there wasn't any more boredom. Because if you take something that's intrinsically boring and focus on it in a very, in Samadhi, if you can taste the Samadhi, if you can taste the concentration as you're focusing on this boring thing, it's not boring anymore, it's intrinsically rewarding.

So that's pretty cool. And then I was able to appreciate why in monasteries east and west they give you such boring tasks to do. The archetypal task for Catholic nuns would be stamping out communion wafers, okay? A whole lifetime of just making communion wafers. I would suggest to you that's either heaven or hell, depending on how, to use their term, how recollected you can become as you do that task. If you become highly focused on that task, it's more and more and more intrinsically interesting. I also discovered that not only does the highly focused state carry an intrinsic reward, but it also reduces suffering. When they finally took me into the temple, they said that they would, this was in Japan, they would let me come into the temple, but they wouldn't teach me any of the Shingon practices, the secret Vajrayana practices. But I could stick around and work in the temple, and they gave me these simple tasks to do, and I was like bored to death until somebody pointed out to me, well, that same state that you get into when you do the breath meditation, you can get into that state when you do these boring tasks.

So that was like great. So I did these boring tasks for about a year and started to discover they weren't, as I said, I could be intrinsically fulfilled doing these very simple things. Then they finally said, okay, well, you seem to be serious about this, you've been sticking around and you memorized the whole liturgy on your own, which as a foreigner is pretty impressive, you're able to memorize these long texts in Sino-Japanese, and you've kept your nose clean, so okay, we're going to initiate you into these secret practices, but you're going to have to do it the old-fashioned way. At this temple, we do it the old-fashioned way.

So I found out what the old-fashioned way meant. So it's 100 days in isolation in winter with essentially very little source of heat. I mean a few charcoal briquettes while you're in your

room, but you're mostly not in your room. You're in the main hall of the temple where there's no source of heat, and it's a blizzard outside and you're doing these tantric rituals three times a day, but before each one, you have to go to this frozen cistern, break the ice, fill this bucket full of ice water, take all your clothes off and like douse yourself with this freezing water, and then dry yourself with a towel that's about six inches square in size that freezes in your hands as you're attempting to dry yourself.

You're actually like knocking the ice out of this thing. So it's like three rituals a day with this mizu gori. Okay, mizu gori in Japanese. Mizu means cold water. There's two words for water. There's not a single word for water in Japanese. If it's hot water, it's called yu. If it's cold water, it's called mizu. So and gori means to purify, to take away the impurities. So this cold water purification. You're going to have to do three cold water purifications every day for 100 days.

So it's like day number three. And something I had noticed was that if I kept in a focused state while I did this thing, it was bad, but it wasn't unbearably bad. It was just like that.

But if my attention was wandering, it was unbearably bad. And it's like day number three and I have this epiphany. There's 97 more days here. And I see in front of me not a fork, but a trichotomy. There's exactly three things are going to happen. Either I'm going to give up because I can't handle this and return to the United States in deep disgrace, or I'm going to suffer for the next 97 days abjectly, or I'm going to stay in a state of samadhi for the next 97 days to the best of my ability. And I didn't want to give up in deep disgrace, and I sure didn't want to suffer abjectly for 97 days. So I decided, okay, at least I know it reduces the suffering if I keep in a highly focused state. So I'm just going to do my damndest not to suffer. Not to suffer in the sense of, well, I'm going to have to go through this thing, but try to keep as focused as I can. So you might say that that was a giant biofeedback device. Negative biofeedback device. Go out of samadhi, you're miserable. Go back into samadhi, well, it's at least bearable.

Depth & Breadth of Concentration - Part 2 of 3 ~ Shinzen Young

As I say, this was one of the things that really sold me on the whole meditative endeavor initially was, wow, there's this taste of this concentrated state. And I could see as I work on it, it deepens and I'm able to maintain it in more and more complex situations. And I'd always liked working on things. I'd always liked developing things, skills, stuff like that. So it's like, this is cool.

I can develop this. It is intrinsically fulfilling. It makes uncomfortable experiences less problematic. And it's known all over the world. It's like really cool. I'm linked to people from very different cultures, from very different belief systems, but they shared this practice. They had a word for it.

I'm doing the same thing they did. And that was sort of cool to feel connected in that sense to a worldwide phenomenon. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has been able to actually demonstrate with credible research this intrinsic reward that goes with tasting high concentration. And he coined a word for it. There's good news and there's bad news. The good news is it's a great word. That means the intrinsic reward that goes with high concentration. So that's the good news. The bad news is unfortunately it's the same word that I use for a different phenomenon.

So that could cause some confusion for people working within my system. Mihaly wrote a book with the title. So what was the, what's the, what does he call it? Flow. Flow.

Yeah. And if you talk about a flow state among people that are interested in consciousness or this kind of thing, they'll know that that refers to that. Now in my system it refers to working with change and energy and that kind of thing. Now they're of course not entirely unrelated because as you get more and more focused there's more and more of a tendency to be aware of how things change and the underlying energies and forces.

But conceptually in basic mindfulness and in positive psychology flow refer to things that are distinct but it's the same word that's used in English. There is another term that's commonly used in the athletic world for states of high concentration. And do you know what that term is? Zone. Be in the zone and so forth.

So there are colloquial words for this in ordinary English. Because it's such an important phenomenon both in terms of sensory issues of being more fulfilled, suffering less, and in terms of objective performance abilities. It's an important notion. So I think it's useful to create a definition of concentration power. My definition of concentration power or just concentration for short is the ability to attend to what you consider to be relevant at a given time. So notice what I said, the ability to attend to what you consider to be relevant. So you decide what's relevant at a given time. And what's relevant for you might not be relevant for some other person.

Also at one time something is relevant, at another time some other thing is relevant. Often in the definition of concentration there is a mention of restricting the attention, narrowing the attention. That's not in my definition of concentration.

Certainly it's true that there are contractive flavors of concentration. If you place your attention on the breath going in and out of your nostrils or the sensation of your abdomen rising and falling, those are very small touch sensations. And if you hold your attention there, you have now deemed that small sensation to be what's relevant. Your attention wanders, you bring it back, wanders, you bring it back. So yes, that is a contractive flavor of concentration.

And there's a place for that. However, let's say that you were to intentionally create a positive image, at the very same time intentionally create some internal talk that matched that image, and talk that you repeated like a mantra over and over again, and at the same time were to generate positive emotional feeling related to that image and that talk, and you were to spread your awareness over all three of these sensory phenomena simultaneously and hold that. That would be a very expansive flavor of concentration. You'd be filling your entire subjective space with awareness. But that would develop the same flavor, the same taste as you would get by focusing in a very small part of your experience.

So my teacher Sasaki Roshi says, everybody thinks that samadhi means narrowing the focus, but you have to understand there are two flavors of samadhi, contractive samadhi and expansive samadhi. If you're driving the car, what's by and large relevant is the touch-sight sound. Touch meaning the physical linkage with the car, sights meaning the sights of the road, sounds meaning the sounds of the road. What's largely relevant in driving the car is touch-sight sound, which is actually a fairly broad focus. Once you understand this, you can drive in rush hour traffic for two hours, arrive at your destination, and you'll be in the same state of deep repose as if you had your awareness focused on the tip of your nose for two hours in formal seated meditation practice without the attention wavering.

It would be no less of a deep experience, even though it was a very large and complex piece of a sensory event. Another misconception is that in order to develop concentration, you're always going to be fighting with yourself because other things come up and you have to sort of push them away or push them down in order to hold on to the thing that you're concentrating on. I spent many, many years wrongly practicing concentration.

Without realizing it, I was subtly trying to suppress things. I would decide what I wanted to focus on in my early period of practice. That was typically the breath. I would be focusing on the breath and then when other things would come up, without realizing it, I was subtly tensing around them. I was subtly trying to push them out of awareness. I was subtly trying to push them down.

I had this subliminal agenda that was aversive to anything that was a distraction. That creates tension and that dissipates energy and that hurts. It's uncomfortable. What we want is that the concentration practice be a positive feedback loop. The more focused you are, the better you feel. If you have these subtle tendencies, or maybe not so subtle tendencies, to be fighting with the things that aren't inside your focus or in some way by tensing around them, pushing them down, not wanting them to be there, that makes it an uncomfortable experience to focus. You're literally fighting with yourself. You have to be careful and train yourself to focus on what you deem relevant without rejecting all the other stuff.

Depth & Breadth of Concentration - Part 3 of 3 ~ Shinzen Young

Another common misconception about concentration is that it will always require a lot of effort.

Now it is true that initially, when you attempt to develop concentration, your attention wanders, you bring it back, your attention wanders, you bring it back. This does require a certain amount of effort initially, but it is not the case that it's always going to require that effort. A time comes when it's automatic and no longer effortful. Yes, you have to be willing to invest a certain amount of effort, and even after it becomes effortless, there may be times when you're facing sensory challenges when you have to effort again. But it's not the case that forever and ever and ever it's this huge Herculean or Sisyphean task that you're undertaking. You train yourself to be able to maintain profound concentration states while doing it in a very complex or chaotic environment.

And that's the dimension of growth of concentration that I refer to as it broadens, it encompasses more and more of life. So when I went into that 100-day training, I could sometimes get a little bit of flavor of concentration through formal sitting, counting the breath, and I could get a little bit of concentration when I would do simple tasks. I came out 100 days later, and I was not the same person.

I had been fundamentally re-engineered. It was a very small price to pay. You might think 100 days is a big price, is like a long time, and that's a big deal. It's a very small price to pay for a new life. But essentially after that, that taste of concentration was always present for me 24-7. Now, of course, as fun as it is to tell these horror stories or war stories about intense training in Asia, it's also sort of not a good thing to tell people.

Why? Why is this not a good thing to tell you? Because if that's what you have to go through to get this, I don't think I'm going to sign up in this lifetime. It's the natural reaction. It's like, what, I'm going to have to torture myself with cold water for 100 days if I want to have perennial samadhi? No, not necessary. In Buddhism, they have this concept called upaya or skillful means. You don't have to rely on brute force methods. You can work smart and get the same results. And my attempt to formulate the techniques and the concepts of this path in a very precise way is my attempt to allow ordinary North American, or let's say modern people, to allow you to get the same results that monastics get without the brute force methods. So, no, you don't have to go through this kind of thing in order to get comparable results. You can work smart. And, yes, you may have to amortize it over a longer period of time.

Discrimination and Unification - Part 1 of 4 ~ Shinzen Young

There's a Zen koan that says, drink down the West River in one gulp. That would be maybe equivalent to saying, eat all the food in the granaries of the United States all at once, or something like that. What does it mean to digest? What does it mean to incorporate within? If you look at the process of eating food, and you look at the process of experience, it might seem that there's not much relationship between them.

But think about what happens. In order to extract what is nutritive from food, you have to break it down into its molecules. And you do that in various steps, from coarser to finer to finer.

If you look at what happens, the teeth do their thing, and then the tongue does its thing, and the saliva, and then all the different juices, and all the different processing stations. Just break the material down finer and finer and finer, until it's fine enough so that what has nutritive value can be extracted and accrue to your energy content. And since matter is energy, you can look upon it as you derive energy from the food, either in the form of storing matter or in the form of energy that you use. And then the parts that have no place in your being, by the same process, are excreted.

Experience works the same way. If you want to digest the world, drink down the West River, have a complete experience of the moment, in other words, or of the world, because after all, a complete experience of the world is just a sequence of thousands and thousands of complete experiences of the moment. So if you want to have a complete experience of the world, drink down the West River, eat everything that can be eaten, like the god Shiva, then you have to learn how to have a complete experience in the moment, and that's a digestive process. When you are so engaged in any sensory experience that you have a complete experience, there's no time to fixate that experience into a thing.

The particles become waves. And so the experience is digested into vibration, undulation, expansion, contraction, flow, the activity of impermanence. And so it can be completely internalized, completely made your own. Moment by moment, if you digest the present, eventually you will drink down the entire world, and you will know that you have as your very content, this is the way Sasaki Roshi talks, you'll have everything as your content. Now of course you may not be able to have the kind of dramatic experiences that I'm describing right off the bat, but to whatever extent you bring concentration, clarity, and equanimity to moment by moment sensory experience, to that extent you are digesting it.

And in the most extreme form, you literally digest it down into its vibratory atoms. And that causes a merging of inside and outside. And that's why you don't just merge with flowers and the sky and the rivers, you also merge with garbage cans and unpleasant people and whatever comes up in front of your eyes. Because if you have really good digestive flowers, then it all accrues to nutrition. However the peristalsis of impermanence doesn't just digest the experiences of the moment, it breaks up the holdings from the past, the doo-doo, the karmic residue that's sort of stuck in the karma colon, you might say. I know, it's a gross metaphor.

But actually maybe not such an inappropriate metaphor actually. The flow of impermanence when turned to the outside world gives you a sense that you're digesting the present moment, acquiring energy, empowerment, richness from it. But when applied to the internal world, as we sit and practice and in daily life, stuff comes up. Our cage gets rattled. The stored pool of poison and pain within gets activated, either due to its own rhythms for no particular reason or because something happens in the outside world that gets to us. This expression, having your cage rattled, I think is a really good expression. Because it is our cage, that holding from the past, is the prison. It's our cage. And when an event in the

present sort of bangs on it, we get our cage rattled. When we get our cage rattled, it comes up in body experience and mental experience. Usually emotions or, as I call it, feel activity in the body. And then mental image, internal talk.

Sometimes it comes up in a purely physical form in the body. If we bring concentration, clarity, and equanimity to that arising, the more it rattles our cage, the more it seems to go to the depths of our being, then the more we'll be digested as we bring concentration, clarity, and equanimity to those body and mind volcanoes. And in the extreme case, we actually can digest it or re-digest it.

The reason it's stuck there is it was never really digested in the first place, so it sticks around. So if when it comes up, either as I say from its own rhythms or because it's been triggered by something from the outside, if we have a complete experience of it, we will digest it, release it. And in the most extreme case, it will, it, the depths of the holdings from the past, will turn into vibration, undulation, expansion, contraction, energy. And whatever nutritive value we can recycle from that, we will recycle into the energy of our being. And the rest just gets dissipated. It splashes, ripples, radiates, and releases out of our being. And that's the flow of impermanence as karma digester or purifier.

Discrimination and Unification - Part 2 of 4 ~ Shinzen Young

What are the facets of the experience of flow? So there are many, many facets to the experience of flow. I use the word flow for any kind of change, other than the abrupt vanishings. I have you work with the experience of something vanishing as a special case of change that has a special significance because each time you notice something vanish, for just a fraction of a second, your attention is adverted, turned towards a place that's outside of place and outside of time. That instant of vanishing turns you just instantaneously towards the unborn source.

The place where A disappears to is exactly the place that gives birth to B in the next instant of experience. So when I have you work with the theme of change or impermanence, you note vanishings, and then all other kinds of change, anything. I just use the word flow just to have a nice name for it.

So how can things flow? Well, it's nothing mystical. Something can get more intense or it can get less intense. If you've ever noticed something get more intense or less intense, you've experienced flow, as I've described. A sensation could spread or it could collapse.

Something could speed up your thoughts, or a certain sensation someplace, its frequency could speed up or it could slow down. There could be inward pressures, outward pressures. Even the scattering of your awareness, which is usually looked upon as a problem, it's like I'm all over the place, that could simply be looked upon as a kind of expansive flow. And the gripping and holding, the obsessing, the not being able to let go of something or something holding you so you can't get free from it, that certainly could be interpreted as a problem, or it could be interpreted as simply a form of contractive flow.

And in that sense, not a problem. So as you're paying attention to the kinds of ordinary experiences that I just mentioned, things get more intense, less intense, speed up, slow down, spread, collapse, there's inward pressure force, outward pressure force, scattering, gripping. As you're paying attention to that, you could notice that all of the things that I've mentioned involve an interplay of contrasts.

There's like, okay, it can push out, it can push in. It can get more intense, it can get less intense. So if we were to abstract from this situation, we could say that there's two basic principles underlying flow. A principle of increase, a principle of decrease. And there's many, many flavors and dimensions within which the increase and decrease can express itself. And so we can give a general term to the principle of increase.

We can call it expansion if you wish. And then we can give a general term to the principle of decrease. We can call it contraction.

In between increase and decrease is a balance point that we could call zero if we were using an additive metaphor. With regards to all of the different flavors that I mentioned, as you're paying attention to things speeding up, slowing down, getting more intense, less intense, pushing out, pulling in, scattering, gripping, you might get a sense that accompanying each one of these flavors of expansion and contraction is a sense that space itself is expanding. The space of the experience is expanding or contracting. If, as you're practicing, that theme should come up, you pay attention to expansion and contraction, it has many, many guises, some of them not all that pleasant, but you might notice that there's always an increase in space. Actually, it's an increase in time-space. Time-space gets inflated when things tend to get inflated, when things intensify, when they speed up, when there's outward pressure, etc., etc.

Then space or time-space tends to collapse. So you could tune into the spaceness associated with the flow of expansive and contractive flavors. And to the extent that you

would tune into the spaceness, you are tuning into the spacious nature of consciousness.

This is a phrase that's used very much in the Dzogchen tradition of Tibetan practice. They talk about spaciousness. Spaciousness is maybe not the best English word because it implies a pre-existing, solidified stage called space that somehow you're supposed to get in contact with. But I'm sure that that's not what that tradition is aiming at when they say spaciousness, because that's just a solidified perception. Spaciousness is the space nature of experience. When you have a complete experience, it's utterly rich but utterly transparent, and so presents itself as space itself. Sasaki Roshi says you must reach the point in your practice where when you laugh, space is laughing, and when you cry, space is crying. And it's very enigmatic.

You can't guess what he's talking about. But then in a few months or a few years or a few decades, you have this experience. Oh, yeah, of course, that would be the way to describe this. So if you can fight long enough against spaciness, the reward you get is, quote, spaciousness, which is really spaceness. It may seem bleak, but it incorporates the richness of everything within it.

Discrimination and Unification - Part 3 of 4 ~ Shinzen Young

What is the experience of the mind? As you are exploring experience, what do we mean by experience? Physical body sensations, external sights, external sounds, emotional body sensations, mental image, internal talk, or various pleasant restful experiences such as relaxation, gentle, quiet, and so forth. As you are exploring sensory experience, you could become aware of the presence of change. If you became aware of the presence of change, you might become aware of the presence of change in various flavors, vibration, undulation, etc. You might further get a sense that all change can be looked upon in terms of pairs of contrasts.

And there are many dimensions, many types of contrast. Shall I repeat it again? More intense, less intense. Speeds up, slows down. Pressure pushes out, pressure pulls in. Sensations or anything spreads or collapses. Your attention is scattered in many directions.

Your attention is gripped and held by one thing. These all can be looked upon as representations of expansion and contraction. And of course, more than one can happen at the same time. Something can speed up and grip at the same time. Speeding up, that's expansion.

Gripping, that's contraction. Something can spread and thin out at the same time. Spreading, that's expansion.

Thinning out, that's contraction. So you can have just expansive flavors, just contractive flavors, and very frequently you have both flavors at the same time. Maybe in the same place, maybe same time but different place. So it could happen, as you're paying attention to experience, that you become aware of change. It could happen that you become aware of how change can be looked upon in terms of various flavors of increase and decrease. If so, if you become aware of change, then you can explore the change. If you become aware of change as fundamentally being based on different flavors of increase and decrease, then you can note the increase and decrease as expansion, contraction.

And if both happen at the same time, you can say both. And by increase or decrease, affirmation, negation, I mean along any of the dimensions that this can happen. Speeding up, slowing down, okay, should I go through the list again? Speeding up, slowing down, intensifying, diminishing, spreading, collapsing, outward pressure, inward pressure, scattering of your attention, obsessing and gripping, and fixation of your attention.

Outward and inward pressure are usually in the body looked upon as problems. We tend to blame ourselves. I'm resisting something. I'm somehow not letting things do what they need to do. Certainly scattering and obsessing of our attention is looked upon as a problem. But you don't have to look upon them as problems. You can just look upon them as reflections of the cosmic doubt of the effortless efflux and reflux of nature. So if you don't become aware of change, fine.

Then make empowering distinctions. Just bring concentration, clarity, and equanimity to the stability of your experience. If you are aware of change and you want to explore it generically, then you can note flow gone. If the flow presents itself in a way where you can see, you can analyze it into two fundamental flavors, and at any given instant there may be just expansive qualities, just contractive qualities, or both at the same time, then you can go to a version of focus on change where you explicitly note and surrender to the expansion, contraction, or bidirectional flow. So expansion, contraction, and both at the same time are... I look upon them as the fundamental flavors or a sort of fundamental way of looking upon all flow.

When expansion and contraction disappear, then there's zero. There's the one. There's the balance point, the still point. Except for the point, the still point, there would be no dance. And there is only the dance. It's a great phrase. So expansion and contraction are the dance.

The still point is where the dance comes from and where it goes to and what peppers it at all times. Next step. It could happen. Not necessarily will or has to. It could happen that as you're paying attention to expansion and contraction, once again, to repeat, some of the expansion and contraction may not be that pleasant. As you're paying attention to it and yielding to it, it could happen that you notice that whenever there's anything expansive, space grows with it.

Whenever there's anything contractive, space collapses. Then you could focus on the expansion and contraction of the pure, spacious nature of consciousness. And that becomes an amazingly empowering and fulfilling experience. Essentially, you get to feel the way the universe feels. I guess that's why some people call it cosmic consciousness.

A further theme could present itself. Not only do you have a sense that this is a dance of pure space, the this meaning everything, the so-called material world that is so-called outside, the world of touch, sight, sound, and the so-called inner world, the world of thought and emotion that reacts to it and says, I am. We say, I am.

We say, it is. And that's true from a certain perspective. But it is also true that the I and the it are one arabesque of flowing, spacious energy from another perspective.

Wave-particle duality is a beautiful metaphor for this that we can derive from modern physics. Yes, we can say there's an I and an it. But we can also say that comes about as an artifact of habits of consciousness, specifically lack of concentration, clarity, and equanimity. And if you have habitual concentration, clarity, and equanimity, you can tune into a different paradigm. Instead of the I over here, always at the mercy of an it over there, and eternally separate like two ice cubes, cubes of ice that can only bang together, there's the river called I and the river called it, which will automatically become a single flow.

Can't prevent them, can't prevent the two waves from adding, and can't make the two ice cubes merge. If you participate, even at the level of a hint, the sort of dramatic things that I'm describing maybe are not common experiences, but you may get a hint of what I'm talking about. And even when you get a hint of it, that's highly significant for a human being. In any event, by having enough experiences of self and world as integrated wave, the I versus it paradigm actually goes away forever. It can never come back. The sense of self, separate from the world most assuredly, can come back. But if there's been enough I-I experience, then you can never really go back to I-it. You can only go back to what Martin Buber called I-thou. Thank you.

Discrimination and Unification - Part 4 of 4 ~ Shinzen Young

What is the difference between the I and the Thou? You're separate but not separate, never completely separate, because neither the I nor the Thou, what you used to call the It, the world, the other pieces of matter, other people, and so forth, you see both the I and the Thou coming from and returning to the same womb of zero moment by moment. And how? Zero breaks apart and vibrates out and in and ferments space into existence. And then that space further vibrates and begins to think and feel and either thinks, I am a thing and is vulnerable, or thinks, I just came from the source and is in some sense invulnerable.

The former case is what usually happens. The latter case is something called enlightenment. What we're talking about here is empowering unification. However, the way I like to look upon the path, it's based on contrasts, empowering contrasts. One of the contrasts is between oneness, that is a healthy oneness, and discrimination, which is a healthy discrimination. And we don't want to get one-sided on one side or the other.

So the kind of oneness that I'm describing, I would say, is desirable for humans. However, it's also desirable to make empowering discriminations and to go back and forth. It's a dialectical process.

Dialectical means back and forth. So you experience oneness, but then you're not averse to making distinctions again. A person that says, oh, I only want to be in flow and emptiness, and I'm unwilling to track, feel, image, talk as objects. I'm unwilling to track touch, sight, and sound as an object. Oh, that will mire me in self and materiality.

No. Tracking in those ways, that's making empowering distinctions. That's making distinctions that allow you to untangle and be free.

That's making distinctions that allow you to go from multiplicative overwhelm when things get tangled to additive manageability when things get teased apart. I like to think that there's this list of categories that contain all and only the most important empowering healthy distinctions that we need to make for psychological personal growth and for spiritual transpersonal growth. We can distinguish the somatic versus visual versus auditory, obviously. Within those, we can distinguish the more subjective somatic visual and auditory feel, image, talk, the more objective somatic visual and auditory touch, sight, sound. Then, corresponding to those six ordinary sensory experiences, we have to be willing to put taste and smell into touch. That sort of covers ordinary sensory experiences.

Then there's some special restful states, six, corresponding to the six ordinary active states. Those are very useful to discriminate because they lead to very pleasant, tranquil experiences. Those are discriminations that I think are very healthy to be able to tease those things out, to be able to break the thinking process into visual versus auditory so thought becomes tangible and spatial, and therefore trackable, and therefore tractable. If you can keep track of it, or you can train better still, more accurately still, you train the depths of your being to automatically keep track of these kinds of distinctions, then they become tractable, meaning a source of fulfillment and not a source of suffering. Empowering healthy distinctions, healthy oneness, back and forth, back and forth, over and over again, marks the path to psychospiritual super adulthood.

Dissolution (Bhanga), and T.S. Eliot ~ Shinzen Young

There's an experience that some people have in their spiritual path that in the Pali language is called Bhanga, B-H-A-N-G-A.

Pali is an ancient Indian language, the one in which the earliest Buddhist writings are preserved. Bhanga means dissolution, literally, and it's reported all over the world. It is by no means distinctive to Buddhist practice.

In fact, it's pretty central to a lot of shamanic paths in different tribal cultures. The dissolution or Bhanga experience has two sides to it. On one hand, it can be unbelievably blissful because your whole body dissolves into champagne bubbles, this pleasant vibratory energy. Not just your whole body, your whole body and your whole mind, or maybe even not just your body and your mind, but even your external senses of sight and sound all dissolve into champagne energy. It's like having a bubble bath. It's like being massaged by the Holy Spirit. It's like the cosmic parents are holding you, embracing you, stretching you and squeezing you in loving ways that totally fulfill you.

That's the heavenly side to the dissolution experience. Having said that, you might be saying, gee, I hope I get that someday. First of all, you don't have to have that kind of experience in order to gain insight and purification. Secondly, there is another side, the side that is not heavenly. The side that hopefully will be purgatorial and hopefully will not be hellish. Purgatory and hell are very different, theologically speaking. Purgatory is a temporary place where you are purified. Consciousness is purified and every minute that you spend in purgatory, although it may be uncomfortable, is a moment that takes you closer and closer to heaven, the beatific vision. Hell is a place of pointless suffering.

It doesn't lead you anywhere. Purgatory definitely has a goal and there's a silver lining to the cloud, you might say. So sometimes the experience of dissolution can be purgatorial. It can seem as though you're being torn apart. You can be terrified.

It can seem as though you have no firm ground to stand on. There are horrific, painful mental images, images of death and destruction. In classical shamanic cultures, this sometimes takes the form of animals eating you up. The whole thing is in some ways like being sick, the purgatorial side of dissolution.

In fact, in traditional African cultures, this stage is often associated with actual physical illness from which the shaman recovers and then knows their vocation as a server of humanity. There's exactly four possibilities. Some people do the path without any dissolution. Some people do the path with the heavenly kind of dissolution. Some people do the path with the purgatorial kind of dissolution.

Some people do the path, there's a mixture of the heavenly and the purgatory. My favorite poet is T.S. Eliot.

He pulls no punches. Apparently for him, the Bhanga did not have much of the blissful aspect that I'm describing. As I said, it's different for different people and you have to just accept.

Some people don't have dissolution experiences, some people have blissful ones, some people have horrific ones, and some people have a mixture of the two. It seems, if we just base on what Eliot had to say, that his was much more purgatorial. In part of the Four Quartets, he compares this to being sick. He compares the action of the Trinity to a surgeon, that would be the son, and to a nurse, that was the Holy Spirit, and to the owner of the hospital, which is God the Father. Remember that Eliot was a traditional high church Anglican, very conservative Christian. He thought of his job as not trying to convince people

of Christianity through poetry. He didn't think that was the poet's job. The poet's job, if they're a Christian poet, is to allow people to experience what it's like to be a Christian, even if they may not be Christians. You can experience what it feels like to be a Christian, in his case a form of Catholic Christian, Church of England. You can experience what it's like to be that, even though you might not believe in that, by reading his poetry, and that's why I like his poetry, because although I wouldn't say that I buy into the belief system of that path, I really appreciate that by reading him I can experience what it's like to be somebody on that path.

So I'm going to read for you a little section on how the Holy Spirit, which is the Christian term for the activity of impermanence, how the Holy Spirit acts on you in order to rip apart your somethingness, and in a sense kill you, but kill you in the sense of dissolving the somethingness of self within you so that there's nothing in between you and the beatific vision, which is their word for the direct experience of the source. The wounded surgeon plies the steel that questions the distempered part. Beneath the bleeding hands we feel the sharp compassion of the healer's art, resolving the enigma of the fever chart. Our only health is the disease if we obey the dying nurse, whose constant care is not to please, but to remind of our and Adam's curse, and that to be restored our sickness must grow worse. The whole earth is our hospital, endowed by the ruined millionaire, in which if we do well we shall die of the absolute parental care, which will not leave us, but prevents us everywhere. The chill ascends from feet to knees, the fever sings in mental wires, if to be warmed then I must freeze and quake in frigid purgatorial fires of which the flame is roses and the smoke is briars. The dripping blood our only drink, the bloody flesh our only food, in spite of which we like to think that we are sound, substantial flesh and blood. And in spite of that we call this Friday good.

Do You Think Sex is Dirty? ~ Shinzen Young

Do you think sex is dirty? I think it is.

Actually, it's true. I do think that for most people, the experience of sex is dirty. That's not at all, however, to say that I think that the experience of sex is dirt.

Those are completely different things. A window can be dirty. That doesn't mean that the window is itself dirt. Dirty means that there's something covering, something from the outside that's covering the transparency that would be there otherwise.

For most people, there is craving and unconsciousness entering into their sexual experiences. That could be called a kind of dirt. The term in Buddhism, in Pali, would be *agantukakilesa*. *Agantukakilesa* means secondary or coming from the outside.

Kilesa means impurity. Not in the sense of you're impure because you're a bad boy kind of impurity, but rather more impurity in the sense of mining engineering. In other words, if you have an ore, with that ore can be mixed something other than that ore. You can have gold and there are impurities in the gold. A refining process removes the impurity.

In that metallurgical sense, *kilesa* is an impurity. Consciousness is gold and there's this other stuff, craving, aversion, and unconsciousness that's mixed in with it and causes our problems. Yes, there is this craving, aversion, and unconsciousness mixed into the sexual experience that covers over what otherwise would be a transparent window to transcendence. So yes, from that perspective, we could say that for most people, sex is dirty. Of the three, craving, aversion, and unconsciousness, in the sexual domain, because it's primarily pleasure involved, it's the unconsciousness and the craving or grasping around the pleasure that cause the obscuring of the clear window. If we develop our mindfulness skills to the point where we have enough momentum of concentration, clarity, and equanimity, that momentum will automatically carry into the lovemaking situation, in which case it will be less dirty and eventually not dirty at all.

All the dirt will be cleaned away from the window. We'll be able to clearly understand the jewel that has been sort of hidden in the petals of this beautiful lotus. Nothing wrong with the petals of a beautiful lotus, but when you peel them back, you'll discover something extraordinary, the jewel in the lotus. So what is the jewel in the lotus? Well, it's the liberation potential in the act of making love.

And what is that liberation potential? It's at two levels. The first level is that the act of lovemaking can potentially become a pleasure meditation. Now pleasure meditation is a tricky deal. Pleasure meditation is meditation. It's not the same as pleasure indulgence.

What makes the experience of pleasure a meditative endeavor? Well, as you're experiencing the pleasure, you taste the effect of your equanimity with that pleasure, and that effect is that the pleasure is providing you with greater and greater fulfillment, seemingly, paradoxically, as you become more and more detached from the pleasure as it's occurring. You don't tighten around its arising out of fear of being overwhelmed. You don't hold on to its passing out of fear of loss of something. When you stop tightening around pleasure in general, out of fear of overwhelm, and stop holding on to it, trying to prevent its passing out of fear of loss, when you stop doing that, then the pleasure starts to deliver for you greater and greater satisfaction. Clearly, this becomes most challenging when the pleasure is of the most intense type that the human nervous system can produce, which typically happens in the lovemaking situation. There the fear of overwhelm is obviously great, so there tends to be a tightening around the arising of the pleasure. Also the sense of loss when a wave of pleasure passes can be great, so there's a tightening around the passing of the pleasure. If you can learn to experience the pleasure without the tightening on its

arising or its passing, then you start to experience something beyond pleasure. You experience fulfillment. At the most extreme level of that phenomenon, the pleasure hovers right at the boundary between existence and non-existence.

It's so much a wave, you're so open to it, that it's in a sense not there, but it also is there. The Tibetan term for that is the oneness of bliss and void. One level at which the lovemaking, the jewel in the lotus, reveals itself is in this complete experience of pleasure, which gives immense fulfillment, transforms consciousness, but is paradoxical because it's both rich and empty at the same time. However, at an even deeper level, the jewel in the lotus, the spiritual potential in the act of making love, arises from the fact that the feel-image-talk-self has a natural tendency to dissolve into flow and even to vanish, to disappear, due to the expansion of the pleasant touch and the sight and sound of your partner. That is a direct window into an experience that actually happens naturally all the time in daily life, just not quite so intensely. If you can look through that window, see the dissolving of your feel-image-talk-self into flow and then the disappearance of that flow into nothing whatsoever, you may be able, in fact you will eventually, be able to remember what that experience is and replicate it with the touch, sight, sound of everything in the world. That is not to say that all your daily experiences become eroticized. All your daily experiences become spiritualized. The act of love was your synagogue, your church, where that sermon was first delivered.

Don't Know Mind: Not Needing to Have Answers & the Wisdom

Function ~ Shinzen Young

What is the difference between eating and not eating? When a person who is a compulsive eater overcomes their eating compulsion, they don't stop eating. They continue to eat, but they eat in a different way.

It's not driven, and it's healthier. With regards to our mind, the mind has a certain drive to find meaning. That drive, I think, is in some way intrinsic to the image-talk circuits themselves, but also is linked to feel. I define feel as emotional body sensation. When the mind finds meaning, you'll find a smile on your face, or a rosiness in your chest, or a frisson, a kind of ripple of pleasant excitement through your body. When the mind fails to find meaning, when the mind is confused, muddled, spinning to no avail, then you'll find in the body sensations of fear and tear, and impatience, agitation, and so forth. So, the drive to find meaning involves, I believe, a certain intrinsic drive in the image-talk circuits to establish pattern, and then some juice in the body, particularly with regards to the pleasure associated with finding answers and the discomfort in the body associated with being confused or not having answers, especially fear and sadness flavors. So, some combination of forces within feel-image-talk drive us to have meaning. We can train ourselves into equanimity with don't-know.

It's a systematic training. The medieval Christians called it *docta ignorantia*, or trained ignorance. The ancient Greeks called it *epokhe*, in their pronunciation, meaning to suspend.

Suspend what? Suspend the need to have answers. In Zen, it's called don't-know mind. This can be systematically trained, meaning that one can systematically work through the forces in image-talk and feel that drive us to have meaning.

Now, why is it important to do that? Well, I would say several reasons. For one thing, inevitably, we will be faced with the inability to find meaning. Every new thing we know raises new questions. So, our don't-know grows faster than our do-know.

By our, I mean the human species. So, we have to accept the fact that we'll always be facing don't-know. And in fact, a major theme in modern mathematics and modern physics is the limits of what even can be known, or at least known in certain ways. Gödel's undecidability and incompleteness theorems, Heisenberg uncertainty in physics and so forth, point us directly to don't-know. In fact, a point could be made that the stability of the known universe, in that it depends on Heisenberg uncertainty, depends on God's equanimity with don't-know. Anyway, so sooner or later, we and probably God, are faced with don't-know.

I'm being somewhat metaphorical and humorous, I think you understand, on the theoretical level. And then on the practical level, hey, we're going to get old. And as we get old, our mental faculties deteriorate. I can see for myself I'm 65, and I can see it's downhill.

I'm past my intellectual peak. But that doesn't freak me out, because I have made friends with don't-know. I've made friends with my own impending stupidity. There was a famous 20th century mathematician that I like a lot. He was quite eccentric, named Paul Erdos.

E-R-D-O-S is how you write that name. And he wanted to have put on his gravestone. I don't know if they actually did it, but what he said, put on my gravestone is, at last I'm not getting stupider anymore. So I can see I'm sort of getting, gradually getting stupider.

But that's okay. So theoretically and practically, sooner or later, we have to face don't-know. There is a need to deal with the need to know.

And fortunately, there is a way of doing that. The other reason why it's good to be able to deal with don't-know is that, as you'll remember on the metaphor of the compulsive eater, when the compulsive eater has worked through their compulsion to eat, they don't stop eating. In fact, they eat in a much more fulfilling new way. When a human being works through the need to have answers, they don't stop having answers. They start having answers in a deeply fulfilling and radical new way.

That's why the Christians in the Middle Ages and the Greeks in classical antiquity, at least some of them, cultivated this. And it's the basis also for the Zen koan practices, like what's the sound of one hand and so forth. This new way of knowing, we have a name for it. We call it wisdom function. So both because we don't want to suffer due to the fact that don't-know is inevitable, and also on the positive side, when we work through the need to know, we get to know in a radical new way called insight, or if you wish, wisdom, or even in its most extreme form, enlightenment. For these reasons, there is a need to work through the need to know.

Dynamic Aspects of the Sensory System ~ Shinzen Young

These are the 12 basic sensory experiences that I have people work with. Six restful flavors, relaxation, light, silence, peace, blank, quiet, and six ordinary flavors that correspond to those, touch, sight, sound, feel, image, talk. Any of these sensory categories, when it arises, could be completely still and stable. On the other hand, it might not be perfectly still and stable. Any of these sensory experiences could flow.

They could change. They could be wavy, vibratory, undulatory. There could be spreading or collapsing. There could be inward or outward forces, expansive forces, contractive forces. In other words, inside the ordinary experiences of touch, sight, sound, feel, image, talk, and the restful experiences of relaxation, light, silence, peace, blank, quiet, there could, on occasion, be a dynamic aspect. I like the word dynamic because dynamic, if you look it up in the dictionary, is defined as relating to change or the forces or energies that produce change. When you're working with these sensory categories, it could happen that you become aware of the dynamic aspect being present in one or many of them, meaning your awareness is drawn to the fact that there's change or that there's energy force within it. Energy is an interesting word because until it was incorporated as a technical term in the vocabulary of physics, not that long ago, maybe a couple hundred years ago, until then energy was a technical term in the vocabulary of Christian meditators.

It meant pretty much what I'm talking about, an awareness of the spirit moving through one's body, mind, and so forth, and the world, actually, and breaking things up, dissolving you, reducing you in the sense of taking you back to the source. If the dynamic aspect presents itself in any of these states, I will have people, if they wish, focus on that. If it's a kind of continuous change, then I refer to that as flow. Flow, as I say, could happen in any of these. Another kind of change is the discontinuous change where something abruptly vanishes, and I call that vanishing.

When people label it, they label gone. As you're working with ordinary or restful experience, if flow or vanishing becomes evident, and if you so desire, you can focus on that. That will bring about a whole bunch of very interesting and important experiences that I describe on my websites, and there's an article on the significance of flow. There's another article called, I'll return to the source, where I talk about the significance of the abrupt vanishing experiences. That gives another theme, which is the dynamic aspect. People can focus on ordinary experience, they can focus on restful experience, or if the dynamic aspect of nature presents itself within those experiences, they can focus on that.

Enlightenment and the Ten Zen Ox Herding Pictures ~ Shinzen

Young

The Chan or Zen school sometimes calls itself the school of consciousness. In other words, it teaches the nature of consciousness.

There is a famous set of drawings that show one paradigm, or one possible model, for the path of coming to understand the nature of your consciousness. And it's called the Ten Ox Herding Pictures, Shi Niu Tu in Mandarin pronunciation, Jyu Gyu Zu in the Sino-Japanese. Niu means an ox, and the ox symbolizes the nature of consciousness. So they call it the Shin Niu, the ox of consciousness, or the Sam Ngao. Do I have it right? How close? How do you say it? Pretty good, pretty close.

That was a guess on the Cantonese, Sam Ngao. So the consciousness symbolized by the ox. But to understand consciousness, in other words, the way that humans experience our senses, is also enlightenment. So the Ten Ox Herding Pictures can be interpreted in two different ways. One is they show you stages on the path to enlightenment. The other is they show you the process of understanding or truly grasping what consciousness is.

But of course, those are exactly the same thing. I don't know if you can all see this, but this is the first picture. And this is called Searching for the Ox. Notice that there is no ox to be found. The Chinese verse that goes with this says, the ox herding boy is completely lost. There's no trace of the ox. There's only the cicadas chirping.

Do you understand who the ox herding boy is and what the cicadas chirping? This is the situation of most people on this planet at this time, unfortunately. They know they want something, but what they think they want is not what they really want. Everyone's searching, like that song goes, everybody's looking for something. But what people think they want is happiness dependent on conditions. But what they really want is happiness independent of conditions, symbolized by the enlightenment ox or the consciousness, the nature of consciousness ox.

But there's no ox at all, not even any trace of the ox. He's just wandering around, searching for something, looking for something, and just hearing the twittering of the cicadas, which is unfortunately the situation for most people. Some people though, in their wanderings, get fortunate. They see the tracks of something. They haven't seen the nature of consciousness, they haven't seen the ox, they haven't experienced enlightenment. But something gives them an indication that there is this possibility. Maybe they heard a dharma talk, maybe they had some experience when they were little that they never forgot, or when they were grown up. Maybe they had a friend that came to a retreat, etc.

They get some indication that there's another possibility beyond the transient fulfillment of the twittering world. So this is called seeing the footprints. Every one of you has seen the footprints, or you wouldn't be here. You might guess what the next step is. He sees the tail on the ox, the tush, and a few hairs of the tail.

He hasn't really seen the whole ox yet, but can you see there's the tush and the tail, and it's like, oh my god, it really exists. I haven't seen it all, but I have seen a little piece of it. Most of you are in this category. You haven't maybe, or at least in this category, you've gone beyond just seeing the footprints.

You've actually gotten a little visage of who you really are, or you wouldn't have survived two weeks in silence. So you've seen the ox, but that's not catching the ox. You see he's got

the whole ox, and he's got a hold of it. Now we could say that this would be perhaps one's first glimpse of no-self, stream entry, or Kensho type experience. You've actually seen the whole ox, the nature of consciousness, which is no-thingness, and you've got a handle on it, but it's still running wild. At least you've captured the ox, and it's in your ken. You can see it anytime you want, but that's a far cry from taming the ox. In other words, you internalize the enlightenment to the point where it can't slip away from you, and doesn't run wild.

It follows you, and as wonderful as that is, that cannot be compared to getting on the ox, actually riding it. This is awesome. People are really afraid of this. It's one thing to see the ox, even to catch it, even to sort of get it to be manageable. This is the ox of consciousness.

The samgau. When it comes to riding on the ox, that's scary. Some of you are facing this stage. If you look carefully, you'll see the ox is going this way. You see the boy? He's playing a flute, quite relaxed, but he's looking the other way.

He's riding the ox backwards. Do you understand? Okay. There's no informed consent to enlightenment. Enlightenment is better than you think it is, and not nearly what it's cracked up to be.

Which one of those did you want to hear? One, both, or neither? Enlightenment is like continually falling off a cliff, and being completely comfortable with that. A great and powerful beast carries you, and you have to give up your investment with where it's going. It's the ultimate act of surrender, riding the ox backwards. The flow of impermanence. It's like falling down, but you don't fall down. You fall up into existence moment by moment, which is what *pratityasamutpada* means. It's a falling, but a falling up, without any fixation, without needing to know what's going to happen next. You simply fall into what needs to be done moment by moment. This might be called the act of true faith, as opposed to belief, which is holding on to something.

Faith is letting go of the need to be oriented, the need to have answers. You simply let the flow of expansion. This is surrendering to the flow of expansion and contraction. Riding, riding on the wave of the dynamic wave of nothing whatsoever, and letting it carry you.

That's quite a profound act of faith. What comes next? The ox has now carried you home. He's home. Okay? And he's completely at rest. He's found final repose of the spirit in his home. The ox is gone. Only who he really was remains. Just the person, that true, authentic human with no fixated position whatsoever.

And no more need for a mind as an object. He's home. He rode the ox home. Complete enlightenment.

Nirvana. But there's three more pictures. What could they possibly stand for? Well, if you read the books, they give you various explanations. But I was privileged to discuss these pictures with a Japanese Zen master many years ago, who told me that there's an oral tradition about these ten pictures that has not been written down.

According to this Roshi's oral tradition, the last three of these ox herding pictures tell us the substance, the appearance, and the ultimate use of enlightenment. So you can hardly wait, right? Substance is coming up first. What it's made out of? The matter. The matter itself. And here is the substance of enlightenment.

No substance whatsoever. Right? When the Emperor asked Bodhidharma, what is the first principle of holiness? What did Bodhidharma say? Wide open and nothing holy. What's the form of enlightenment? The mountains and the cherry blossoms. The ordinary appearances of the world. Every single thing is the appearance of enlightenment. And what's the use of enlightenment? Why do we do this? Why do we bust our buns? Well, actually, it's not the use of enlightenment. It's the ultimate use of enlightenment. The final cause. In the end, why do we do this? In the beginning, we might do it out of curiosity, out of desperation, out

of wanting to get high in some way. Who knows? Okay? Maybe relief of suffering.

Maybe find out who we really are. These all have their validity. So in the beginning, there could be many causes for us to take on this practice.

But the final cause, the arete, when you get right down to it, what is it going to be about? This is my favorite and the last. Essentially, the Chinese version of Santa Claus. Roly-poly guy with a bag full of goodies going into the marketplace, handing them out to anyone who wants to take them. Very ordinary, okay? The kind of person you wouldn't hesitate to talk to. The kind of person you might not think even was in any way special, unless you knew what to look for. This is actually a historical character, someone that existed in Chinese history. He was known as the cloth bag monk. That's essentially what he was, a bag man, a street person.

You know how some of you come from Santa Monica, okay? You know how there's sort of like celebrity street people, okay? There's like certain ones that you know, you even see them in cartoons and things. Well, in the capital of China, in the Tang Dynasty, Chang'an, that was the capital. It's now known as Xi'an.

Some of you have been there. It's in the far western part of China. Anyway, in the capital of China, during the Tang Dynasty and Chang'an, there was this well-known sort of street person that was a kind of Buddhist monk. All he did was play with children all day and just hang out in the market place and schmooze with people. Everybody knew him and he was just sort of this like friendly guy and easy to get along with.

You'd never really think there was anything all that special. He was always just sort of around for people, particularly liked to give out gifts to children, things like that. At night, he used to sleep in the snow.

That should have been a giveaway right there that there was something a little unusual about his physiology that may have been the result of something. He was known to the citizens of Chang'an. They called him the Bu Dai He Shang.

Bu means cloth, Dai means bag, and He Shang means a monk, the cloth bag monk, because he carried around these gifts to give to people. The Emperor of China at that time was a Buddhist and a meditator who had his own imperial preceptor, his own sort of master, who would have been like the most authoritative monk in China of the time. So one morning, they call that the Guo Shi, that's the teacher of the Emperor. So one morning, the Guo Shi said, Your Majesty, I don't know if you're aware or not, but the most enlightened subject in your kingdom died this morning. The Emperor said, Who? The imperial master said, the cloth bag monk. The Emperor couldn't believe it, because it was like, that was the most enlightened person in my kingdom? Because everybody just took him for granted. So this becomes a sort of ideal for what an enlightened person should be like.

Very ordinary, very easily approachable, just they're there for you, nothing all that special. In the Indic formulation, an enlightened being is a god, is an archetype. But in the Chinese formulation, the enlightened being is a sort of pudgy, easily approached guy hanging out in the streets, available to people, but with these gifts to give. So this is called, this last picture is called, Entering the Marketplace with Hand Outstretched. We may start this path for various reasons, but if we stay on it, in the end, this is where we end up. We end up with what's called the Dao Xin in Chinese, the Bodhicitta, the intense call to be of service to our fellow beings in one way or another. It's an automatic consequence of having understood the nature of consciousness, the nature of my mind, which is the nature of nature, the nature of the source.

It's an automatic consequence of knowing that your source is everyone's source, but knowing that for real, not in a sort of feel-good belief kind of way, but in a very tangible way, moment by moment, really inescapable in your moment-by-moment perceptions of

things. So we're coming now to the end of our retreat, just one more day actually, we're going to be going into the marketplace when we leave here, metaphorically. And in various ways, each of us in his or her own way, we have a bag full of goodies, and we can go with hand outstretched. Not that we're going to lay any trips on anybody, but you have a gift to give, the gift of the effects of your practice. You may never speak about it explicitly, but your pores will. The pores of your skin, that's teaching, that's going into the marketplace, giving a gift to people.

If somebody asks you what you did, and you're capable of giving a reasonable, logical, coherent description of this practice, you're giving a gift to someone. And some of you already, and many of you eventually, will discover that you'll end up actually teaching, maybe one or two people, or maybe more people. You may have heard the the cliché, when the student's ready, the teacher appears. Well, I don't know about that, but I can definitely tell you that when the teacher is ready, the students disappear. And you may notice that happening to you. Do not be alarmed. And understand that in the end, this is the final goal of this practice. So I leave you with that.

Enlightenment Maps and Models ~ Shinzen Young

Is there a best model or map for the various stages of the spiritual path, including classical enlightenment and all of its ramifications, the places, the directions that you grow from it? Is there a best model, a best map? It is possible that there is.

I don't think anybody has found it yet. Probably what comes to mind for most people when they consider looking at the various models, maps, stages, and so forth that have been developed in the past, probably what comes to most people's mind is, well, which one is the most complete, which one is the deepest, which one really tells where it's at, et cetera, et cetera. But for me, when I think about the various models, maps, for stages of spiritual unfolding, the first thing that comes to my mind is how poor they all are, actually.

None of them is really very good. Now, you might think that that is a very shocking thing, and maybe that's a disturbing thing, to hear a teacher like myself say something like that. But actually, I take this as a huge, huge positive. So let me repeat.

The disturbing, shocking, upsetting statement that none of the models and none of the paths is very good is, for me, a huge positive. I wonder if you can guess why. Can you guess? I think that there is a lot about enlightenment that is not known and is important. I think that no living teacher knows very much about enlightenment, even the deeply enlightened teachers, and I think that no teacher of the past knew very much about enlightenment, perhaps. There may be, and probably is, just a lot that could not be known within the limited confines of pre-scientific culture, the pre-scientific view of things. Now that we live in a scientific culture, we can start to look at dimensions of enlightenment that none of the masters of the past could have thought of. And I suspect, although I cannot know for sure, I can conjecture, and I don't think it's an unreasonable conjecture, that we will discover radically innovative dimensions of enlightenment that are very, very important.

Assuming there's no catastrophic collapse of human culture for the next many centuries, I think it is highly probable that a vastly improved science and technology of enlightenment will be discovered by humanity. So for now, given that none of us teachers is very good, and that none of our maps are very good, that may take a little bit of the pressure off of you in terms of finding the best teacher and the best map. The best of what's not very good, we have to be humble about that.

All of us teachers, no matter what their depth of personal enlightenment, have to be very humble. In science, this is how it works. You make a theory, and it has certain implications. You then do experiments, or you observe and you see, well, did those things that this theory implied happen? If they didn't, then you have to modify or reject the theory.

Actually it's not so much a rejecting as an improving process. A really good map of enlightenment would make enlightenment readily available to great masses of human beings. Essentially anyone on the planet with informed consent, who had an idea of what it was and thought they wanted this, should be able to have it if we had a best map and a best technology. The fact that this doesn't happen, to me, indicates that we've got a long way to go, and that's a huge positive. Because if what someone in India discovered 2,500 years ago is the last word, the best, and cannot be dramatically evolved from, then we're really screwed up. We're in bad shape.

I know the Buddhist tradition says, well, it is the best, it's just that the nature of our impurities is so deep and we have all this reincarnation and it takes a gazillion lifetimes, etc., etc. I would say that could be the case. But to tell you the truth, I don't see any compelling evidence that that is the case. My gut tells me, as a modern person, a skeptical modern person, my gut tells me that we can do a lot better. And my own teacher, who is very

traditional, Sasaki Roshi, has said that each generation of enlightened masters must improve the work of the previous generation.

So I don't just come, you know, it's not just an idea that I came upon on my own. And he said science is the model. Science gets better and better.

So what's the best map? Well, if you're young enough, maybe you will live to hear about the best map. And that's what gets me up every morning. That's what I live for. What can I do to nourish the soil in which the next lotus of enlightenment for the planet will arise?. .

Enlightenment "Downsides" ~ Shinzen Young

How do you feel about the lack of informed consent for enlightenment? I sometimes like to somewhat jokingly say that there's no informed consent for enlightenment. People tend to overestimate or underestimate how wonderful the experience is. How wonderful is it? Well, I would say anyone who has entered into the world of no-self, emptiness, and wisdom mind, who abides in that world, if you give them a choice to live one day knowing what they know, or live an entire lifetime but not be allowed to know that, I think I can't speak for everyone, but I would say most people who live in that world would say, I'd rather have one day knowing what I know than a lifetime not being able to know this.

So that's how wonderful it is. On the other hand, people tend to overestimate how wonderful it is. People tend to project completely unrealistic fantasies, really, about what enlightened people, enlightened people being, of course, an entire range from initial stream entry all the way up to arhats, people tend to overestimate what it's like or project things that are completely unrealistic. For example, that if you have some degree of enlightenment you never make mistakes, or that everything is perfect in your life, or that everything is always bliss and wonderful and so forth. People don't realize there are certain peculiar downsides to enlightenment. For one thing, you can't describe it very well to other people. So it's like you know this secret, you look out and you see the state of humanity, you know exactly what needs to be done, you know that what needs to be done is doable by anyone, and you see that people aren't doing it, don't know whether to laugh or cry at the human condition, and you can't really explain it very well to people. I mean, you can try, and a few people catch on, but it sort of goes in one ear and out the other for most people that you'll try to talk to about this. So it's like that character out of Greek mythology, I forgot her name, but the gods gave her this blessing that she could know the future, but the flip side of that was that no one would believe her. So you sort of know exactly what needs to be done, and you know that it's doable, but no one believes you, or not very many people believe you. So that's one of the downsides.

Another thing is that you get to have all this influence, let's say, but you don't get to take any credit for it. You don't even know what you're doing. It's like falling off a cliff. Enlightenment is like a free fall. It's like falling off a cliff that never ends, and you've acclimatized to it. That's why the Zen people say it's like riding an ox backwards. So you don't actually know what you're doing, or even what you're saying. When you give your most powerful teachings to people, you don't know what you're saying. You don't even know who you are.

You can't take any credit for it whatsoever. It just happens, like a leaf falling from a tree. So it's not like you get to think of yourself as, well, I'm this cool dude that can do this cool stuff. No, that's not the way it works. So you can't even know or enjoy, in a sense. You just have to occur.

Enlightenment, DP/DR & Falling Into the Pit of the Void ~

Shinzen Young

What is DPDR? DPDR.

It's an abbreviation for Depersonalization Derealization Disorder. And it is a subject that I am very interested in as a teacher of meditation. I sometimes refer to it as enlightenment's evil twin. As the result of successful practice with classic mindfulness, a person comes to an experience of the no-thingness of themselves and the no-thingness of their world. And that is for that person the most fulfilling and empowering event of their life. It allows them to live ten times the size that they would have lived otherwise. It frees them from fears and concerns.

It meaning the emptiness, the nothingness, the paper-thinness of the world, and the non-existence of self as thing. Those fulfill that person. They give that person a sense of absolute freedom.

They give that person a sense of profound repose and direct contact with their spiritual source. So it's a kind of rich and wonderful and empowering nothingness. The evil twin of that is DPDR. It's also an experience of the nothingness of self and the paper-thinness and insubstantiality of what you formerly thought was the world. However, the effect on the person that has this condition—and by the way, it is a recognized psychopathology, it's a diagnosis, it's in the manuals, in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual—the effect of this experience of emptiness and nothingness on a person that has DPDR is the diametric opposite. It is the exact opposite of the effect of enlightenment.

And it is possible that the nothingness is the same nothingness. So then, what's the difference? To me this is a huge, huge question, both a theoretical question and a practical question. The theoretical question asks us to look in a new way and in a deeper way at what enlightenment is. Why can it be so empowering and fulfilling, the it meaning this nothingness, for one person and have the opposite effect on another? So that's sort of the theoretical question, and no one knows the answer to that. There's also the practical question, because every once in a while—I want to be very clear in my use of language—very, very occasionally it happens that people that are doing a meditative practice, their experience moves in the direction of DPDR. Now, why I have to be very careful about saying that is, of course, people are afraid, right? Because meditation is not something that's known to most people. So it's like, oh my God, I don't think I want to try that if I could end up in the pit of the void and in this horrible, nihilistic, dysfunctional state.

So please listen carefully. In my entire career of teaching, which is long, decades, into my fourth decade now, I have encountered this in students only a few times. In the few times I've encountered it, with maybe one or two exceptions, I've been able to cure it. In other words, through giving the right direction, it ended up eventually becoming the empowering and fulfilling experience. So the chances that you're going to develop this bad effect that I just described as a result of doing mindfulness under a competent guide, the chances of that happening to you are very remote.

I mean, yes, there's a non-zero probability, but there's also a non-zero probability that you're going to be killed in a terrorist attack in North America, but it's really not highly probable. So this is not something to worry about from a practical point of view for someone that's considering the meditative path, assuming that they have a senior, competent guide that has dealt with this problem successfully and has some idea of how to work with it, which I'll talk about in a moment. What I have never done is attempt to cure

somebody that developed this condition spontaneously using mindfulness methods.

I don't know if that's possible. I don't know enough about the nature of it. In other words, most people that develop depersonalization, derealization disorder do not develop it as the result of having done a meditative practice. It just happens to them one day.

Suddenly the somethingness of the self is gone, and the world is paper thin, and everything that ever gave them meaning has now vanished, and they flail for the rest of their lives trying to get back to normalcy, unable apparently to do so from what I can tell. And I could be wrong about this, and I sort of hope I'm wrong about this, but I have the impression that there's not a drug-based or therapy-based cure for this. It might be interesting to attempt a homeopathic cure. By that I mean to use the strategies that people like me use with meditators when this happens, see if they work on the general population. I have no idea whether it would or not, although I've sometimes entertained the notion if I had another lifetime that I would work with some of these people and see if the methods that usually work on meditators would actually work on the non-meditators. So what usually works for meditators if their practice starts to move in this direction, which by the way is traditionally in Buddhism called falling into the pit of the void, and can be found, descriptions of it can be found in the classical Buddhist literature, including the Pali Canon.

Well, in any event, what I usually do is two things. If they're freaking out because of the emptiness, then there's something that's not empty. What's not empty is the freak-out. So I have them see that their freak-out reaction is itself empty, so that's sort of negating the negative. And then the other thing is systematically develop the positive. So you just use your concentration skills and so forth to do a lot of creating of positive field image talk.

And you basically, I actually put it in a positive framework for them. I say, okay, good, now you have nothing, and from that nothing, that's the ideal place to reconstruct a completely new self. You can still at will create positive field image and talk, and now like a physical therapist would exercise atrophied muscles and in a systematic way rebuild that person's ability to move. So I sort of push them, very much like a PT, push them to develop positive field image talk over and over and over again until they literally build a new and indeed better self.

Enlightenment; Simultaneous Expansion & Contraction; Sahej

Samadhi; Non-Dual Awareness ~ Shinzen

Harprakash's YouTube channel is called Expand Contract. Usually when things expand spatially, they thin out simultaneously. That gives you a simultaneous expansion contraction flavor. A vastness all around and a thinness all throughout. And if you have a vastness all around and a thinness all throughout, everything that you see, hear and feel on the inside and outside while you're walking around in life, I would pretty much define you as an enlightened person. That's sahaja samadhi. That is true non-dual awareness. And if you want the details filled in, you can go to the YouTube channel.

Equanimity and the Taste of Purification - Part 1 of 2 ~ Shinzen

Young

Now, another thing that you find all over the world, and which also goes back to our shamanic tribal ancestors, is the notion that you can purify consciousness by exposing yourself to harsh ordeals. And that practice is called asceticism. We have the remnants of Western asceticism embedded in the English language, in certain idioms that we use.

For example, to wear a hair shirt or to flagellate yourself, you've all heard these expressions. Well these are actual practices that were, and actually are, still done within the Christian contemplative tradition. That's called asceticism, ascetical practices. The idea being that by exposing yourself to this discomfort, that in some way this will purify away your sinfulness or reduce your original sin, and therefore get you closer to God. Similar practices exist in tribal cultures. And yes, there's a notion that they can be purification.

I suspect that the notion that these are purifications came about secondarily. Can't know for sure, but my conjecture would be that our ancestors originally exposed themselves to these physical ordeals primarily in order to enter the realms of power, where they would encounter spirits, where they would attain healing powers, they would have visions. You can take workshops in shamanism, and it's like you drum or you do these different things, and it's like two weekends and you did a seminar in shamanism, and that's sort of like, now I know what shamanism's about. When you do shamanism in traditional cultures, it usually involves hair-raising physical ordeals that most of you know about because we have a connection with the native community here. You have to put yourself through things that you wouldn't think any human, I mean like throwing a little cold water over your body is a joke compared to a sun dance. It was probably the case that people exposed themselves to these ordeals in order to enter altered states, enter the spirit realms, and then I'm guessing they discovered that as they were doing this, they were changing as a person.

Something about them was getting better. So a paradigm of asceticism evolved where it's like, okay, it's not just that exposing ourselves to these harsh sensations thrusts us into the spirit realm, but it also purifies our consciousness. All around the world you can find ascetical practices. If you read the standard histories of Buddhism, they will usually say that the Buddha rejected asceticism.

However, I wouldn't exactly say that. I would say rather that the Buddha refined asceticism, conceptually and practically. Conceptually, in essence he replaced the notion of the more it hurts, the more it purifies, with the notion of the more you bring equanimity to an experience, the more purification occurs. If it's an unpleasant experience, that will purify consciousness in one way. If it's a pleasant experience and you bring equanimity to it, that will purify consciousness in another way, a related way, but from a slightly different angle. But if it's a neutral experience and you bring equanimity to it, that also purifies consciousness, even though it's a non-valenced experience. So what is equanimity? We can think of it as training our sense gates not to fight with themselves. So if, for example, just to give a specific example, if a sensation wants to arise, at some point the body may fight with its own sensation, but you can gradually train the body not to fight with its own sensations as they arise. If a sensation is about to pass, the body may hold on inappropriately long, but you can train the body not to hold on inappropriately long to the sensations it produces. And the same is true for the other sensory modalities. It's easiest to see in the body, but the same principles hold in visual experiences, image, sight, and in auditory experiences, sound and internal talk. You can think of equanimity as training the sensory circuits to get out of their own way, to not fight against their own productions, but also to not inappropriately

hold on to their own productions.

So one way, it's a little bit of an esoteric metaphor, but one way to think about equanimity is that it's a training of the sensory circuits out of their usual habit, which is to be reactive. As soon as they start to move, they coagulate. Training out of that habit into behaving like fixotropic substances, where the more you stir it, the thinner it gets, and therefore the less resistance it presents to change. As we bring equanimity to an uncomfortable experience, number one, that experience doesn't cause as much suffering, and number two, that experience delivers a flavor of purification, so that it's possible to get something positive, a taste of purification, even inside discomfort. Now what about the pleasant experiences? The more you bring equanimity to a pleasant experience, the more that experience produces a quality called fulfillment, which is not the same as mere pleasure. Unpleasant is what we really want, pleasure is what we think we want. So as you bring equanimity to a pleasant experience, it delivers more fulfillment, and also it delivers the same flavor of purification. So you can get the sense that you are purifying consciousness by bringing equanimity to pleasant or unpleasant.

Equanimity and the Taste of Purification - Part 2 of 2 ~ Shinzen

Young

The old concept of asceticism that was present in Buddha's time, probably originally starting in shamanic ordeals for powers, and then people noticed, well, if I sort of torture myself, I sort of get better as a person, and then the Buddha's saying, no, it's not the fact that you're torturing yourself, it's that in these ceremonies, you're experiencing uncomfortable sensations with equanimity, that's purifying consciousness, but you could do just as well with pleasure. And if you look at the classic Buddhist texts with the longer discourses of the Buddha, he essentially describes going into altered blissful states and having equanimity with them, and that purifying consciousness through the process of having equanimity with these absorptions, and then that taking you to something that is beyond bliss, beyond pleasure and pain, beyond all dualities, which is the absolute rest of nirvana.

So there's an actual description of working with, a lot of descriptions actually, of working with pleasant experiences, but with an emphasis on equanimity, they purify consciousness, they deeply fulfill, and if they purify consciousness profoundly enough, the blocks to nirvana are worked through. There are what are called the dhutangas, which are, depending on how you want to count them, 12 or 13 uncomfortable practices that the monks were allowed to do but not required to do, like yasa, for example. A person could take a vow, I'm not going to, I'm going to sit always at night, not lay down. That is a practice, but not for one night, okay? A person could say, I'm going to do this for the duration, or, you know, for a week or something like that. That's one of the dhutangas, that's the term that was for, for allowed uncomfortable practices. But the Buddha didn't allow uncomfortable practices that would be harmful to your body, or that would wipe you out so badly that you, you weren't really doing practice anymore, you were just sort of, you know, out of it. Beauty is another of the components that constitutes mindful awareness, in the way that I like to think about mindful awareness.

Equanimity: Intentional, Noticing Dropping Deeper, and

Second-Order Equanimity ~ Shinzen Young

How can we bring equanimity to an experience? You can intentionally bring equanimity to it.

There are ways of doing that. However, I would say that in the end, the most significant learning about equanimity comes about by what you described initially, which is it just sort of happens to you and you notice it, and you notice its effect. How can you bring equanimity to an experience? Well, you can try to physically relax the body.

That tends to open the body, and that tends to open consciousness. So if you can keep the body physically relaxed as various sensory phenomena are arising, that's something that you can intentionally do that would tend to create equanimity. You can attempt to intentionally create talk that sort of welcomes whatever is coming up, or you can attempt to sort of disregard talk that judges, or a sort of combined strategy, you replace judging talk with accepting talk, because we have a certain control over internal talk. So you can use your control over talk and your control over the relaxation of the body to create equanimity to a certain extent.

But there's only a limited extent to which a person can do that. And mostly you just wait for it to happen. You drop into it.

It's a numbers game. And then when you drop into it, you notice it's happened, and you notice the effect of it on your sense of happiness, and that creates a positive conditioning loop. It's important to also understand that if you can't have equanimity, meaning you can't control the tensing in your body and the judging in your mind, then have equanimity with the non-equanimity. Go to that and just observe and accept the tension and observe and accept the judgments. So that either you have equanimity or you have equanimity with your lack of equanimity, which is a second-order equanimity, would be my recommendations.

Evoking and Working Through Challenging Material ~ Shinzen

Young

Within the sort of standard methodology, it's what you say. If stuff percolates up spontaneously, that is negatives from memories and so forth, it can only come up as some combination of field image talk. So you simply apply the focus in technique to it.

You untangle the strands, you open up to them, you give it permission to last as long or as short as it wants. And as you say, if that's unfinished business, then this finishes the business, or at least is part of an ongoing process that maybe a year later some more has to percolate up. But you're fostering the finishing of the business. Or another way to put it is that you're letting the ghosts out of the cellar and they dissipate and are gone. So typically that's how one deals with negatives. Now when you say focus on negative, okay, that could have a different meaning because focus on positive means intentionally hold and radiate the positive. So no, there's no technique to intentionally hold and radiate the negatives in my system.

So in that sense, yes, I apologize, it's asymmetrical. There is something, it's not really a focus on negative because focus on positive here, attempting to nurture positive content, and there's no way we're going to nurture negative content. However, there is something that people frequently ask about, which is, well, do I have to wait for it to spontaneously arise? Can I evoke something that I know is problematic and then observe it? Then apply the deconstruction practice to it? The answer is yes, subject to a couple of constraints. The first constraint is I would not make that the centerpiece of mindfulness practice because then you're doing psychotherapy, you're not doing mindfulness.

But it's okay to do that on occasion. The second is to sort of know how to do it so as to optimize the mindfulness cathartic component. By that I mean, if you consider, well, you've heard the expression like, what are some of the expressions? Like, okay, rattle your cage when it's a negative or ring your bell when it's a positive. What does that mean? If you look at the act, if the bell stands for the samskaras, the stored materials, so you can with intention strike that bell by bringing up some feel, image, talk, typically a negative, an issue. So you strike the body-mind bell intentionally, but then it's like hands-off, and you let it resonate and you observe. You don't strike it again until it completely dies down. And then you strike it again.

At some point, you may find this happens. And that could be actually at the very beginning, in which case you don't beat that dead horse trying to evoke that thing. The idea is it needs to be something that will resonate on its own readily after evoking, freeing up all your energy to now apply the technique to it. So you can't be constantly trying to beat it, like strike it into existence and deconstruct it. But if you find a bell that resonates, so you strike it and now, however subtly you can still detect it as it damps, and then strike it again. If at some point you can't evoke it anymore, you're done for that session. So I call that evoking. And it's not a focus on negative, but it's a little related to what you brought up.

Expansion and Contraction - Part 1: Kenotic Christianity and

Shuniya ~ Shinzen Young

We've been talking about a number of themes. We talked about the theme of change, impermanence.

We also have been talking about the theme of that which represents no change. It could be described as the one or the zero, depending on your tradition of practice. We talked about the parallel between one and zero. The one is the balance point between stretch and squeeze. The zero is the balance point between moving this way and moving that way, the center of the coordinate grid, the origin.

They play the same role. Zero is to addition as the one is to multiplication. The point being that we have contrasting activities. There's a way of multiplicatively affirming and negating. They're called stretch and squeeze.

There's a way of additively affirming and negating. One's called go this way. The other one's called go exactly the opposite direction and equal amount.

The balance point could be called zero or could be called one. At the still point of the turning world, as T.S. Eliot put it, neither movement from nor towards. At the still point there the dance is, but do not call it fixity where past and future are gathered. We talked about movement, change, flow and vanishing. In the way that I like to describe things, my own technical vocabulary for describing experience, any abrupt disappearance I call a vanishing.

When you label, the label for that is gone, something is gone. Any other aspect of change, any increase, decrease, affirmation, negation, speeding up, slowing down, spreading, collapsing, moving this way, moving the opposite way, I refer to that all generically as flow, just to have a general term for it. One might say that there are two fundamental flavors of flow.

If we consider that any kind of movement would be molded by an interplay of opposites. The Greeks lacked both negative numbers and zero. China had negative numbers but no zero.

It was only the genius of ancient India, their mental set, that could see that you could have zero as an authentic number. They called it shunya or shunyata, which literally means emptiness. It's cognate to the Greek word kenos, K-E-N-O-S, which means empty. It's a Greek cognate to the Sanskrit word shunya because the K sound in Greek corresponds to a SH sound in Sanskrit.

So shunya, kenos. Kenotic as an adjective, meaning relating to emptying out, describes what God had to do in order to incarnate as Jesus. It also describes what Christians were supposed to do with themselves in order to experience oneness with God, empty out, annihilate the somethingness within. That's called kenotic Christianity, Christianity based on the notion of a oneness, a union in Greek, a oneness with God comes about through an emptying of the somethingness of self.

Except to become God, this is tricky. There's two words in Greek that correspond to one word in Latin. The one word in Latin is deification. The two words in Greek are theosis and apotheosis. We even have the word apotheosis, meaning the very embodiment of something. Apotheosis means to become God in the sense of like the emperors of the

ancient world claimed they were gods. But theosis as a Christian term meant to experience a direct participation in the spiritual source. But they become one word in Greek, in Latin, deification. The subtle distinction is lost. Shunya, emptying out, kenosis.

It's the same in the East and the same in the West. If you want to have a direct experience of that balance point, that nothing, that very rich nothing, that very special nothing that is the source, since that's the still point, how do you get to the still point? Many possible ways, actually. One of them, paradoxically, is to utterly surrender to the opposite of stillness, which is the movement and the flow. We can think of movement as generated by a dialectical process of back and forth.

I have mentioned a number of times in these talks things that my teacher, Sasaki Roshi, Joshu Sasaki Roshi says. You can look him up on the internet. If you go to Mount Baldy Zen Center website, you can see pictures of him and find out about his teachings. When I first translated for him, even though I had a very impressive background in Buddhist scholarship and many, many years of practice, I couldn't understand what he was talking about. I could mechanically translate it into English.

But I made a lot of mistakes at the beginning in translating. One of them, I remember he said, which literally means, Westerners are weak in abstraction. Now, I thought that Zen was against abstraction, so he must be putting down Westerners. So I mistranslated it, as Westerners are too abstract.

But actually, that's not what he meant. He meant, they're not abstract enough. My preconceptions about what Zen was supposed to be got in the way. What he was really saying is, they're not abstract enough to see that a gazillion things that they think are completely different are actually reflections of exactly the same thing. What are the gazillion things that they think are different that are really reflections of the same thing? What is that one thing that they are reflections of? .

Expansion and Contraction - Part 2: Zen Metaphors and Three

Tastes ~ Shinzen Young

He runs through this list of things that some of them seem related and some of them seem like completely unrelated to each other or to anything. He'll say, there is zero, but zero is intrinsically unstable because zero consists of all positive and all negative taken together. And therefore, inevitably, zero breaks apart and the positive only knows how to expand and the negative only knows how to contract. Now by positive I mean life, by negative I mean death, by positive I mean being, by negative I mean non-being, by positive I mean future, by negative I mean past, by positive I mean thus going, by negative I mean thus coming, by positive I mean father, by negative I mean mother, by positive I mean heaven, by negative I mean earth, by positive I mean objective, By negative, I mean subjective. By positive, I mean guest. By negative, I mean host. By positive, I mean outside. By negative, I mean inside. By positive, I mean God. By negative, I mean the devil. What? Positive is God. Negative is the devil. Positive is father. Negative is mother. Mother is the devil? Is he saying that? If you get caught up, see, if you're weak in abstraction, then you'll be completely wiggled out. What he's saying is that, oh, and then he says success, failure, affirmation, negation, praise, blame, OK.

Can you see what the teaching is, what he's trying to point out to people? Maybe not. You're weak in abstraction. You're too caught up in the literal meanings of these words rather than the poetry. Zen is a powerful poem. Vipassana, on the other hand, should be a carefully crafted essay. Zen people don't say enough.

We Vipassana teachers say too much. But hopefully, there'll be somewhere in between all these faulty teachings, someone will get something of benefit. In between, born in between, boy, is that an interesting theme. All of mathematics could in some way, or much of mathematics could be described as the study of what is born in between. We're born in between. Our remote ancestors thought of us as born in between Father Sky and Mother Earth. East Asian flower arranging, Japanese flower arranging, is based on there's a sky principle, an earth principle, and in between is the human principle.

There's always those three levels represented in the flowers. So we're born in between, moment by moment, in between what might be called fundamental flow. If you want to get to the stillness, the absolute stillness, the still point of the turning world, neither movement from nor towards, paradoxically, one way to get there, there must be many, many ways to get there. I would never say there's only one way to get there, but one way to get there, the way I'm familiar with, is the paradoxical way.

By utterly surrendering to movement from and movement towards, or any antipodal pair of activities of nature, by utterly surrendering to either one, the other, or preferably both at the same time, if you can, the somethingness within is literally torn apart. Sasaki Roshi is very politically incorrect as a teacher. He says things that, and I have to translate them, that offend people, I mean really offend people.

And he's completely unapologetic. He says, I know this might sound horrific, but father and mother tear their baby apart, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. In fact, he will also put it in the same thing in a more soothing metaphor. He says that when the child is born, so you have to understand what child is. What's the child in this case? Was it the physical baby? Well, yeah, he's talking about that level. But the child is this moment of consciousness, the self of the moment.

We talked about all the different scales of self. Any of those cells can be the child. It's born in between. We don't notice that typically. But if we did, if we realized, if we saw how zero has just come apart and vibrated back and forth to mold the feel-image-talk-self and the touch-sight-sound surrounding scene in this moment, then we would know, we would arise, the baby, the child, would arise as an enlightened self.

And it would know exactly what its job is. The more gentle metaphor is that the child, the baby, graciously gives back to father what it got from father and graciously gives back to mother what it got from mother. And therefore, the child as a thing disappears. In other words, in this present, see, now I'll put on the vipassana hat and explain the poetry, which maybe is bad.

But it's what I'm going to do. So all of the affirmations and negations, the vibrations of our senses involved in this present moment of perception can be analyzed into a part that affirms and a part that negates. They're tangled together utterly. And if you allow everything that wants to push out in your sensory experience to simultaneously push out and everything that wants to pull in in your sensory experience to simultaneously pull in, all the pushes become one giant, effortless expansion of pure space.

And all the pulls become one infinitesimal, effortless contraction of pure space. It's sort of like electrolysis. Imagine several hundred different tasting salts, but they all have positive and negative ions.

You connect them across a potential by hooking up a battery. So all those tastes will completely disappear. But there will be three tastes left. The taste of positive, the taste of negative, and the taste of zero. The taste of zero pervades the positive microscopically and pervades the negative and surrounds the whole thing. We started early on talking about manifesting a complete self. This is the graduate level version of that concept.

Expansion and Contraction - Part 3: Surrendering to Life & Death,

Nirvana ~ Shinzen Young

The idea of manifesting was described by some of the Neoplatonists as from the good to the good, never leaving the good. And there's a metaphor of a fountain that gushes out, gathers back at the same time. If you look at your central nervous system, the functional anatomy, there's something right in the center of your brain called the corona radiata. And it looks like a fountain. And the sensory fibers go up and the motor fibers come down, roughly speaking.

I suspect that this is not a coincidence. So from the good back to the good, never leaving the good. You expand and contract simultaneously, but the entire thing is surrounded by zero. So although there is contrast, there is no birth. Ironically, by utterly giving yourself to life and death, you abide in a transcendence of life and death. You are literally born into the unborn. And just like someone who's born into life doesn't know the rules, doesn't know the lay of the land, it takes many years for the no-self, the unborn, to learn how to carry on all of the functions of the self-self.

There's some pictures called the Zen ox-herding pictures that portray that on the metaphor of training an ox. Time and space arise by the arising of what inhabits time and space, which is our subjective world of field image talk and our so-called objective world of touch-site sound. Now by utterly giving yourself to whatever wants to say yes and whatever wants to say no, by utterly giving yourself to whatever pushes out and whatever pulls in, however uncomfortable that may be for a while, we get a little bit of the cosmic affirmation and a little bit of the cosmic negation, just a tiny little fraction of it.

This is the way Sasaki Roshi teaches. So we give that tiny fraction back to the rest of the universe, the totality of expansion and the totality of contraction, and then our tiny little bit merges with the totality and there's no somethingness to prevent expansion and contraction from re-merging, coming back together into the one zero. And to experience this cycle over and over again, as you look to the right, look to the left, talk to this person, think about this, do that, plan dinner, eat dinner, make love, make arguments, to not lose track that this is happening would be tantamount to what might be called living nirvana. I spoke about how flow can integrate the mind and the body. I spoke about how flow can integrate inside and outside.

But mind and body, inside and outside, can be integrated in the sense of never disconnected from the source, the zero, the balance point, the one nothing, the fulfilling vacuity. It's this word nirvana, we can't translate it into English. It means both cessation and complete fulfillment, because it's quenching. The fire is quenched, the fire of suffering is quenched, but your thirst is quenched, meaning that you have fulfillment, and not just a little bit of fulfillment, but a kind of utter fulfillment for no reason whatsoever, happiness independent of conditions. Sukhihoto, may you be happy, is the traditional greeting in Theravada Buddhism, in the Pali language, happy in the sense of good things happen to you, and happy in the sense that your happiness is not dependent on good things happening to you.

Both of these connotations are present when people say sukhimoto. Ironically, by being able to, in a sense, abstract, in a sense, see that all change can be in some way looked upon as an interplay of oppositely directed doings, and then by seeing that they all boil down to yang and yin, yes and no, life and death, expansion and contraction, moving forward, moving backward, etc., etc., you surrender to life and death, and you're torn apart. But don't worry, all that happens is you become life and death.

I didn't make this phraseology up, this is verbatim Sasaki Roshi's taisho. He says, I know it's scary to think of completely surrendering to expansion and contraction. It's scary to consider allowing yourself to literally be torn apart by the forces of nature.

But don't be scared. All that's going to happen is when you surrender to life and death, you will become life and death. They will no longer be an object for you, and therefore you will become free from life and death. You will become that which is beyond life and death, because life and death will rebalance, will reunite into the still point of the turning world, neither life nor death, neither movement from nor towards. This could also be described as absolute present, future and past uniting in an absolute presence that has no duration whatsoever. Spatially paper-thin, temporally instantaneous.

Expansion and Contraction - Part 4: Heaven, Hell, Integration & 3

Tastes of Freedom ~ Shinzen Young

Sometimes when we sit here and practice, especially if you sit for long periods of time, it may seem like you're being torn apart. It's hard not to be afraid of being torn apart. What will become of me? By the way, this being torn apart is called *bhanga* in Pali and Sanskrit. It means dissolution.

You can look it up on the internet. It's an experience that some people go through, and some of you are going through, and others of you will go through. But not everyone goes through it. It has both a wonderful aspect to it, because there can be like champagne bubbles and blissful flows of energy and so forth.

That's the wonderful side. But there can also be disturbing images of skeletons and death and animals eating you up. And if this sounds like some of the things that happen in shamanic culture, that's no coincidence.

I'm sure that's no coincidence. This is a human thing. It transcends a particular spiritual path. Often in Africa, there's an illness associated with before a big spiritual breakthrough takes place.

In other cultures, the shaman experiences animals eating them, etc., etc. So there can be a heavenly side and a hellish side. For some people, it's only heavenly. Everything just becomes an aerosol of the most blissful, gentle, effervescent flow.

And that's the form that the dissolution takes. For other people, the flow is more like being torn apart, like you're just being pounded and squeezed and stretched and twisted, the whole fabric of consciousness. And other people get these weird images and stuff like that, skeletons and rotting corpses and things emblematic of death, which makes sense because you are, after all, surrendering to the primordial forces of death, but also of life. If it takes the form that it seems that you're being torn apart, don't be afraid. All that's going to happen is you will be torn apart, but you will become life and death.

God and the devil won't have anything in between them to prevent them from uniting into that which transcends contrast. All ordinary tastes disappear. And there is only the *vimoksa rasa*, the taste of liberation. But according to the way my teacher likes to talk, there's really three tastes in there, the taste of life, the taste of death, and the taste of zero, that which is neither life nor death, but their completion.

The integrated body, mind, and world arise never completely separate from the source. Even as you're going about daily life, looking here, looking there, it seems like zero opens up, expands, it contracts, and molds what you're looking at. But it never really separates from zero. So you, what you're looking at, the forces that are molding you and what you're looking at, and the cessation of those forces are never completely separate.

That then sets the stage for a lifetime of integration. And since you experience the self and the world as coming out of and returning to the same place through the peristalsis of this formless womb, in Greek, you know what the word for brother or sister is? It's a unisex word, actually, means sibling, brother or sister. I'll give you a hint. There's a city that's called the city of brotherly slash sisterly love. Well, the love part is the *philia*. The *adelphos* is the brother-sister part. *Adelphos*, although you would never guess by its sound, is cognate to the Sanskrit word *garbha*, G-A-R-B-H-A. Have you ever heard of the Tathagata *garbha*? *Garbha* means womb.

Tathagata garbha is the womb of the Buddhas, the mother of the Buddhas, the source, the nature of nature. Adelphos means womb. And so adelphos means one who shares the womb. Adelphos, a brother or sister, is someone who shares the womb, literally.

And in Sanskrit, the word is sagarbha. So adelphos, they don't sound that similar, but they're cognate, sagarbha, one who has shared the womb. Adelphos, one who has shared the womb. So your physical brother or sister is the one who has shared the physical womb. But the formless womb of the source, everyone shares. And to the extent that you have a sense of sharing that source, to that extent you cannot avoid the direct perception, moment by moment, that everyone you look at is your relative, literally. And not just every human, right, every animal or plant, everything. The keno-centric view leads to a cosmos-centric view. If zero is at the center of your being, then the whole cosmos is the center of your concern in the sense of a call to service.

Expansion, Contraction and the Breath Cycle ~ Shinzen Young

What is the importance of the breath? One has to really detect expansive, contractive movement force.

It's not just, okay, if you focus on the breath, that's expansion and contraction. You have to detect those flavors in it. And you don't want to only do it with the breath forever, because the idea is you want to eventually be able to detect this in all sensory experiences, all time. But the breath is a representative of this. How can I detect the breath? There's three ways you can do it. You can just focus on the volumetric expansion on the in and the volumetric collapse on the out breath. That would be one way. You're alternating expansion and contraction in the sense of literally space getting larger or smaller.

You can reverse it, though. When you breathe in, the muscles contract and the linings of the bronchi and so forth feel a tug inward. Remember, I always say pressure or space or etc., etc., or force. When you breathe in, there's actually a contractive force that's detectable.

And when you breathe out, that releases. So there's an expansive force. That's the opposite polarity of the volumetric expansion and contraction. One way you can work with the breath expansive, contractive-wise is in breath is volumetric expansion, out breath is volumetric contraction.

Volumetric, pardon my geek speak, it just means with respect to how big something is, how you would measure the volume. So you can expand on the in, contract on the out. Or force-wise, you can contract on the in and expand on the out.

Or if you want to get fancy, you can volumetrically expand and force-wise contract on the in and reverse that on the out. So you have a both on the in, a both on the out, but the roles of father and mother get reversed. Sasaki Roshi says when father finds mother's native village and mother finds father's native village, then father turns into mother and mother turns into father. And they flip roles and that's the only way that they can come back, etc., etc.

So you've got whichever one you want to call the native village. But if you want to call the volumetric thing sort of like surface and then the other thing deep, so your surface expands on the in breath, the depths contract on the in breath, but then on the out breath they flip roles, right? The surface contracts, but the inside muscles stretch. So that's probably part of what he's talking about, but just a very small part. What I find is that by working with the breath that way, which is readily available, almost anyone can get the volumetric expansion contraction. Most people can detect the muscles doing the opposite. I find that working that way with the breath sort of sensitizes to the detection of similar phenomena in other sensory domains.

Experiences of the Dissolution (Bhanga) Process ~ Shinzen Young

Interactive - 1 of 3

I remember a number of years ago you went through experiences of flow that were not like a massage. They were more like a beating.

Yes. I had sort of left spiritual practice for many years. I had bad experiences with other teachers and I said, no more teachers, no more gurus, no more techniques. I am going to let life be my teacher. I had many friends at that time who were students of yours and they were saying very positive things about you.

I said, yeah, whatever. I ended up coming up to one of your retreats in 2006. I had good experiences with you. You showed lots of techniques. You reactivated my desire to meditate.

Nothing particular happened on that retreat. I was getting used to the pain of sitting for long periods of time. I was practicing your techniques and then I went home and I thought, well, that's all very interesting and that was a pleasant experience in general. And then about two or three weeks later, something started to happen. Something started to happen in my solar plexus area where there were waves and impulses and gnawing sensations and incredible terrors. And I started reliving terrors from my childhood and I started having a very chaotic feeling. I felt like I was just going crazy. Friends said that I should call you.

You were able to walk me through it and ask specific questions and we were able to isolate the sensations and you actually said that this was a positive experience and it was a type of purification and it was a type of dissolution. I gave you the Pollywood bonga. You said bonga.

B-H-A, yeah, B-H-A. And that pleased my ego a little bit. That gave me some pleasant feel, oh, I guess something good is happening. But the experience itself was still so frightening to me because it was so disorienting. The description I have now is like there's a jazz drummer on speed living in my torso going boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. And it felt like a Jim Carrey movie where there was like pounding and twisting and morphing and tingling and just completely incoherent thoughts, terrors, even things didn't look familiar anymore. I kind of, I have to keep looking at my hands and I say, these are my hands.

Where am I? And I would actually hide in my apartment at home because I was so frightened. And we spent a fair bit of time together and you said that this was an experience of the dissolving of an old self. I've heard people talk about it before and it's always different when it happens to you personally.

Yeah, my standard phrase is you read the book, now you're going to have to live the movie. And so many things about the spiritual path that I had read about started happening after that and I would never have imagined what the experience of that was from the inside. It's so different that when you read about it and then it starts happening. It was frightening. It really was frightening. And it was very disorienting and it's been almost three years since that's happened. That still comes and goes.

And it's now a bit, I'm a bit more familiar with it. Just a few hours ago on the retreat I had another wave of it where I was having like these very primordial terror thoughts, like a frightened animal feeling like something was a matter of life and death. I felt things being ripped apart. It felt like my heart was being ripped open.

It just felt like this ripping experience. How did you work with that? Did you do the love it to death? It was actually too frightening to even bring that in at certain times. I just did the focus on flow, which is a little more hands off.

Little more hands off. And I knew I was safe. So you just noted it as flow. Harsh flow, but still flow.

Very again the jazz drummer that was hitting every drum all at once. And I specifically remember a few images, image and feel combos that literally I thought I was going to die. And sight space collapsed.

I just completely collapsed into raw image feel and then let go. Do you remember when you first called me the conceptual model that I gave you for Bhangka? I talked to you about how it's described in the tradition. It could be very just purely blissful. It's all champagne bubbles and massage. I mean earlier you were describing this blissful massage. There is that component.

Yeah. But for some people it's only bliss city the whole way and the dissolution process just sort of gently and blissfully dissolves them like an Alka-Seltzer tablet into the source. So for some people it's like just bliss city.

It's pleasant vibratory and undulatory flow in the body and mind is pretty restful. For other people it's at the other extreme. It's like nothing but the horrific. The flow patterns are harsh and jarring and torturous. The mental pictures are archetypal and horrific monsters, images of death, animals eating you up.

That's exactly what I went through. I went to a Goenka retreat two years ago in India and the meditations were horrific. I was an insect being eaten by another insect. You actually saw that in the images? I saw this big mouth come and crush me, consume me. People see skeletons of death.

And then I was some animal running for its very life and this other animal grabbed me and just started ripping my flesh apart. Unfortunately this Bhangka thing is not limited to Buddhist practice. It's described all over the world but specifically in shamanic traditions.

All over the world in pre-literate cultures it is not uncommon for the shamans to report animals have to eat them up, monsters get them, they see their own death, they see the death of everyone in the world. This kind of thing. So there can be these horrific images, uncomfortable touch and feel, and jarring, tearing energies. What happened in talk space? Did you get irrational talk going on? What sorts of talk would come up? It felt like all the cylinders were firing. It was mostly chaotic feel for me. Horrible shame and guilt. I felt like I should be caught and taken in front of a firing squad and killed right away.

I would come out of meditation and I would be waiting for someone to torture me and kill me. So that's the horrific side of Bhangka. So for some people it's only bliss, believe it or not.

They never get any of that stuff. For other people it's mostly horrific. For other people it's a mixture of both. Has both sides to it. And then actually there's the fourth possibility. Not everyone on a spiritual path or a path to enlightenment passes through a dissolution experience. It's not a requirement. Many people do, but not inevitably or it may be so mild that you don't really even think of it in terms of a dissolution.

Experiences of the Dissolution (Bhanga) Process ~ Shinzen Young

Interactive - 2 of 3

If you think of the spiritual journey as a journey from surface to source, in making that journey, some people will have blissful dissolution, that they just sort of dissolve back into the flow and go of the source. Some people have these horrific dissolutions that if they can stay with it, then become blissful and eventually just purely blissful.

Some people get a mixture of both, and some are not particularly aware of going through a dissolution process, so it's not required. I do talk about these things and other teachers talk about them because we want to give you the heads up, just in case it happens to you. Basically, you need to know two things, why is this happening and what am I going to do about it? So we do talk about it. The advantage is that if it does happen, you know why it's happening and what to do about it. But the disadvantage is, if we talk about it, some people listening will say, that hasn't happened to me yet, so I must be the child of a lesser god, I'm not really making progress.

They're not missing that. Well, it depends. Not always as rough as you had. People think, well, I haven't experienced that so I must not be making progress, so there's that problem. And then other people think, oh my god, I hope that doesn't happen to me, and there's that problem. And then other people are thinking, wow, I wish that would happen to me. There are problems involved in explicitly talking about these phenomena.

It scares people or it creates craving or comparison mind. But I think it's still worth talking about. Definitely.

Get it out there. Because I think if you wouldn't have been there, I would have gone for psychiatric help. And that could have had tragic consequences because...

They may not have understood. There's actually something called the Spiritual Emergence Network, you know about this, that was created because they realized people who were having spiritual experiences didn't have someone to talk to. They go into the mental health system, while those mental health professionals in prior times didn't know about this stuff. And the Spiritual Emergence Network was designed to inform mental health professionals that hey, just because somebody's reporting the kind of things you're reporting doesn't necessarily mean they're losing their marbles and that they necessarily need to be put in chemical restraints.

I can see the importance of that. You know, there could have been horrific consequences or tragic consequences if you had gotten somebody that didn't understand the difference between dissolution and insanity. I would say the single most important thing if a person goes through an experience like this is you've got to have somebody to talk to who's actually themselves been through it.

I made it through to the other end. That's like, that's the cure. Okay, more than anything it's like, okay, find somebody who's actually experienced this. Then they'll take you through it.

Isn't that what I said I would do? And you're more or less through it, aren't you? I mean, you had a little recurrence today, but... It's taken on a different texture. That initial destabilization is still going on in different areas in my life. But you've acclimatized. Well, every time you acclimatize to something or some fixed reference point, that seems to, the carpet gets pulled out. Zen master Rinzai talked about finding that true person within you who has no fixed position.

Wu wei zhen ran. That's what you're being called on to do. Those are great words, and I've read a hundred spiritual books that thought, wow, I'd like to be free. I want to find that true person within me that has no fixed position.

Be careful what you pray for. Absolutely, because it's not like I have ever imagined. There is no informed consent to enlightenment.

It's both not as good as, and much better than, you fantasized. And I realized that for most of my life, my spiritual model was wrong, in that I was a person, an ego, that was going to have more awareness, that I was going to make a better me, a new, improved me, with more consciousness. You were going to polish a brick into a mirror.

I was going to be a better, new, improved version of myself. But instead you discovered that you're a brick that gets smashed into a trillion pieces and vaporized. And what I realized is that it's not that some kind of perfection gets added to me. I get erased. I get erased, and the perfection that was always there becomes clear and starts to shine. That's called a figure-ground reversal. And that's wisdom that's speaking through you now, to say those words. That's exactly how it works. I would never have guessed it from reading the books. Can you repeat that? I interrupted you.

That was really good. No, just what you said. You thought it was... Well, I always thought spirituality was adding something, becoming bigger and bigger. More consciousness, more power, more clarity, more focus, more success in my life. And then I realized that what spirituality is about is not having a self that has that at all.

And that those powerful qualities are just always there in creation all the time when you step out of the way. And the price for that is? Everything. As T.S. Eliot said. Everything you ever believed in, everything you ever thought you were. It's a very humbling experience. But I wouldn't give it up for anything at this point. I want to thank you for kicking me into this place, for jump-starting. Excellent, yeah.

Experiences of the Dissolution (Bhanga) Process ~ Shinzen Young

Interactive - 3 of 3

What I've been exploring in my own practice is how suffering is created by the free cap, by the spasm, by the fit space. The fit fit.

The fit fit, exactly. And that's... The feel in which talk. It does spasm, doesn't it? Like a spasm of the body, but it's a subjective spasm.

Absolutely. And you become hard as a rock, and you become a terrified thing, and you create yourself. That's how you, in my mind, become a billiard ball, and how the situation becomes a billiard ball, and you're just frozen. You see that happening everywhere, how we relate to the world.

And the practice lets you go from the particulate paradigm to the wave. Shall we do so? Take a moment to lengthen your spine, and let your whole body settle, which is just our old friend, physical relaxation. And would you say at this time in your body and or mind that there's any of that flow going on, or are things pretty tranquil? There's quite a lot of flow going on. Is it in the body or mind also? Just in the body or mind also? It's in the body. By mind. I mean image talk space.

Image talk space. This was always the interesting thing about flow, because there can be, for example, a vibrational hum in my body. I feel it in touch space. I feel it in and out in feel space. I feel it in talk space. I feel it in sound space. External sound. External sound space.

And image space also. And sometimes if the vibration gets strong enough and is often connected to my heartbeat, syncopated with my heartbeat, it actually modulates sight space. External sight. External sight space. And you get it in internal image also. Like on the screen, vibration on the blank screen. Not so much actually. How about waviness on the blank screen? Not so much.

The body is waving big time. How about the images? Do they melt and morph? Mental pictures? Not many mental pictures. You don't get, so it's not much in image space, but it's in the other modalities. Almost all of them.

Almost all the others. How about right now? Is the vibratory flavor of flow present in most of those modalities? Yes, it is. Here's what I'd like you to do. I'd like you to, moment by moment, note flow. And we're going to tune into that. But each time you note flow, I'd like you to spread your awareness, do the zoom out option, spread your awareness as broadly as you can through body, mind, and even external world.

Just sort of do a coverage moment by moment, zooming out. Does that make sense? Do you understand what I'm talking about? Yes. I'd like you to begin by using spoken labels, note flow, say the word out loud, and use the tone of voice and the pacing for the equanimity and the concentration. Flow. Flow. Flow. Flow.

Flow. That's perfect. I can tell by the tone of voice that you're in deep equanimity. And I can tell by the pacing that your concentration is good. Is that correct? Yes.

Good. Now, go to the standard optional labeling. Either speak the labels out loud or make them mental or no label at all. Sort of shifting like gears, whatever works best for you. And zoom out each time to cover the flow as broadly as it may be present in your sensory experience. And sort of unify and integrate body, mind, maybe body, mind, and world.

Does that instruction make sense? Yes, it does. Good. And we'll just see what happens. I'll just do my own practice while you do that. Is that coming along okay? Very much okay.

What's okay or good about it? I don't know. Stay with it as you speak. See, if you want to speak slowly, that's okay. Sort of stay with it as you describe it. This particular instance has become more focused and heightened than I have experienced before.

Perhaps it's the one-on-one guidance or something. But when I say flow, it's just a unified field of soft, pleasant waves in almost every sense except image. That's fine. And of course my eyes are closed. Would it tend to affect sight space if you opened your eyes? Why don't you do that, see what happens. Defocus your eyes, just let light in. See if it affects visual with your eyes open. Maybe not.

When I label flow and penetrate with eyes open, I move from sight to light. Yes, that's good. Do that. Just relate to it as light. Now I'd like you to go back to the practice that you were doing, noting flow, zooming out, the awareness.

And you can cover the light coming in from the outside world as part of the flow. The materiality of the world is now breaking up along with the carnality of your body and the somethingness of your mind. And just sort of stay with that for a little while. How's that coming? Very nicely.

We're going to up the challenge level. I'd like you to see if you can keep some contact with that and make eye contact. You knew what I was going to say. Excellent. Able to do that a little bit? That shows. So, this is what you can do.

Your little gift to the world. Any questions about that? Thank you. Okay.

Keep up the good work. Wow. I never said that. Okay. Thank you.

Finding Feel Good in Emotional Body Space - Shinzen Young

Guides a Student

I'd like you to take a moment to stretch your spine up and then let your whole body settle. Sort of relax for a moment into the posture and tune into the pleasantness of the body being still and reposed. Now sometimes there can be pleasant emotional sensation that's just there in your body, maybe for no particular reason, like there's an interest or pleasant excitement or a kind of smiley-ness or rosy-ness or something like that. I'd like you to go into your bodily experience and see if at this time, if there's anything that's sort of pleasant sensation that could be considered an emotion like interest, enthusiasm, joy, smile, that kind of thing.

There may or may not be. Either is fine. Just sort of take a look for a moment. Sometimes just having a conversation. It's sort of fun, right? You smile and so forth.

So it makes a kind of interested juice in the body. And would you say there's anything like that at this time? Yeah, as soon as you say smile or joy, the word is there. It's just sort of there, just saying the word.

Good. I would like you to tune into that smiley, joyous flavor as broadly as it's present in the body and any other pleasant thing, including laughter, humor, anything that's emotional and pleasant, and sort of see how broadly it's present in your body and sort of cover it with awareness and focus all your attention on that. If it completely evaporates, that's okay. But as long as it's there, just focus in on it. And if anything else pulls your attention away, gently return to finding positive feel in your body. Does that instruction make sense? So what if it just goes away? If it goes away and doesn't come back, I'd like you to tell me, and then we'll take it from there. So what if it just sort of settles into calmness? Meaning it sort of went away, is that correct? Yeah. Does that count as another positive sensation? Okay, excellent question. If it settles into calmness, it means that there's actually no pleasant sensation there for a moment. We'll call that a form of emotional relaxation.

However, you can open your eyes if you want for a second. Now you feel pleasant, like we're smiling, right? It's sort of fun talking, whatever. But now you're aware of it in your body, right? When it hits on your face, because we've been working with it.

The approach that we're using right now is what I call finding positive feel in the body. In other words, you just look and see if it's there. Without an agenda, it's either there or it's not. If it is there, then you focus on it with all your attention. And then if it goes away for just a moment, then okay, be aware that there's a kind of emotional peace, you're emotionally relaxed. And then either you'll find yourself smiling again because of that, and you sort of get into a cycle of emotional relaxation, creating joy, okay, and then that sort of going into this peaceful state and then creating joy. So you might get into a cycle like that. The other thing that might happen though is the pleasant feel might go away and not come back. Finding positive feel in the body is just one strategy for the whole positive technique. There's lots of other things we can do. We can create it in addition to finding it. So I'm going to take you through a whole systematic procedure. We'll start with like you're smiling now, okay, you can find the pleasant feel right now.

It's spreading, okay, totally open to it. Experience your whole body. I have a question. When you say it disappears for a moment or it settles down to emotional calmness, isn't that also associated with positivity? Like if I associate that as being positive for me, that feels good.

Excellent question. It is true that in ordinary colloquial English, positive can mean anything, okay. It can mean a huge range of things. Emotional states could be positive or energy flow and some people call that positive. So in ordinary colloquial English, the word positive has a broad meaning.

In this particular system, we'll only use positive in a very special restricted way. It will be either image, talk or feel that in some way is positive for you. So you don't feel restless? Not strictly speaking within this system, okay.

You're aware of body rest, but we will restrict the word feel or feeling to refer to emotional sensations which if they're pleasant, we'll call them positive feel. This once again is just a matter of convention in language. Remember, being very clear within a certain system with regards to what words mean requires a little bit of investment initially and may seem a little artificial and perhaps even a little bit fussy.

But in the end, it really pays off because we'll know exactly what we're talking about. So once again, take a moment to stretch up, settle in. And now bring your attention to your emotional body.

And it's possible for some reason, maybe the circumstance or what have you, that there's some interest, joy, smiley, humorous, whatever, even if it's just because I said the words. If so, tune into that and zoom out, sort of cover it as broadly as it may be present. If it completely vanishes, fine. If it comes back, focus on it. But if it doesn't come back, that's fine too, then let me know and we'll explore something else. in the in the in the in in in in in.

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Five Aspects of the Five Ways - 1 of 4 ~ Shinzen Young

When I think of each of those five ways, I sort of think of each one as having five aspects to it. If you think about each of the approaches, focus in where you're working with your subject of experience, feel, image, talk. Focus out where you're working with your object of experience, touch, sight, sound. Focus on rest, where you're working with restful states, focus on change, focus on positive.

If you analyze each one, you can see how in specific they develop these three core mindfulness skills. So on one hand, they're sort of like generic exercise equipment. And you can use them as you would exercise equipment. If you think of a gym with five workout stations, each piece of equipment has sort of like different settings.

You know, you can adjust the settings. One way to use it is to do a set sequence, where it's like, okay, I do this, then I do this, and I always follow that same set sequence. So you can do all five ways, or just a subset of the five ways in a set sequence. Another way people use the exercise equipment is, well, they just go to one, and they'll do a certain setting, and that's what they like to do. Another way that people use a room full of exercise equipment is they'll do one, and then they'll decide, I'm going to go over to this other one, and they sort of cut in and out.

It's considered rude in a public place, but if it's your own set of equipment, you can sort of loop around and branch as you wish. So if you wish to work within the basic mindfulness system, you can either do a set sequence, or you can just have a single stand-alone practice that you do. Or you can loop and branch, depending on interest, opportunity, necessity. So like, start with one, and maybe there's a lot of flow, or maybe there's a lot of pain. And so depending on opportunity on one hand, or necessity on another hand, it's like an algorithm, and you decide. So that's sort of one way to look at each of the five ways.

It's a generic exercise. Behavioral challenges are driven by sensory challenges. So sensory challenges are very primary. If you're in a challenging situation, the first thing you do is you make an analysis of what are the components, the sensory components, in this sensory challenge. And you can also use this not just for yourself, but if you happen to be in a helping profession and you're guiding some other person, you help them make an analysis of what the sensory challenge is. Once you see what the sensory challenge is, then you can start to formulate a range of strategies for dealing with it.

Fortunately, there's more than one strategy, typically, and so you can try different ones until you find what works. For example, let's say you have an issue of pain, physical pain. Like last night, I sat for several hours without moving, so at some point I started to get a lot of pain. Typically part of the sensory challenge is the uncomfortable touch of the pain.

It could happen, though, that you have disconcerting mental pictures, negative talk, fear, agitation, poor me, feel flavors. So the sensory challenge could be more than just pain. It could involve three other factors. Essentially, there are three strategies for dealing with any sensory challenge. Turn towards it, turn away from it, or focus on how things change. Things meaning any and all things, including it, the sensory challenge. Focus on change is one of these unifying practices.

It's one of the practices that destroys distinctions. A person might, if they choose a focus on change strategy, initially there might not be any change in the sensory challenge, but there might be some flow in some other part of their being. They focus on that, and then it starts to move into the sensory challenge. So you can turn towards, and then you bring your concentration, clarity, and equanimity to the sensory challenge, and that's one way to deal with it.

Another way to deal with it is turn away. For example, if you have uncomfortable touch and you're having a lot of feel-image-talk reactions to it, you could choose to replace those negative feel-image-talk with positive. You'll either be able to do it or not, but that would be to turn away from the sensory challenge, focus on positive. Or you could focus on restful states. Or you could attempt to focus on sound, say the sound of music. You're moving the attention away from the sensory challenge. The problem is that people think if you focus away from the sensory challenge, then you're into avoidance, denial, and suppression. If you focus on the sensory challenge, you're just going to make it worse. The objection to focus on change is it's not changing. It'll never change. So then you set yourself up for failure, right? Because all possible strategies you have an objection to.

But let's say you were to take an extreme turn away from its strategy. You're in pain, you have a lot of feel-image-talk reactions, you decide to focus on the sound of music. Are you really suppressing or denying? If you conceive of it as I am letting the touch-feel-image-talk just dance its dance, do its thing, but I'm choosing to background it, meaning totally give it permission, but I'm not intentionally focusing on it.

I am intentionally focusing on the sound of music. You're actually having equanimity with the sensory challenge. You're not directing your concentration or clarity towards it.

But you do have equanimity with it, and that's an important factor. Your concentration and clarity is directed towards sound and is being strengthened by working against the gravitational tug of the touch-feel-image-talk. You have to bring yourself back to the sound that's strengthening your concentration.

You have to learn to detect the sound even though all this other stuff is erupting like a Vesuvius that revs up your detection clarity piece. So you're developing mindfulness, concentration, clarity, and you're developing equanimity with what's going on even though you're not focusing on it. You can conceive of the endeavor that way. At some point, the sensory challenge may cool out a bit, and the concentration and clarity that you developed with the sound of the music, you now could, if you wish, turn that towards the sensory challenge. And you've got a momentum of it, and now you are doing a turn-towards strategy. And yes, it's true if you focus your attention on a sensory challenge, sometimes it may exacerbate it. But sometimes things have to inflate before they're ready to deflate, or the bubble has to get big before it's going to pop.

That goes with the turning-towards strategy. So we did yaza last night, late-night sitting. So you get sleepy. So what's the sensory challenge? The sensory challenge is yucky sensations of sleepiness. What's the behavioral challenge? The behavioral challenge is keep your spine straight, your eyes open, and your consciousness awake. That's the behavioral challenge.

Well there's a relationship between sensory challenge and behavioral challenge. A turn-towards strategy is turn towards the actual sensations of sleepiness, infuse them with concentration, clarity, equanimity, until they are perfused and cause you less suffering, and at some point probably break up into a flowing energy. That's a turn-towards strategy.

But you could do a turn-away-from strategy. You could notice that each wave of sleepiness causes your body to slightly relax. You could notice that as you get sleepy, you can't focus your eyes. Your external vision defocuses, causing a restful state of just light coming in. Your mental screen also may become, like, have a lot of light and so forth. Those are restful states. So you focus away onto the restful states that are being induced by the sleepiness, and you're not dealing with the sensory challenge, but you use that to carry you through. And as I say, at some point you may get an experience of flow, and then you can, that's a focus-on-change strategy.

Five Aspects of the Five Ways - 2 of 4 ~ Shinzen Young

Each one of the five ways goes back to at least one, if not many, historical traditions that were developed around the world, and not exclusively in the East from Buddhism, but they also link to traditions from other parts of the world, the West, Christianity and so forth. Because as I say, I tend to see the worldwide contemplative tradition as a unity. You could look back from the five ways and you could see the whole history of the development of contemplation from its shamanic origins through the arising of civilizations and through the seminal discoveries of the Buddha particularly, and then the Mahayana sort of merging with Zen and what came out of that, and then the Vajrayana, and then the sort of more non-dual approaches.

All of that is behind it. And I could go into a long talk and have elsewhere as to the rich historical origins of each of the five ways. They have a past, but they also have, I believe, a future because they represent reworkings of those traditions. I don't claim that these are those traditions. I am attempting to make, represent a secular modern approach to these things. The spiritual clout I don't want to lose, the liberating clout that each one of them can lead to classical enlightenment, can lead to what I believe is the core spiritual experience of humanity.

Certainly don't want to lose that. Cultural trappings, doctrinal trappings, things that are based on mythology or things that don't seem to have an empirical basis or don't seem probable logically, I have tried to take that out, for better or worse. It's an approach that will work for certain people and not work for other people, like all approaches. Every approach has strengths and weaknesses, and that's good because different things work for different people. This is one direction that a person could take if they wanted to explore what can be done creatively with what has come down to us from the past.

Just one possible way to go. If you look carefully at the five way system, you'll notice it's all built on binary contrasts. Binary means one-on-one, one-on-one contrast, like black versus white, that's a binary contrast.

That's intentional because when you study, when you do functional imaging of brain changes as the result of whatever, meditation or anything else, you can't actually image the brain function. You can just have two contrasting conditions and compare them. I designed the system to work that way. There's a contrast between tracking ordinary sensory activity and tracking corresponding restful states. There's a contrast between intentionally creating positive feel-image talk and just observing any and all feel-image talk. There's a contrast between working with the subjective somatic visual and auditory experience versus objective somatic visual and auditory experience. There's a contrast between relative rest, where you're focusing on restful qualities, and absolute rest, where you do nothing, etc., etc., etc. Any one of those presents itself as a natural thing that can be studied with the imaging technology. When I say that the five ways have a future, hopefully, by that I mean they've been set up based on what I know that scientists need when they do this kind of research so that their effects can be easily researched in subsequent generations.

Five Aspects of the Five Ways - 3 of 4 ~ Shinzen Young

One of the main discoveries of the historical Buddha was this notion that you could take the phenomenon of limited suffering self and analyze it into its components. And as the result of that, your identification with the limited suffering self would be broken and the sense that there ever even was a limiting suffering self evaporates.

In early Buddhism, there were a number of ways of sort of chopping up the pie. The five aggregates of clinging, if we were to put into a more contemporary vocabulary, would probably be something like the five things people tend to identify with. So what do we identify with? Rupa, the physical body. Vedana. You can interpret the Pali word vedana, broad or narrow. You can interpret it as applying to any and all sensory experience or just body sensation.

But I would say, however you interpret it, the thing that really gets us are the emotional pleasures and pains. It's hard, but you can learn to accept physical pain in the body. People learn to do this. But how many people can have an arising of terror or grief or rage in their body and it's just not, it just, it doesn't get them. That's really, really hard, even though it's just body sensation.

They're much harder to have a complete experience of. Why? Because what I call feel, you all know my definition of feel, body sensation that seems to a given individual at a given time to be emotional in nature. Those are sensations that have been honed by the evolutionary process to be an internal reward and punishment system to control us robotically.

So it's really, really hard to have a complete experience of feel, but it's well worth it. Okay, so the rupa, vedana, sanya. Sanya means concept. Means thinking.

But concept is very conceptual. I like to deal with thinking in terms that it's a sensory event, image talk. Now you might say, but what about the unconscious? Well, when you develop a sensitivity to where images arise, most of you have had this experience. At some point the surface images don't arise, but you're aware there's some activity down there, a lot of activity.

That's subconscious visual thinking. You develop a sensitivity to where you can hear internal talk. At some point you don't hear the words anymore, but there's a rumbling of a thousand voices down there. That's subconscious auditory thinking. So you can directly experience and monitor the subconscious by using the categories image space and talk space, even if there's no explicit image activity or talk activity. So that's at least one level of the subconscious. Then there's this thing called sankara in Sanskrit or sankara in Pali.

It's a plural actually, sankaras. That's the deep unconscious mind where the habit patterns are stored. One way to get in contact with those very deep levels that you can't directly observe, they're below even the subtle field image talk.

They're way, way down there. You look at your sub-personalities or you look at your habitual modes. I've got certain grooves that I just fall into. There's like, okay, let's entertain ourself with mathematics groove. That's one of my grooves. There's, okay, let's run a sexual fantasy groove.

That's another one. If I don't do one, I do the other. Then there's, okay, I got to do some writing because I'm a meditation teacher and I got to do... That's like another groove. Got to work with students groove. It's like call people, see how their practice is going.

That's a lot easier than sit down and write texts and articles. That's a hard groove. It's like somebody calls and they're in crisis and they got three hours. Wow, that's great.

I'm totally up for it because I know what the probable results are and it doesn't really take that much effort on my part. It's an algorithm. I see the whole chess game in front of me, 12 moves ahead, years and years and years of practice. So when sub-personalities or these major habit patterns come up, I can sense this cone that's going down deep, deep, deep into my subconscious. It broadens as it goes down and it's accessing all that previous conditioning and the tip of it is coming up as this sensory event of this pattern.

So it's just space simultaneously expanding and contracting. If I can experience it that way, then I can break the identification. Then there's *vijnana* or *vijnana* in Pali. That means consciousness. I don't know what consciousness is, but I can tell you in traditional Buddhism, it comes in six flavors, hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and body sensation.

In my system, it's touch, sight, sound, feeling, which is why I like the Sages of the Light and Silence piece, Blind and Quiet. Those are the flavors. I don't know what consciousness is, but it comes in those flavors. That we can also consider it in its vanilla form, independent of flavor. When we consider it independent of flavor, then we call it consciousness. In the traditional Buddhist formulation, consciousness is no more spiritual than your material body. What's spiritual is zero. The material body is called *rupa*, and the other four aggregates are collectively called *nama*.

Nirvana is explicitly defined as beyond *nama* or *rupa*. That's where I was thinking of that story. There's a monk who is pretty enlightened, gone pretty far, and he is having a conversation with his master, and it gets late into the night. It's time to go back to his room.

Of course, they didn't have flashlights in those days. He's got this candle, and he steps out of the room. Now, remember, he's pretty enlightened, but he's not quite there yet. It's the job of the roshi to point him to what's the next step. He steps out of the room, and the minute he steps out of the room, the roshi goes, Blows out the candle! And there's nothing but darkness.

That's the last little holding on to identification with consciousness itself. You've got to let the light go out. Definitely do not rage against the fading of the light. Let it happen. It'll come right back.

Five Aspects of the Five Ways - 4 of 4 ~ Shinzen Young

How did Buddhism and Buddhism in the Middle Ages differ? Early Buddhism sort of divided things up this way. It said, this is what we tend to identify with, physical body, pleasant versus unpleasant, thoughts, habit forces, and consciousness itself. But if you divide it up, and then you subdivide, you can take the physicality of your body, and they didn't have modern chemistry, they didn't have the periodic table of the elements, what they had was the four classical elements, earth, water, air, and fire.

They would break the experience of body into those elements. That was a subdividing. So if you divide it all up, then you'll see it's just this stuff, and there's not a thing called a self here.

My modern reworking of that is the focus in. I take what I would consider to be the core sense of self, which is feel, which is sort of related to the Vedana, and the image talk, which are definitely related to the Sanjna. But it is possible to have a broader definition of self, body, mind, self. I find that through feel-image-talk, you can get a sense of the unconscious forces. So anyway, same idea, but it's a little different, because feel-image-talk, all three of them are sensory events that can be monitored in time. So I find that if you can separate them out, then the somethingness of self goes away. And when they get conflated or tangled together, then you get the illusion of self as thing. So the focus in is my reworking of finding a spiritual self in the sense of becoming free from the limited identity with thought and feeling. My reworking of that divide and conquer, but instead of using the five aggregates, I just use the three subjective sensory elements.

So that's one way to... one strategy for finding a spiritual self. Focus out is based on more of a Zen way of working.

So if you're having to work all day and you want to experience a merging with your environment, well, focus out. Anchor in touch, sight, sound. Feel-image-talk, it contracts. Touch, sight, sound expands. Easy to do, well, not easy, but natural to do as you're doing physical tasks.

Physical tasks, all about touch, sight, sound. So you get the Confucian ethical values of working with the Taoist spiritual paradigm of merge with the outside world. So my focus out reworks that strategy. Focus on rest is a reworking of the absorption practices of early Buddhism. The idea there is you discover a restful self, actually a restful self in a restful world.

I do that. The restful self is, instead of feel-image-talk, it's peace, blind, quiet. The restful world, instead of touch, sight, sound, it's relaxation, light, silence. So this forms an attenuated experience of self and world, not quite the absolute no-self and no-world of the source, but moving in that direction. After all, the absorption practices are never claimed to be nirvana, but they're sort of moving in that direction. So the focus on rest is a reworking of that paradigm.

Focus on positive, well, you're actively manipulating feel-image-talk. Clearly, this is related to things like the Brahma-viharas, the loving-kindness practice in such early Buddhism. It's also related to the deity yoga practices of much later Buddhism, the Vajrayana, what came after Mahayana. From my perspective, it's basically concentration, clarity, and equanimity in subjective space developed by actively manipulating subjective space as opposed to passively observing the way we do with focus in. So certainly, if you are manifesting positive feel-image-talk, I don't know that it will necessarily turn you into a money magnet, but it will turn you into a people magnet.

That I can guarantee, that people will be attracted to you and that people will want to be with you and find you a source of comfort and inspiration. A Catholic priest once asked my teacher, Sasaki Roshi, what his take on Christianity was. And he said, well, it's about crucifixion and resurrection. I totally believe in crucifixion and resurrection.

Roshi said that, okay. The priest is all happy, oh good, it's fun to see you. You believe in resurrection? Absolutely, I totally believe in resurrection. And he does, and crucifixion, okay.

But his idea of crucifixion is that you get crucified by the source. You get pinned and torn apart, stretched and nailed by the forces of expansion and contraction. The somethingness within you dies, but then is resurrected as positive feeling, which you talk of better self, because you could go to the source, you could die. And it's like born again, but big time born again, not the little time born again. It's all about crucifixion and resurrection. So focus on positive in its most advanced forms actually is the new life that comes from the death that occurs through focus on change.

Five Basic Assumptions in Mindfulness Practice ~ Shinzen Young

There are certain axioms or basic assumptions behind mindfulness.

These lead to not logical conclusions, but when implemented they lead to experiential developments within a person. I say that there are certain assumptions that underlie mindfulness as I would teach it. I think that they're very reasonable assumptions, that they could be accepted by anyone, but they are assumptions. The first assumption is that the ability to focus on what one deems relevant whenever one wants, to have that ability is better than to not have that ability. That's an assumption, although some of the work in positive psychology would seem to prove that assumption.

But anyway, we can take that as a basic axiom. In other words, it's better to have the ability to concentrate on what you want than to lack that ability. Notice, by the way, I said the ability to focus on what you deem relevant at any given time. I didn't say that you're necessarily constrained to go around as a concentration machine in an always highly focused state, but that you have the ability whenever you want to focus on what is deemed relevant in that circumstance. That's the axiom of concentration. Then there's an axiom that it's better to be sensorially clear about what's going on than to be sensorially muddled.

That's another assumption in mindfulness. Third axiom is that it's good to be able to not fight with yourself, at least have that ability. Sometimes you might have to fight with yourself under certain circumstances, but most people always are fighting with themselves in subtle ways, very, very microscopic subtle ways without even realizing it.

It's good to have the ability not to fight with yourself. That's the axiom of equanimity. Then there's a fourth axiom that I call recycle the reaction, which is as the result of applying the axioms of concentration, clarity, and equanimity, your sensory experience may change. It may change temporarily in unpleasant ways, or it may change in pleasant ways. It is even possible that strange experiences might arise.

They do for some people, not for everyone. As the result of merely applying what would seem to be fairly innocuous axioms of concentration, clarity, and equanimity. The fourth axiom is really important because it tells you what to do if the first three axioms produce anything that's challenging, either in the sense that it's pleasant and therefore you might get addicted, or in the sense that it's unpleasant and therefore you might suffer, or in the sense that it's weird and therefore you might freak out. As the result of applying the first three axioms, reactions might take place, not inevitably, not saying they will take place for everyone.

Not everyone gets heavenly or hellish or bizarre phenomena, but just in case they do, remember the fourth axiom, recycle the reaction. Then there's one final axiom, the fifth axiom, which is if you forget the first four axioms, the fifth axiom says have contact information of a competent guide and call them, and they'll remind you of the first four axioms. Those are the five axioms. Hey, Euclid had five too, by the way, five postulates, so I'm in good company.

Five Fold Sila in Pali ~ Shinzen Young

PANATIPATA PANATIPATA PANATIPATA PANATIPATA VERAMANI VERAMANI
SIKKAPADAM SIKKAPADAM SAMADHIYAMI SAMADHIYAMI ADINADANA ADINADANA
VERAMANI VERAMANI SIKKAPADAM SIKKAPADAM SAMADHIYAMI SAMADHIYAMI
KAMESU KAMESU MITCHACHARA MITCHACHARA VERAMANI VERAMANI SIKKAPADAM
SIKKAPADAM SAMADHIYAMI SAMADHIYAMI MUSAVADA MUSAVADA VERAMANI
VERAMANI SIKKAPADAM SIKKAPADAM SAMADHIYAMI SAMADHIYAMI SURA SURA
MERAYA MERAYA MAJJAPAMADATANA MAJJAPAMADATANA VERAMANI VERAMANI
SIKKAPADAM SAMADHIYAMI SAMADHIYAMI SATU SATU SATU SATU

Flow ~ Shinzen Young

What is the difference between ordinary and restful experience? Ordinary or restful experience can sometimes be perfectly stable and still, which is completely natural, but other times show us a dynamic side. Dynamic is the Greek adjective that means related to movement, change, and the underlying forces and energies that could produce movement and change. That's why I like that word dynamic, because it covers a wide range in its definition. We can, within ordinary or restful experience, distinguish a static aspect and a dynamic aspect.

We're particularly interested in the dynamic aspect, not that that's better than the static, but when it appears, it's something that we can choose to work with. Its continuous side I call flow, and its more abrupt or discontinuous side I call gone or vanishing. In terms of working with change, you can focus on just the flow or just the vanishing, but if there happens to be vanishings within the flows, the flows arise and then noticeably subside, you can combine those two. Is that flow or is that just my heart beating? It's flow, because anything where you can focus on the theme of changingness counts as flow. Things that have vibratory or pulsatory qualities, whatever their source may be, definitely count as flow. A lot of the subtle vibratory flow that people report through their body is in fact the pulse. It's the circulation of the blood through the vessels that causes those vibratory sensations.

You can know that because if you run or something like that, you get more of that stuff. It doesn't matter if the sense of flow has been produced by some gross physical, something obviously material, physical in origin. That doesn't count as an instance of change because it's like, oh, just my heart beating kind of thing. What is the flow of change? There is a wide range of flavors of flow, but basically there's various frequencies that I call generically vibratory, but people talk about, oh, what are words people use? Bubbly, scintillating mist, twinkly, sparkly. What are some of the other ones for the vibratory? I use that generically for all the frequencies.

Pulsation for the slower frequencies. There's generically stuff that seems like it's vibrating. Then there's stuff that seems more wavy, sort of lava lamp-like, seaweed in a tide pool kind of streaming protoplasm, that kind of thing. Then there's spreading, collapsing, outward pressures, inward pressures, sense of scattering, sense of gathering, the expansive contractive type flavors. All of the above count as flow, so it's a vast range of phenomena. Certainly an awareness of the heartbeat and an awareness of the blood making a sort of vibratory flow throughout the body is definitely an instance of flow.

How does T.S. Eliot put it? The dance along the artery, the circulation of the lymph is figured in the drift of stars. It's all part of nature's flow. As a general principle within the system, flow is just something, if it's there you observe it, if it's not there, then it's not there. The static aspect is dominant. That's not to say that there's some cosmic meditative rule that you're not allowed to do practices that intentionally create or manipulate flow.

That's not the case at all. That's integral to a lot of Qigong exercises, Kundalini yoga exercises, and so forth. It's completely valid practice. If you want to do those practices and then get things going with that and then you go to a vipassana and you just observe, well, that's fine. But I wouldn't consider it part of vipassana, strictly speaking.

Is there a way to make flow flow everywhere? Yes, with time and practice, the resolution can be so great that there's always flow everywhere. Having said that, though, that's very dangerous. It's things like that statement that are one of the reasons I'm a bad meditation teacher, because I say something like that. The Buddha said, say only what is true and useful.

What I just said is true. It's arguable whether it's useful, because it could be useful. Well, let's make the case it's useful. Obviously, I must have thought it's in some sense useful.

I wouldn't say it at all. It's useful because it can inspire people and give people a goal to work towards. It's not useful, and in fact extremely harmful, statement, if it sets up in that person a need to have that kind of resolution and a sense of failure and frustration when you don't. That's a general theme in working with flow. If you've got flow in one area, it will have a natural tendency to induce flow in other areas. This is a little weird sounding, but let's say you have flow in one domain and you have solidity over here. What the meditator can do is play the role of the shadkhan. You don't know that word, but a shadkhan is a Jewish marriage broker. You get the flow part and introduce the flow part to the solid part, and then you don't need to do anything more.

Have a party. Yeah, that's right. The flow then tends to induce into the solid part, which sounds like what you were doing. That's a little bit of an esoteric strategy, but if you interactively guide a person, they can often do that. It can be a little harder to reproduce on your own.

Flow, Gone & a Figure-Ground Reversal ~ Shinzen Young

Let's say that you decide, okay, you're going to just note flow. At first, you'll probably be aware of where the flow is, what's flowing, and so forth. But you may reach a point where you actually don't care and don't even know whether it's somatic, visual, or auditory. Those discriminations break down. Subjective versus objective breaks down. Ordinary versus restful breaks down. All you're interested in is just flow.

You actually begin to lose specificity with regards to all the distinctions that we make in the other techniques. That's highly desirable. You can't make that happen. But there's really, you know how I always say it's a dialectical process. Half of the dialectic is making these discriminations in a healthy way. The other half is destroying the discriminations also in a healthy way. Flow is lecom platisil. It's the great leveler that destroys distinctions.

The only greater leveler is gone. That destroys time and space. Can't have distinctions without time and space. You can still distinguish flavors of flow. Vibratory, undulatory.

There's no different flavors of God. If you reach a point where you're noting flow and it's like sort of what I was describing. It's like all flow and you don't even know what it is or where it is or who you are or where you are, that now you're getting close to that figure ground reversal that I talked about last night.

And good, go with that. Same deal with the gone. You can reach a point where you don't know what it is that's disappearing. You don't even know whether it was big or small.

Pleasant, unpleasant, simple, complex. You forget about all that. You're just dominated by the vanishingness of things. And that once again leads to the figure ground reversal piece. That was what you were starting to experience. And if you get the combined where it's flow, go, flow, go, flow, go, that's all you're with, then that's going to lead to that experience of there's this matrix of nothingness that is birthing self and scene moment by moment inside that rhythm of flow and go, flow and go.

When there's go, there's nothing. And then it breaks apart and it sort of scintillates and that scintillating mist, if it gets coagulated, we call it a self in a world. If it doesn't get coagulated, we call it pure spirit. And part of it is constantly spreading out effortlessly. Part of it is constantly pulling in effortlessly. It's a fountain of youth, invisible doing. So that would be the flow gone, flow gone. You combine the two together. That's an option for focus on change.

Focus Methods in Mindfulness: Advantages and Disadvantages ~

Shinzen Young

How can we classify mindfulness? When we look at the whole field of mindfulness, all the different ways that mindfulness is taught and so forth, by different lineages, teachers, in general we can classify the focus methods in terms of, are they just letting the attention sort of go wherever it goes, I call that free floating, and then being aware of where it is going. Are they saying, okay, we're going to systematically sort of scroll through the possibilities and then start again, I call that inventory.

Or are we going to try to cover all the possibilities at once, I call that even coverage. Easiest to understand with regards to the body, but can be generalized to any sensory experience. What is the body location? I have a technique that I call noting body locations. So here the categories are body locations, and it's just, okay, let your attention go wherever it wants to go, and note knee, face, stomach, and probably 95% of the people in this room have done that with me upon occasion. Well, I would say that's a free floating strategy.

You just sort of, as it comes up, yes, you can exercise some control, but it's basically what pulls you. And the elements here are the various locations of sensation. What is the body location? By way of contrast, a systematic inventory is, okay, we're going to go through the body part by part and sample what's there, and then maybe repeat that cycle, which could be done in any one of dozens of ways. You could go sort of like band by band, or you could go like, let's take the right leg, the left leg, the right arm, the left arm, or if you want to be fancy and get down to really subtle levels of sensation and really subtle levels of flow, you can attempt to continuously sweep the awareness either over the surface of the body or even like a CAT scan right through the body. That could be up and down, right to left, left to right, front to back, back to front.

That's a continuous inventory. You can even get fancier if you want. You can go in spirals. All sorts of stuff you can do to make a continuous inventory of the body.

What is the body location? By way of contrast to that, okay, hold all the locations simultaneously in awareness. Even coverage, I call it. What is the advantage of systematic inventory? The advantage to the systematic inventory is that it makes sure you cover everything, and so it brings a lot of sensitization and a lot of detail. The disadvantage might be that there's not much to detect, but of course if you have the categories of restful states, then you can detect the absence as a presence. But sometimes people that do the body sweeping sort of get lost because they can't detect sensations. That can be a possible difficulty with that.

Even coverage is sort of at the opposite end. It integrates and gives you the big picture. Ultimately, since sensory events do tend to spread, it's good to be able to cover large pieces of sensory experience, to have the ability to do that. Most people, if you say the word concentration, assume it implies a narrowing of attention. But Sasaki Roshi is adamant that there's two flavors of concentration. Not surprisingly, contractive, where you restrict the range of focus, and expansive, where you get a flavor of being highly concentrated precisely because you're holding all parts of a large object, either at once or more or less at once. So the even coverage builds that flavor, and it gives you the big picture, and it leads to integrations.

Things have to be integrated before they can be annihilated, and their annihilation takes them to their source. There's something to be said for the even coverage, but it's challenging because you lose contact with pieces and so forth. So my language for even

coverage is, hold it as broadly as you can without straining.

Typically, I'll say something like that. The advantage now to the free float is it's natural. It's not as hard work as the inventory or the even coverage. People can typically do it right away and find it more fun than the other two, I would say, typically.

I don't know that there's any disadvantage to it specifically that I can't think of right offhand, but that would be briefly to compare and contrast the strategies. Or let's say focus in, focus out, and focus on rest are based on a free floating in general. However, remember, even when you're free floating, you are allowed to zoom out. So those are sort of brief moments of even coverage, if you zoom out to fill touch space or something.

So there is, in the zoom out option, there's brief sort of coverage available. But essentially, in focus in, focus out, and focus on rest, you're free floating among the categories. And if more than one is present, you're just choosing one. In focus on change, when you're noting flow, you are not making distinctions between where the flow is at all.

I mean, you're not intentionally making distinctions. So it's wherever the flow is, meaning if the flow infects somatic, visual, and auditory, and at the moment of when you note flow, you elect to zoom out, you are doing the ultimate even coverage. You're covering all sensory spaces at once.

So it fits in there. I use systematic inventories during special exercises, actually quite a bit. Now, focus on positive, you do evenly cover whichever one, two, or all three of the spaces that you're doing. You can attempt to hold the positive in all three at once if you want. Or you can sort of, I don't know, sort of hold it in all three, but not work too hard, and it sort of free floats, but it's always going to positive in any one of them. You could do it as a kind of free float, or you could do it as an even coverage strategy. In general, it's divide and conquer, right? So if you're trying to work with a big piece of experience and you can't, then you work with smaller stuff. So if you're trying an even coverage and it doesn't work, then try free floating or probably better still systematic inventory, and then you can build to coverage. Okay, good.

Forcing Spoken Labels ~ Shinzen Young

The forcing yourself to say the labels has caused the invisible force of scatter to come up as a tangible sensation of impatience. You can detect it in the body, right? Now start noting that. You can either note the impatient locations or just note it as feel if you want to use a generic technique. So let's say that you're noting feel image talk, okay? And the image and talk go away because you're forcing yourself to say the labels out loud. However, what happens to feel is that now there's an agitated, uncomfortable quality of feel. So then you would note feel, feel with spoken labels and the more you speak, the more that discomfort comes up. But that's good because that's observable.

That's a somatic quality. It has location. It has intensity. It has flavor in the body. You can observe it and you can open up to it.

The whole idea in doing something like spoken labels is to take invisible patterns of force that scatter our attention and transmute them into observable patterns of sensation or perhaps also image talk, but usually it's an agitated sensation, an observable pattern of sensation that you can then work with because invisible patterns of force are extremely difficult to work with. It's what you described. They just got you. It's like you're observing and now you're not observing. You're not on the edge of the stream. You have entered the stream and not in the good sense of that term. You're not being carried by the stream of enlightenment.

You're being drowned in the stream of karma. Now you're uncomfortable in the body. That means that the spoken labels have made an invisible pattern of force that's been scattering you into an observable, trackable pattern of sensation, albeit perhaps a very uncomfortable sensation, but it is still trackable and you can note that sensation. What is trackable eventually becomes tractable and you will have worked through the invisible scattering force, which is intractable. One of the very elegant and clever features of mindfulness practice is, I repeat, it takes invisible and intractable problem, which is forces are controlling me that I don't like and there's nothing I can do about it. It transforms that problem, a problem of dealing with invisible forces, into the problem of observing actual body sensations. Then as you equantimize that, you solve that problem, that translates back into, now those forces no longer have a hold on you.

Huge fundamental tool. That's why it may have sounded cavalier and even mean when I said, oh, that's great. You're all agitated and miserable because you're doing the spoken labels, but it was neither cavalier nor mean.

That's the name of the game. Solid mouthing, sotto voce labeling. If that doesn't work, then stay away from the zendo for half a day and just force yourself to do the labels. I know people don't want to do it, but it works. You don't have that much time. You have lives. You took time away from your lives. You paid money to come here to do some work. I'm ethically bound to tell you what's going to make that effective, even though it might not be what you want to hear. There's three reasons people don't want to do spoken labels. Number one, it's very hard work. We sort of think, well, I came here to have this mellow experience.

I don't want to have to work. It's hard work, but that's what we came to do. First cause of resistance, it's hard work. Second cause, it's going to make you uncomfortable, hopefully. And third is, this proves what I've always known.

I'm a child of a lesser God. I've been sent back to Vipassana, one only. Also known as Dumbbell Vipassana. So yes, I've been sent back to Dumbbell Vipassana.

But here's my metaphor. Remember I say that you have these labeling options, strongly spoken label, middle spoken label, whispered label, mental label, no label at all. It's true, it's as a general principle, you want to work towards actually no labels at all, if possible. But you can think of those label options as like gears in your car. If you're going up a steep hill, meaning what makes a hill steep as you're sitting, is one or both of the following.

Lot of doo doo coming from the outside world, lot of doo doo coming from the inside world. So one or both of those means you're going up a hill. The fact that when you go up a very steep hill, you have to put your Rolls Royce into first gear, doesn't mean it's not a Rolls Royce. It has a first gear for a reason.

Those options are there for a reason. It's not being sent back to Dumbbell Vipassana. It's using the standard apparatus of the technique in the way that it was suggested you use it. So it's like, no, I don't care what, I'm not going to put my car in first gear, I'm going to go up this hill under cruise control, I don't care what. I don't want anybody to tell me this is a crummy car. It doesn't work that way. It's a piece of machinery, it's designed to work that way.

From Surface to Source & the Gold Standard for Spiritual

Maturity ~ Shinzen Young

The first level of untangling was to sort of separate out the strands. So first you separate out the field of your stock. That already gets away from a lot of the sense that there is a limited thing called a self. So the focus on ordinary applied to the field image stock, that untangles. So you untangle, that gives you insight into no self. Sometimes noting ordinary can be sort of harsh and uncomfortable.

You can always go to the restful states and note them and you can have the same sequence of insights and purifications in a little more pleasant modality. But then there is a deeper level of untangling where you see that the strands themselves are all just made of vibrating energy. They're like vibrating super strings.

Field image stock is all made of vibrations, etc., etc. That's the focus on flow technique that I gave you. That was called insight into impermanence. And then you look a little more deeply. They're vibrations that they sort of vibrate and then they disappear, vibrate and disappear.

And then watching the vanishings, that sort of takes you back to where the waves come from, which is the nothing, the divine nothing that all the mystics of the world talk about, whether they're Buddhist or not. It's in Christianity, St. John of the Cross, Nada, Meister Eckhart Nihil, and so forth. It's in Judaism, Ayan, the divine nothingness. What's distinctive about Buddhism is that it sort of gives this systematic procedure of how to develop the sensory clarity so that you can go in fairly manageable steps and actually get to this. There are two principles in the spiritual path. One is get over yourself and the world by having a complete sensory experience of yourself and the world. And the other is improve yourself in the world and to see that these two endeavors each reinforces the other I take as the gold standard for spiritual maturity.

Fulfilling the Pythagorean Agenda ~ Shinzen Young

What is the origin of the word civilization? At the beginning of Western civilization, there was, back in the 6th century BC in Greece, was Pythagoras. And Pythagoras had a remarkable notion. A notion that somehow the nature of the material world and the nature of the inner world of thought, emotion, and spirit and the nature of number were somehow linked.

And if you could figure that out, then you would have a complete model that would cover all the needs of humanity. One of the problems, there were, as I look upon it, three problems. One is his notion of the nature of number was too limited.

Essentially, it was positive whole integers. The second is that they didn't have the experimental method to explore nature. That only developed with Galileo, Francis Bacon, Newton, and his optics, for example, and then subsequent researchers, scientists. And the other thing ancient Greeks lacked was methods of developing enough concentration power systematically to explore the nature of the inner world. So they didn't know how to make experiments to explore the nature of the outer world.

And they didn't have the technology of high concentration that India did have that you need in order to explore the inner world. And they didn't have an adequate concept of number in order to model either one. But I think that we now are in a position to fulfill the Pythagorean agenda because we now have a notion of number that's broad enough.

Both the outer dance and the inner dance can be modeled with our present number system because it has enough contrasts built in to explore the different flavors of expansion and contraction. The West has discovered the concentration methods from the East. We have the experimental method for looking at the outside nature.

There's a teaching in Mahayana Buddhism that all beings have the Buddha nature. The Greek word for nature, the thing that Pythagoras and Western civilization from his time on wanted to study, the word was physis, and that's given us the word physics, for example. Physics is the study of the nature of things. I think that the confluence of the empirical method, the focus techniques from the East, empirical means experimental method, and the ability to mathematically model the results of experiments on the outside, and now in this century we'll start to model the results of experiments on the inside mathematically, we'll be able to achieve the Pythagorean agenda. As a result of that, it's easy for me to imagine that there could be, I don't say this will happen because who knows, I just say it's not hard for me to imagine that the human condition in the next century could change rapidly and globally and dramatically for the better. I think that every one of us that follows this path has a little role, perhaps, in what could be one of the most important events in all of history.

Growth and Tastes of Concentration, Sensory Clarity and

Equanimity ~ Shinzen Young

Each of those three components grows on average over time. At a specific time, you could have a certain critical mass of concentration, clarity, and equanimity with regards to a specific experience. And then that experience would become paradoxical. It would be so fully present that it was absent. But it might be a fairly small experience, and that might happen only sporadically. On some days, on some occasions, certain experiences, you get the sense of, as it arose, it completed. So it never constellated into a thing. And when you look back and ask yourself, why did that happen, well, there was an extraordinary degree of concentration, clarity, and equanimity for those few seconds or for those few minutes with regards to this phenomenon. Typically, that occurs initially with regards to pain in the sit that, quote, breaks up.

It's sort of still there, but it's not really there. That kind of thing is what I meant by critical mass. Looked in the large picture, though, over months, years, decades of practice, there is a sort of hockey stick growth curve for all three of these elements. However, that growth curve has local fluctuations of peaks and valleys. Some days, your mindfulness factors are more evident.

Other days, they're less in the small picture, but then there's the large picture. With regards to how you taste each of these, that's a very good question. Concentration has its own taste. It's impossible to describe in words, but once you experience it, you know what it tastes like. It's the in-the-zone taste. But how do you describe that taste to someone? It's been fairly credibly scientifically documented that the taste of concentration in and of itself is sensorially fulfilling.

This comes out of the positive psychology work that was done in Chicago by Mike Chixet Mihaly and others. It has its taste, and you can taste it. Equanimity has its taste, but it's impossible to really describe in words.

You develop a taste for it. If I had to put it into words, but this doesn't really do it, but it's a knowing that because of the open way that you're experiencing this moment, every moment of your future will be more fulfilling, involve less suffering, and you're also releasing stuff from the past. Some part of you knows that as it equanimizes some present sensory phenomenon. That's the taste of equanimity.

So what's the taste of sensory? Clarity. One is untangling. You say work with feel-image-talk, individually, collectively, and there comes a time when you get a big fit storm. A big storm of it arises, and because you have so much momentum of clarity, those elements don't get mixed.

All three are happening simultaneously, but they're intrinsically untangled in the arising, and that's one of the tastes of clarity. It's an unmixing flavor. I don't know how else to describe it. It's a de-conflating, which then removes the flooding effect that people get when many sensory phenomena are activated simultaneously.

They're all still activated at once, but somehow they're not tangling with each other. When that reaches a critical mass, self as thing goes away. It just evaporates. So if you have not a flat screen, but a conventional TV monitor that's a CRT tube, so you look at it, and let's say that it's showing a white pattern, and I make the claim there's no white on the screen. That's an illusion. You say, are you crazy? Just look, there's white. Anybody can see.

I say, oh yeah, there's a magnifying glass. We agree this does nothing but resolve. It makes clearer things that are falling together and tangled. It untangles visual experience. So at some point, the perception white goes away, and the perception red, green, blue arises.

Was there ever any white there? That's sensory clarity. It's resolution power. It's high res. Higher and higher def. The other direction that the sensory clarity goes is the ability to pick up fainter and fainter signals, which is a power thing. If you have signals that are very low power, very subtle, there's a dimension of clarity regarding the ability to detect those.

My favorite shibboleth, subtle is significant. So the flavors of sensation that drive day-to-day perceptions and behaviors of human beings, most of them are initially below the threshold of awareness. With practice, they percolate up to specificity. So you're able to detect finer and finer arisings, meaning that you're less and less likely to be hijacked by subliminal images, talk, and especially by subliminal feel. In other words, subliminal phenomena, very faint arisings, have a huge impact on the subconscious without the conscious knowing. This is one of the main differences between the way that the subconscious is considered in Western psychology and the way it's considered in Eastern psychology.

In Eastern psychology, there's a lot to it, but one of the dimensions that differs is you're interested in making the real-time subconscious events that are sensory subconscious events, specific emotional flavors, mental images, talk that's very faint and very subtle that's arising in the background. That becomes perceptible through developing sensory clarity, so you're not hijacked by it during the day. There's a third dimension, which is speed of detection. Sight, sight, feel, all-round, all-round, sight, feel. You notice that I could start on a dime, sight, feel, feel.

There's no like, okay, I need five minutes to be with my breath and then I can figure out what's going on. No, no, emphatically no. Feel. Okay, feel. You've got to be able to do it instantly, right in the thrust of any activity, start on a dime. It's the ability to also immediately detect. Not have to like, okay, the typical, well, I'll sit for 10 minutes and then I can figure out what the hell's going on inside of me.

No. Okay, it's got to be all rest, touch, any time, any place, one half of a, quarter of a second, you're off and running. Why? Because in a half a second, the terrorists are in the cockpit. So maybe the speed of detection is another clarity. I'm thinking as I'm sort of obviously making it up as I'm going. So the resolution piece, the ability to detect subtle things and the ability to immediately be mindful without having to sort of get grounded or whatever people do. Maybe those are the three dimensions of growth and the clarity.

Hear-In to Mental Talk Space, Feel Flow in Body Space ~ Shinzen

Young Interactive - 4 of 4

Did there continue to be flow in image space? Yes. As you focused on it, did it have any soothing qualities or not particularly? It was more neutral, I think. Okay, not particularly soothing. But you could detect the movement there. Mm-hmm. Now I'd like you to move your attention back into your head where you might hear internal conversations, which we'll call talk space. And are things pretty quiet right now, or is there chatter present? A little. There's a little chatter, but it's pretty quiet. Sometimes when things are quiet in talk space, there can be a sense of a kind of undercurrent of energy, a kind of rumbling or whispering deep down below the conscious talk. You've experienced that in the past.

You know what I'm talking about. I'd like you to scope out and see if anything like that is present right now. It may or may not be. If it's not there, that's fine.

It's not like an assignment to find it. But we're going to just see if there's any of that subtle vibratory flow, that pre-conscious talk thing. Anything like that at this time, or are things just pretty still and quiet? I had some. Then I had a tune visit me for a while, and then there was some talk. Explicit talk.

So there's not a lot of that vibratory, subtle flow at this time. No. Is that correct? That's right. Okay, fine.

Bring your attention back to the body, and see if the flow is still there with regards to the body. Yes. Good. Excellent. So, any questions about what we did so far? No. Okay, good.

Now we're going to go through the same exercise, see if you can keep contact with the flow with your eyes open. Yes. Excellent. Now we're going to go to the next challenge level.

See if you can keep contact with the flow and make eye contact with me. So it's more like an ordinary type situation. That's a lot. Yeah, you can do it. Excellent.

So, this is pretty cool, huh? Any final questions or comments? No. Any time in your life in the future, if you have physical discomfort, you can remember that you can do things like this. And what I was doing is, I was doing exploratory work. I was like asking you questions, seeing what was going on, and then based on that I would like change the guidance and suggest certain things.

First we checked out some local flow and then we found that it tended to spread through your body. So I was looking. I know that that's a tendency. It doesn't always happen.

But if it does happen, it's significant because then the person can get this sort of whole body massage thing. Then I took a look to see if there was any fluidity in your mental experience. At this time there wasn't any.

There wasn't any significance and there doesn't need to be. But sometimes a mind space will also flow. If that had been the case, I would have had you broaden your focus to zoom out and cover the whole mind and body as a single flow field.

But that wasn't the case and we didn't need to do that. Are you still experiencing it now in the body? You've got your money's worth, right? The huge smile indicates the taste of purification and freedom from suffering. That's excellent work. So that's how it goes. Any final questions or comments? No. Okay. Well, we're done. Thank you.

Hold Positive Feel

Hi, my name's Kathleen and I've been meditating with Shinsen for almost 10 years. And I recently had a situation in my life that really threw me off course. My brother went into the hospital, he was taken to the emergency room and we were told that his body had begun the dying process. Now he is a very young man and for us to be told that, it was really scary.

We were told that his liver had gone into liver failure and that if his body did not start to show any signs of healing in the next 12 to 24 hours, he was going to go to the number one spot on the emergency liver transplant list in the entire southeast part of the United States. This shocked us. We're like, oh my goodness.

Yesterday he was bee-bopping around the world and now he might die. So our family stayed there the entire day and into the night. But then I said to the family, I said, please, everyone go home, get a good night's sleep. He was unconscious. I said, get a good night's sleep. I will stay here and be with him tonight just in case he wakes up. They went home and what they didn't know is that I have this technique of holding positive states for a loved one.

I decided to do a yaza, which is where you stay up all night long and you focus, for myself I decided to focus on these positive states. So I sat by his bedside and because of the situation I had a lot of feeling inside of me of love towards him. So at first I sat there and I radiated love towards him. I just sat there and I just focused on the love going out to him.

I'm looking at him laying in a bed. I focused on the love going towards him. After a period of time, I couldn't feel the love inside my body. So then I started focusing on wonderful memories that we had had. I remember great times we had growing up and I would focus on that memory and then the love and the feeling would just radiate out of me towards him.

I sat there for hours and felt so much love and gratitude for him in my life. About 2, 3 o'clock in the morning, the love kind of went away because of the exhaustion. I started to have talk of, you know, just, oh I'm tired, I want to sleep. But then by focusing on that talk and then changing that to love.

Instead of going down the road of the negative talk, I focused on positive talk. I would just sit there and I would just say love and I'd feel the love going out to him. I'd go love, I love you so much. I mean, I would just, any loving thought or talk that I could say in my head to radiate towards my brother, that's what I did.

You know, I live my life that I try to love people day to day and I try to be there for them and I try to cherish them. But I've never experienced a love that deep when I am in such a vulnerable state and he's in such a vulnerable state that to feel that love radiating towards him hour after hour. It was a great gift that he gave to me that night for me by using the whole positive interstates. It truly changed the way I feel about my brother. I have so much love and compassion in my heart for him and I feel like I love him on so much of a deeper level now. And I am just so grateful for him and for the love and for the time that we have shared.

He has had a full recovery and I am so grateful for that. I know that without that technique I would have gone to the hospital, I would have suffered, I would have heard all the negative stuff that was happening. I would have heard he was going to die for this reason or that reason. I would have heard all of that negative stuff and I would have freaked out. I would have been in a panic state. I would not have been able to focus. I would have been so consumed with all the negativity of the situation that I just would have been in a huge ball of suffering. Because of this technique it turned a terrible negative situation in my life into a

deepening of love for my brother. I am forever grateful for this technique.

Home and On-Site Retreats with Shinzen Young

People have been writing in questions to this channel about what happens at my retreats. So I'd like to talk a little bit about what you can expect if you do a retreat with me.

I do two kinds of retreats, actually. One is an on-site type situation, which is more like the traditional way of teaching for householders, where you come to a venue. Often it will be a residential situation where you stay overnight, although not inevitably.

It might be a commuter type situation where you come in for one day or a weekend, but you go home. But I call those on-site retreats because I'm physically present there. So I do on-site retreats around the world, mostly in North America.

You can find the schedule for those at the website shinzen.org. Then I do another kind of retreat that I call the Home Practice Program. That comes to you by conference call. You do that from wherever you are in the world. You register for those retreats by going to basicmindfulness.org. The whole program is explained there. That's a really cool program because it takes away all of the showstoppers, the speed bumps that people have with regards to doing the other kinds of retreats. For an on-site type retreat, you need to leave your home, leave your family, incur loss of job time, incur perhaps travel expenses, loss of income, and so forth in a troubled economy that can be problematic. Also, people don't want to be away from their families. Their schedules don't allow for travel. You might not be a center in their area. You might be living in a part of the world where you don't have even a place you could go to do something like that.

Or you might be disabled, you can't leave your house. So we wanted to create a delivery system for what I call industrial strength but user-friendly meditation that anybody can have regardless of their familial, work, financial, or health situation or geographic situation. So that's the home practice program. You register for that and we give you an access code and a telephone number to call at the appointed time. Most of those are done in four-hour blocks. Just about anybody can get four hours during a month to do the practice.

And that's a second delivery system. If you come to a residential retreat with me or a commuter retreat with me, in other words, if you do an on-site type program, you have the advantage of a buildup of momentum and so forth. If you do a home practice program, you have the advantage of enormous convenience. Sometimes people ask, well, if I go to one of his on-site retreats, will I have to practice his techniques? And the answer is absolutely no, not required. At my retreats, you are free to practice whatever form of meditation you wish. A lot of people come to my programs because they want to learn my approaches and my techniques, the so-called five-way system of basic mindfulness that I teach. And you will have a chance, of course, to learn that, but it is by no means required that you practice that, either at the retreat or for your own self-practice. It's been my experience over the years of teaching that different things work for different people at different times in their spiritual itinerary. So my basic motto about what to do, if you were to ask me, well, how should I meditate, how should I practice, I would say do what works. I'm not alone in this regard. Another senior teacher, Joseph Goldstein, wrote a book called *One Dharma*, and basically that's, if you had to sum it up in a soundbite, that's what the book is about.

And that's been my conclusion also. Do what works. So no, you don't have to do any of the five ways at my retreats. The way I think of the organization of the practice is I have this system of five approaches, and then there's everything else that anybody ever did that worked. So I divide all ways of practicing into the five ways, which in some ways is just a modernization of a whole bunch of old stuff, so stuff that sort of fits within that framework. And then anything else that doesn't fit within that framework, I refer to them as special exercises. You can mix the five ways with special exercises. You can mix it with whatever you

want to do. You're just totally free to practice as you wish. So I like people that study with me as the result of having studied with me, not to become a devotee of my way of teaching, but rather to see the commonality within all the ways of teaching so that they can be comfortable with anybody's program.

They can make use of everybody's program. From my perspective, there's only one teacher in the universe through all times. There's just one teacher, and she is the thousand-armed, thousand-headed goddess of compassion. And each one of us individual teachers sort of represents one head and a couple of arms on that single archetype. And if you look at the—this is Avalokiteshvara, or Kannon in Japanese, Guanyin in Chinese, Guanam in Korean, and Guan Am in Vietnamese, and Chenresi in Tibetan, known by many names, sometimes actually male, but often in East Asia, female. So I call her the thousand-armed goddess of compassion. If you look at this particular archetype, you'll see each one of her hands has a different attribute, a different object, a different symbol.

And to me, that represents all the different approaches that different teachers have developed over the ages. But we're all limbs on one formless activity that pervades time and space. Each one of us contributes as best we can to this overall activity. So my job as a teacher is to set you up to see things that way, so that we, all of us teachers, can share this huge job that needs to be done for the world.

How do I find a good meditation teacher? ~ Shinzen Young

How do you find a good meditation teacher or teachers? One way to consider this is to think about different kinds of teachers. I have in my own mind a kind of map, a classification system for teaching. Actually, I don't really think so much in terms of teachers. I don't think so much in terms of the noun, teacher. I think more in terms of the verb, teaching. There is an activity called teaching. Broadly, I classify the activity of teaching under three headings. There is subtle teaching, there is descriptive teaching, and then there is explicit teaching. From my perspective, everyone who does a spiritual practice or a meditative practice is a teacher in that they teach. But they may only teach at the subtle level.

So what does it mean to teach at the subtle level? Well, two things. As a result of doing the practice, we change. Our vibe changes, how we carry ourselves moment by moment. Our body odors probably change, our pheromones change. Things about us change, and that shows. Perhaps only at a subtle level, it shows in body language. As I say, it may show in odors, subtle cues, how we breathe, how our eyes look here or there, and so forth. Changes take place within us as the result of this practice.

People can detect those changes, perhaps consciously or perhaps below the threshold of awareness. And that puts out a subtle teaching. You could be talking about anything, you could be doing anything, but you're coming from a certain place. As the result of your practice, you're subtly teaching with every action you do, every syllable you utter.

Even people who haven't done much meditation, the change has already started to happen. So that's one aspect of subtle teaching. Another aspect of subtle teaching is more large-scale, our behaviors improve, or they should. If they're not, then there's a problem. And people that know us see the behaviors improving. And that's impressive to people.

Very impressive, actually. And that makes them interested, sympathetic, maybe wanting to do that path or that practice themselves. So the behavior changes that take place with time, coupled with the sort of vibe changes, so we say energy changes that take place, to me this constitutes teaching. Therefore every practitioner is automatically a subtle teacher. Then there's descriptive teaching. What descriptive teaching means is you have a practice, somebody asks you to describe your practice, and you can do so coherently. Coherently means there's clear vocabulary, well-formulated sentences, it all hangs together logically.

That's what cohere means. You can give a coherent description of what you do in words that the average person can do. I call that the descriptive level of teaching. I have a little phrase that I use, which is, what is coherent is cogent. Cogent means compelling.

It means, oh, that makes sense, and I see the point. Maybe I'd like to do it myself. So you're not telling them to do it, you're not proselytizing, you're not giving them a practice and explicitly teaching them, you're just describing, hey, this is what I do, when I have physical discomfort I do this, and it has this effect, when I have emotional challenges I do this, and it has this effect, when I do formal practice I do this, and sometimes this happens, and sometimes that happens. You're giving a coherent description of your practice. Well, that's a teaching, and that's a level of teaching. So any of you that have a practice and can coherently describe it to people in words, average people, people that don't have a practice, then I say you're a teacher at that level of teaching. Then there's explicit teaching. Explicit teaching is you are running a meditation class, or you're privately tutoring someone, and you are giving them techniques, you're answering their questions, you're giving them detailed guidance, you're monitoring their progress, and so forth, you're explicitly now a teacher. Some people evolve to a place in their practice where they would like to be an explicit teacher, and that's good. Usually you need some sort of training for that, although not inevitably. Tell you the truth, when I moved from being a descriptive teacher to an

explicit teacher, I myself did not have any training to do that. I just started to experiment and see what worked.

Maybe that's not the best scenario, but that's what I did, and it just evolved with time. Among explicit teachers, I would say that there are various subcategories. There are paraprofessional teachers.

That is to say teachers that teach part-time. In my organization we call them facilitators. I've trained numerous, many, many people to be facilitators.

They can help out at retreats, they can answer questions, and so forth. They're sort of like a paramedic. They're a paraprofessional. Then there are professional teachers. A professional teacher teaches full-time.

Someone like me. We derive their livelihood that way. Among full-time teachers, there's a class of full-time teachers that are capable of dealing with classical enlightenment. When it starts to happen to people, they can handle that phenomenon. They can handle the pathologies that may occur occasionally that can accompany classical enlightenment. Occasionally.

They get all freaked out, it doesn't happen that often. We might call them masters. People that aren't afraid of the E-word, enlightenment. If you can find a teacher in that category that you can relate to, then that's good.

It doesn't have to be one, though. You might find several teachers in that category that you can relate to. If you can't find a teacher in that category who is comfortable with handling the enlightenment issue, then okay, just find a professional teacher. Somebody that does this, is established. If you can't find that, a paraprofessional. If you can't find that, then a descriptive teacher. If you can't find that, then just someone that teaches at the subtle level, would be my general recommendations as far as how to think about teachers.

How Shinzen Uses the Term Spaciousness ~ Shinzen Young

You Hi. What do you dare ask? These all relate to spaciousness. Part of the definition is thinness within, openness around, or both that may present themselves in sensory spaces. That's the best I could do.

So let's start with that. When you first brought in the term spaciousness, I thought it's just like he's making a special case of expansion and contraction and kind of giving it its own term. The openness is like expansion and the thinness is like contraction.

And then you said you brought it in to represent the four formless absorptions, etc. Roughly yes. Okay.

It's not a one-to-one correspondence, but I think of it as moving people in that direction. Okay. So I have kind of several things in this area that I wanted to get your response to. So one is when the Tibetans talk about spacious awareness, is that part of how you think about it? Yeah. That was another source. The Theravada dhyanas or jhanas, the whole Tibetan thing around space with Dzogchen and Mahabutra, and then Sasaki Roshi's formulation, he used the word space a lot.

So I saw a way of integrating those traditions, roughly. I think Harprakash froze up. He's going through a cessation. It happens. It has happened before. He had a cessation in the scanner at Harvard Medical School. We caught it on camera. I don't know if Dave Vago, what he ever did with it. That actually happened.

He was in the scanner and he just turned off for a little while. Well, I guess now gone. Yeah. Maybe we should go to someone else until he re-arises. Yeah we can reconnect as soon as he does.

Okay. Harprakash yet, unless if I'm missing you, please unmute Harprakash. Otherwise we'll go to- Hey, I'm back. Oh, great. Okay. Where are you? Where am I? I'm right here. Where are you? Okay. Okay.

Apologies. I slipped into gone for a while. I made a big joke about it.

I told them about when we were at Harvard and you had that cessation thing. Yeah. Okay. Let's see.

Okay. So let's stick with the spaciousness part. So you said among other things, you brought it into representative, the Aruba Jones, the four formless absorptions. And you also said that when spaciousness goes with dynamic flow, that there's lots of opportunities there. And my association with spacious awareness from Tibetan Buddhism.

So why did you make, if I can see spaciousness as just a form of expansion and contraction, why did you make that its own specific theme? Yeah. So the descriptions don't necessarily classically mention anything about energy or flow or impermanence. It's just sort of a description, boundless space, nothing whatsoever, boundless consciousness. And going so deep that you're right on the border of even being conscious or not conscious.

These are the names of the four formless jhanas. The boundless consciousness is, once again, I'm just reporting my own experience. So other people might be different, but for me, when you get to the base of all of the archetypal material, you're basically in the multiverse of all stories.

And then that seems, then you take it one more step and it's no story because all the stories have now shrunk to a point. And that seems like boundless consciousness. And nothing

whatsoeverness clearly is getting close to nirvana, if you were to abide there. So what they do say, though, is that when you enter absorptions, this is more modern terminology, but some teachers talk about a vipassana jhana, an absorption where there is an insight component. And usually the insight is impermanence. So some absorption teachers will talk about these states and then they'll say something like it can be a pure shamatha, in which case I'm guessing there's an emphasis on stability.

That's a guess. Or it can be a vipassana jhana where you're aware of impermanence within the deep state. So I wanted to be able to deal with spaciousness as its own independent dimension, allowing for the possibility that it might stabilize and not be dynamical for a person. And then pointing out that if flow in general is present, well, that's insight absorption. But if expansion contraction flow is present, in other words, if the vastness doesn't just sit there, but it moves out, the thinness becomes the basis for an effortless crunch, a continuous crunch. If that happens to present itself, that's very close to Sasaki Roshi's formulation of the source. So I wanted to take the fact that in the Tibetan formulations and in the absorptions from early Buddhism, it is not necessarily explicitly mentioned that there would be flow.

What to say of explicitly that the expansion might in fact not just sit there, but move out, be a force, likewise the contraction. They don't explicitly mention that. It might be implicit or added on later. So in order to have a formulation that was sort of dimensionally clean, that would work for a lot of different situations, I said, okay, the spaciousness is one thing. If flow is present within that, great. If not, that's okay too. So it's the best I could do to integrate such a wide range of formulations.

Okay. And related to that, the spacious awareness, is that the equivalent to what you're... I think I just used the word spaciousness. I might use the phrase spacious awareness for exactly that same thing. It would just be synonymous.

Would have to look in the manual. I don't remember what the official vocabulary is. Okay. Thank you.

How the Endeavor of "Improve" Supports "Transcend" ~ Shinzen

Young

It's not an uncommon experience that people report, well I'm sort of spinning my wheels with my formal practice.

It's like, you know, I don't seem to be getting anywhere with day to day sits, etc., etc. Sometimes if you do some good thing in the world that's special, you volunteer, you do something, and then you go back to your formal practice, you'll see that it's sort of like, now it's moving again. That would be an example of the seva or what you put out influencing what you experience. It goes to a somewhat broader formulation, which is see beyond self and world, refine self and world, or improve self and world. So you make improvements in yourself and your world that will then influence your experience during formal practice, which is the main place that you're trying to see beyond the self and the world.

So it's a little larger than seva, it's more improve. For example, diet, lifestyle, ethics, sila, traditionally it's said, well sort of get that together before you even try to sit, because otherwise it's just going to be chaos sitting when you try to sit. So the fact that you have a certain lifestyle, that you're not bringing all this awareness of guilt and bad karma to your sits, you're not conflicted about- you're less conflicted about your life because you're living your life in a better way, perhaps diet enters in, exercise, all that sort of stuff. So those are improvements in yourself. You bring those- those improvements will probably improve your experience in formal practice. And then there's the knowledge that you're putting on good things into the world, and that's in your subliminal consciousness, and it's there, whether you're surface aware of it or not, it's sort of there in your practice and that supports you also. So it's really broader than how seva supports sadhana, it's more like how the endeavor of improve supports the endeavor of transcend.

How to do Labeling and Noting During Meditation, 1 of 2 Parts ~

Shinzen Young

Here's how I like to conceive of the structure of the notate. There's a rhythm that is set up of acts of noting.

Each act typically, but not inevitably, consists of two parts. A brief moment of clear acknowledging that some sensory category or some sensory event is present. So that's a clear acknowledging. And then there's a few seconds of intent focusing. The main exception being that sometimes as soon as something is acknowledged, it immediately disappears. So there can't be that few seconds of intent focusing in that case. And in fact, as I pointed out, the immediate disappearance, whether it's due to the fact that you acknowledged or it's due to some other fact, makes no difference.

That's a huge insight into vanishings. The default, meaning what you fall back on, all other factors being equal, is not to label. But just to be clear about the category with direct awareness.

However, that is often very difficult. You'll find as soon as you try to track those things without at least mental labels, you're just in la-la land. In that case, got a label. But the ideal is to be able to track with clarity and not even a mental label.

So that's sort of the default that you can gradually work towards with time. But don't fault yourself if you find that you have to use labeling most of the time. I mean, sometimes I'll go for the no labels.

But even for me, it's hard work. It's easier to do it with labels of some sort. You can, to a certain extent, control the concentration, sensory clarity, and equanimity that you have at a given time. You don't have a huge amount of control over it because those are the skills we're trying to build. If we had a lot of concentration, clarity, and equanimity to begin with, we wouldn't be doing these exercises.

You don't lift weights if you're already strong. So we don't expect that you'll have much concentration, clarity, or equanimity. But there are things that you can do with the options in the noting apparatus that can help in those directions. And the options come under three broad categories. Options with regards to labeling. Options with regards to how you spatially direct your attention during the focus on phase.

And options with regards to the pacing of the labeling. If you come to me and report difficulty with practice, the first thing I'll ask you is what techniques are you using. Second thing I'll ask you is which options have you used to deal with the challenge.

It's perfectly okay if you say, I tried them all and none of them helped. Then we'll go creative. And I'll give you special exercises and so forth.

But you should have at least tried them and see, well, could any of them help with the challenge. With regards to a clear acknowledge phase, you have the following options. You can speak a label out loud. You can think a label mentally. You can not label at all.

And some people finger label. We won't go into that. If you're ever interested, maybe we'll talk about it someday.

But that has been something that people have, some people have found useful. Basically you just assign categories to fingers in any way you want. If you elect to speak the labels

out loud, you have sort of three levels. Strong, medium, and weak. The weak level is you whisper them so another can't hear. You sub vocalize.

That would be for a group meditation situation. The medium level is an ordinary voice. The strong is that you're forcing yourself to make the label. You probably have resistance to doing it. You're making it loud and clear and crisp and you're really listening to make sure that that label stream does not stop.

And that's when you're really going up a hill. Intentionally create a kind of gentle matter of fact, almost impersonal quality to the mental or spoken labels. And that may seem artificial, but that will tend to induce equanimity.

And it's a sort of like the tail can wag the dog kind of situation. Because you wouldn't think that artificially forming an equanimous voice would authentically induce equanimity into consciousness. But typically it does.

Sometimes it might take as long as a half an hour. Sometimes I work with people going through major physical and or emotional freak outs. And I have one of the main tasks is to sort of get them to the point that they're willing perhaps in between sobbing and even screaming in pain, they're willing to have that equanimous voice to the labels.

They don't have to be equanimous with regards to expression. They can flail, they can scream, they can cry, but they keep the labeling voice, albeit artificially with that gentle matter of factness, usually within a half an hour, consciousness itself has dropped into equanimity. And my phrase for that is use the voice.

You use the voice to meaning the tone of the voice, including the mental voice of your labeling to induce equanimity. In general, you do it not too fast, not too slow, but everybody finds what's good for them. If it's too fast, it's making you frenetic. If it's too slow, you might be spacing out.

You find the rhythm that works for you. Sometimes the phenomenon that you're noting happens very, very rapidly. There's like a rapid fire stream, like a machine gun shooting. It's like really quick, like ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta. It's like bang-bang-bang-bang-bang. Or sensations are bang-bang-bang-bang-bang. They're very, very rapid.

You just average. So every few seconds, you just say touch. And that's an abbreviation for, I just had a dozen lightning fast touch events. But you just go touch, and you understand that, OK, that's averaging what I experienced over the last few seconds.

Some people find that the rhythm of the noting tends to entrain with the natural rhythm of their breathing. That's fine. If that happens, let it happen. Should you try to make that happen? Certainly not.

But you don't have to prevent that from happening. So that's the sort of pacing piece with regards to the rhythm of the breath, how the rhythm of the noting relates to the rhythm of the breath. If it entrains naturally and that really works for you, great.

But you don't have to fight with that happening, and you certainly don't have to try to make that happen. The option to repeat the same note more than once, it can sort of slow down your internal clock and make it a little easier to detect things and so forth. It's more likely that you will start to notice vanishings if you constrain yourself to go back to the same thing for more than just a few seconds. If you say, OK, for a period of time, I'm going to do it that way. A further option is repeat until gone.

These are options. So you're going to go touch, touch, and you're just going to lock onto that touch and keep noting touch, touch until there's a vanishing, until some part of it abruptly subsides. Then you note gone. And maybe if it doesn't disappear, then you can move on to something else or whatever. So you can repeat until gone, until there's some

indication of abrupt subsidence is an option.

And depending on what's happening and how things are presenting themselves, that might be something that you would decide to do. So I know this is a lot of information, but actually, most of you have heard this before many times. But I wanted you to get the whole picture of sort of the apparatus of noting with all the bells and whistles. So you realize how really powerful it is if you internalize all of these variations. You should be able to deal with the bulk of challenges that would come up.

How to do Labeling and Noting During Meditation, Part 2 of 2,

Zooming ~ Shinzen Young

So, with regards to the control of the spatial direction during the focus on phase, assuming that the thing doesn't vanish immediately, that means it's extended in time.

And it is also extended in space. Easiest to understand is body sensation. You note feel.

So that was the clear acknowledging. You use the word feel to indicate that you're having an emotional sensation in the body. So it has a spatial extent.

May not be well defined. Typically there will be places within a sensation that are intense and other places that are less intense. Typically the less intense is around the border, the more intense is at the center, but it doesn't necessarily have that kind of spatial configuration. Often you will be able to detect that in addition to the local obvious sensation, there are subtle influences that spread from that. So it could be that you get a spread that is continuous from the primary, but more frequently you get sort of like a little ping here, a little ping there, a little ping there.

Or you may not be aware of any spread at all. So there is a spatial configuration. Once again, I emphasize it may not be well defined for you. It's okay, but there is an extent in space of that sensory event. Easiest to conceptualize with touch and feel, but actually all the sensory categories that were sung about in that song can have a spatial extent to them. In time, for several seconds, you're going to be intently focusing on that category you've acknowledged.

Default means what you fall back on all other factors being equal. Default with regards to how you control attention within the spatial scope of the thing you've acknowledged is not to control the attention. However, you do have the option, if it seems appropriate, useful, to in fact control your attention for those few seconds with regards to direction and spatial extent. If you focus intentionally on a small part of the phenomenon, we'll say that you're zooming in, just to have a word for that. In, you'll be zooming in on small, weak parts of body sensations to deal with intensities, like pain or intense emotions. It's got a local intensity here, but it's around the perimeter. It's a little less intense. You zoom into a little piece of the perimeter and see, for these few seconds that I'm intently focusing, it's just that one little volume for just these few seconds.

Maybe it will be easier to completely open up to that than to deal with the whole phenomenon. That's zooming in. Zooming out means that you spread your attention broadly at some extent, maybe over the whole sensation, or as widely as you can detect the sensation.

You're trying to encompass the whole thing. That also can sometimes dissipate intensity, because it's like the laws in physical chemistry. Pressure is inversely proportional to volume.

If you give it volume, you may find that helpful. That's zooming out, zooming in. The name is to zoom in and out at the same time. What does that mean? You would typically do that with something that is intense, typically a body sensation. The zoom in, in this case, means you intentionally go to the most intense part you can find.

The zoom out, in this case, means you simultaneously spread your awareness as broadly as you can through the body. I can explain why you might want to do it. However, that's not the same as to say that you should ever do this ever in your practice.

Remember, the default is not to control. This is true for all sensory phenomena, but particularly true for body sensation. Sensory phenomena tend to have a local impact and a global spread. Let's assume that there is spread. We won't be concerned with whether it's detectable or not. We'll just assume that it's spreading, perhaps below the threshold of awareness. If you go local and at the same time spread your attention over the whole body, that tends to grease the rails for the spread to occur without resistance. Most of the suffering is not in local intensities. Most of the suffering is in the resistance to the subtle spread, particularly the resistance to the spread that is below the threshold of awareness. It's resistance to very, very, very tiny sensations, so tiny that the surface consciousness is not aware of them. The resistance to the subtle spread through the body until it's been trained away is huge. Those tiny little sensations catch in the gears of the nervous system, and that's why people's bodies shake and so forth. That's actually where most of the suffering is. Zooming in and out at the same time will tend to facilitate the spread, even if you're not in any way conscious of the spread.

That can help. Zooming in and out at the same time means that if it's done with regards to the body, which typically is where it is done, although it works with image and talk, believe it or not, also, but that's much subtler. Zooming in and out at the same time with time will lead to a kind of experience of splash, ripple through the body, radiate beyond the body into the infinity of space, and dissipate.

You'll tend to get that rhythm. Splash, ripple, filling the body, then radiation out, and release. Very much like the physics of a raindrop falling into a pot. There's a certain amount of potential energy. That potential energy is converted into kinetic energy as the raindrop falls, hits the pond. Where's that energy going, that potential energy? It's now going into a plop, a ripple, but then the ripples die away. What happened to the energy that was in the ripples? Well, it's partially sound, but then when the sound... Okay, sound is just the air rippling.

You've got the water rippling. What happens to the sound and the ripples in the water? There's no loss of energy. Conservation of energy, basic principle of physics. Where did that energy go? It's in electromagnetic radiation in the infrared, which means in heat. That travels at the speed of light and fills the entire universe, and in a tiny, tiny, tiny, tiny, tiny way, warms the farthest galaxies and can never be retrieved. Basic principles of entropy, that potential energy that was in that raindrop is gone, gone, gone.

It's gone. You have to go against the gradient of entropy, which the universe doesn't work that way, in order to recreate that potential energy. What that means is that each thing that arises within us is, if we experience it, something along the lines that I'm describing takes on the taste of purification, which is the taste that that quantum of potential for suffering has been released within us forever. The zoom in, zoom out tends to facilitate, at the same time, tends to facilitate that process.

That's the good news. However, until that taste of purification comes on, because you're not in any way fighting, you're giving your whole body, consciously or unconsciously, you're giving your whole body to the sensation. That means there's only so much real estate in consciousness. There may not be much room for the mind. Because we use the mind as the ordinary ordering principle, you might have the impression that you're losing control, but you're not.

You're in an ordering principle that's so primordial it could never be disordered, but it might take you a little while to realize that. The zoom in, zoom out may initially give you a sense of overwhelm and loss of control, but if you can just hang with that, that other flavor will come on. That's that option. I warned you, subtlety and complexity ahead. That was the subtlety and complexity. If you never use this, that's fine.

Humility to the Vanishing Point: No Self Around the World ~

Shinzen Young

Yesterday I wrote out the, it just occurred to me to write the term for no-self in the Islamic tradition of Sufism which is Fana. Then it occurred to me it might be interesting to write, to look at all the words that are used by the meditating mystics around the world for their version of what humility is. So here we go.

So we'll start where we started last night. So this is Arabic. It's pronounced Fana, F-A-N-A. And that's the technical term in the Sufi tradition for what in the Buddhist tradition is called no-self. So let's juxtapose with that Hebrew. It's also written from right to left. So this says Bitul Hayesh in Hebrew language. That would be romanized B-I-T-U-L-H-A-Y-E-S-H.

Bitul means annihilation so very similar to Fana. And Ha means thee and yesh is somethingness. Somethingness of self, somethingness of world, or existence.

Yesh is the common Hebrew word for exist. So the annihilation of the somethingness of self and world pretty much sums it up. By the way, after Bitul Hayesh comes Bria, that you once you annihilate the somethingness, then you become the doingness. So you are able to participate in the flip side of the annihilation, which is the moment by moment continuous arising of yesh, things, from I am the divine nothing. And Fana in the Sufi tradition has exactly the same thing. After Fana is something called Baka, which is now you're stabilized with the source and you can understand how the world is coming from God, Allah, and so forth.

So very parallel type situations. So that's Islam, Judaism. Now let's look at Christianity. Now early Christianity, the mystical writings were in Greek. They're called the Greek fathers. They lived in the deserts of Palestine, Egypt, and so forth.

And there's some amazing writings from that patristic period. So what is the oldest of the Christian terms for the no self experience? Wait a minute. I think that's an omega. Sorry, I think I misspelled it. Not an omicron, but I could be wrong.

I should really check these things out before I present them to the world. Kenosis. If we were to Romanize it, K-E-N-O-S-I-S. And osis doesn't mean a disease, by the way. It means a process. And kenos in Greek means empty. Interestingly, directly cognate to the Sanskrit word shunya. Because the k sound, the veller stop, the voiceless veller stop of the k sound in Proto-Indo-European became a sha, which is a palatalized s in Sanskrit. So actually Sanskrit is modified from the early Proto-Indo-European. Greek still preserves the k sound. So kenos in Greek is a direct Indo-European cognate of shunya in Sanskrit. And interesting, similar spiritual interpretation. Kenosis is the process of emptying out, emptying out of somethingness that the Christian meditators sought.

And if you could achieve a deep enough kenosis, then you would be able to experience theosis, which means godding, literally. See, Greek is a very subtle language. There's two words in God, two words in Greek, theosis and apotheosis. Apotheosis is deification in the sense that the ancient Roman emperors claimed to be gods. But theosis is deification in the sense that the Christian who empties themselves out takes on divine attributes, not infinite power and that kind of thing, but the goodness, the compassion, and so forth.

So you become more godlike in that sense. And culminating in, talk about a subtle use of language and an interesting word, the culmination of kenosis, according to the Greek desert fathers, is to become isochristos. ISO, you know what that means in Greek? It means

equivalent. Isochristos is Christ equivalent. Now I like to very irreverently translate that into modern English as you experience what it's like to be nano Christ, a very, very, very miniature version of dying in order to be of service to others. Your own personal version as opposed to the cosmic version, which is like that would be the mega Christ.

Okay, so kenosis. So now we've got Islam, Judaism, Christianity, the Western religions. Let's go to Buddhism. So just to put it in an Indic script for the fun of it. This is Devanagari, which is the North Indian alphabet used to write Sanskrit, Hindi, and such. But I just wrote a Pali word in it. Anatta, A-N-A-T-T-A. And this is the famous doctrine of the Buddha, no self as thing. That gets translated into various Asian languages.

Let's start with Tibetan. Screwed that up. Let's redo it.

Not pretty. In Tibetan, it's called Takme or Tame. If you romanize it, B-D-A-G dot M-E-D and another dot. But it's pronounced Takme. And it literally means self and M-E-D means without or not. So that just directly translates. In East Asia, you've got Chinese characters as the classical language. So that's how you write it.

And it exactly corresponds. Now, there's four cultures that constitute the sphere of the influence of Chinese characters. Traditionally, those four cultures are, of course, China itself, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. So there's local pronunciations for this.

Let's go down the list. In Mandarin Chinese, it would be pronounced Wu-Wa. Wu means not existent or does not exist and Wa is self. So that's exactly like Takme in Tibetan. In Vietnamese pronunciation, same characters are pronounced Vo-Nga. Vietnamese has a very peculiar creaky tone unique to it.

Vo-Nga. You can hear the tones, right? Vietnamese and Chinese are both tonal languages. So in Mandarin Chinese, it's a rising tone and then a dipping tone. Wu-Wa. And in Vietnamese, you can hear similar, Vo-Nga. Well, let's write it in Korean script. Koreans have their own alphabet.

I could be wrong about this. My Korean is very rusty, but I'm pretty, I think it's Mu-Ah. M-U-A. But I know for sure what it is in Japanese.

Similar sounding. Japanese also have their own syllabary. Kana. Mu-Ga.

M-U-G-A. The Taoist also had a term for the nothingness of the liberated person. It's another Chinese word meaning emptiness, actually. This character here, which is pronounced Xu. And that's sort of the Taoist equivalent. So there we have sort of the world of the humility to the vanishing point as cultivated in the Western and Eastern traditions.

Insight, Clarity & the Sensory System ~ Shinzen Young

What are the themes of mindfulness? One of the themes that I have people explore in mindfulness is working with ordinary sensory activity. That would be touch, sight, sound, feel, image, talk.

These categories naturally organize themselves into certain subsystems. I mentioned in another segment that feel, image, talk is both a reactive and a proactive system. By reactive, I mean when you hear a sound or you're aware of a sight or something physically impacts your body, it may or may not trigger a mental comment, it may or may not trigger a mental picture, it may or may not trigger an emotional sensation in your body.

If it triggers one, two, or all three of those, then I say that there has been a fit reaction, a feel, image, or talk reaction to the it of the touch, sight, or sound. It turns out that you can monitor how your sense of subjective self, the sense of being a perceiver, you can monitor how that sense of self arises through different levels of activation of feel, image, talk. In the most extreme case, when feel, image, and talk, all three activate very strongly in response to an external stimulus of some sort, you will typically get a very strong sense of an eye that is perceiving an it over there.

However, as you're monitoring feel, image, talk, it could happen spontaneously every once in a while that there is a touch or a sight or a sound and it doesn't produce any reaction in this system whatsoever. When that happens, you have little or no sense of a perceiving self inside of you. If you monitor those fluctuations, repeat this kind of experiment over and over again, you can get an aha experience or an insight experience into the mechanism whereby the sense of I am-ness, at least in the sense of a perceiving self, arises. You can have an intense reaction of feel, image, talk, but if there's a lot of clarity so that you keep those components untangled, and if there's a lot of equanimity, which means that those components are completely unblocked, there's no suppressing of their arising, but there's no inappropriate holding on to them once they have arisen, that's equanimity. If there's enough clarity and equanimity, even though you would have a huge fit storm, a huge storm of emotionality in the body, visual mental associations and judgmental chatter in your head, that doesn't turn into a self.

It only turns into a self when there's unconsciousness and coagulation or fixation of the feel, image, talk reactions. That's what I meant when I said that these categories can bring insights, as you're observing. Now, not only is feel, image, talk a reactive system, it's also a proactive system. When it's not reacting to touch, sight, sound or some combination thereof, it usually goes off and begins to spin memory, plan, fantasy, problem-solving, worrying, confusion, etc., etc. Neuroscientists now know about this and call it the default attentional system. It's being studied, but I call it proactive fit. Proactive in the sense that it's not reacting to the environment, it's just going off and spinning past, future and fantasy, basically, plus problem-solving.

And then every once in a while, as I mentioned, the fit system is not reactive, it's not proactive, it just spontaneously goes inactive. Then there's just peace, blank, quiet. The body is emotionally peaceful, mental screen is blank, the head is quiet. If you happen to notice the moment that that occurs, which may be very fleeting, you will get what we call insight into no-self.

Now, of course, there are some other natural systems here. We can take touch-feel to be your body experience, the ordinary side of your body experience. Then there's also a restful system in your body, which is physical relaxation and emotional peace. Emotional peace is defined as a tangible awareness that your emotional centers are not active.

They're in a restful state, they're idling, so to speak. So this gives a system of ordinary experience in the body and restful experience in the body. Then your mental experience is here, your visual thoughts and your auditory thoughts.

So this is the ordinary side, image, talk, activity. However, there's a restful system in your mind, which is blank, quiet. The sense of an outer world of sights and sounds, well, that's here. The corresponding restful states are silence and the defocusing of your eyes, the soft focus, with your eyes open, which I call light. One of the themes that I have people work with is different systems of ordinary experience. For example, they could focus in and just work with feel, image, talk, or they could focus out and just work with touch, sight, sound, or other combinations.

I call that theme focus on ordinary. Then by way of contrast, you can work with various restful systems, including the whole thing at once. You could just let your attention freely float among whatever restful states were available, physical relaxation, emotional peace in the body, mental blank, soft focus of your eyes. And if there happened to be quiet or silence around you, you'd have an auditory component to the rest. The restful states are what most people who don't meditate think meditation is. Certainly, releasing stress and recharging your battery through enjoying restful experiences is an important component in the meditative endeavor. That's why I give people these various restful systems to work on, and I call that the theme of exploring rest.

However, within the mindfulness tradition, taking ordinary experience and making it extraordinary by working with it using high concentration, sensory clarity, and equanimity, that's also an important way of practicing. It's good because if you want to focus on rest but you can't, there'll be a reason. The reason is there's too much activity. Well, then you can focus on the activity. On the other hand, sometimes people run into this situation where when they practice, not much is coming up.

In that case, how do you keep the edge of clarity and therefore the edge of growth? Well, I say when nothing much is happening as you're sitting there, six things are happening. Your body is physically relaxed. Your body is emotionally peaceful. Your mental screen is blank. Your head is quiet. Your eyes are defocused, and your ears are defocused. So you're having six restful experiences all at once. By being aware of that, that brings a clarity component into the experience of rest, and that clarity component guarantees that there'll be growth in your practice, that you won't get stuck in a good place of just mellowing out year after year without gaining insight and purification.

Intermediate FAQ: Practice In Daily Life? Micro-Hits & Challenge

Sequences ~ Shinzen Young

Intermediate students, one of the very common questions is how can I bring the practice into more into my daily life? And the quick answer to that is if you want to achieve that laudable goal, like any other project you have to take measures. It's a combination of yes, doing a formal practice, retreat and self-practice so that there's a carryover into life, that's part of it. But then there are specific things that a person can do to assure that the practice is going to influence their day-to-day ordinary life.

One of the things that you can do is you can take short moments in the day, stop on a dime and begin a mindfulness practice for 30 seconds here or three minutes there, right on the fly when nothing too demanding is happening. I call that practice in life. You can just start sight, sight, feel, talk, image. Just start like that, the process of noting while I'm giving this talk.

So doing that, peppering your day with that. And then the other thing is creating a challenge sequence where you take a technique and you do it seated, eyes closed, seated, eyes open, standing, slow movement, slow movement in an impactful environment. Then do the technique while doing a simple task, do the technique while doing more demanding tasks. You create challenge sequences and you gradually work your way up until you can maintain the technique in very, very complicated circumstances. So the combination of peppering the day at least a half dozen times every day, even if just for a few seconds, you implement the practice on the fly. That plus creating challenge sequences which are analogous to adding more and more weights or doing more and more reps in weight training. So you may sort of gradually pick up heavier and heavier weights. You train yourself to maintain the techniques you use in more and more complicated situations gradually. So the challenge sequence plus the sort of surgical strikes during the day plus enough momentum from formal practice, those three taken together will allow for the practice to begin to inundate your entire life. So there's a figure ground reversal. At first meditation is one of the things you do in life. Eventually you have to reach the point where life is something that takes place inside meditation.

Is Buddhist meditation compatible with other religions? ~

Shinzen Young

The question is often asked, is Buddhist meditation compatible with other religions? In other words, can you be a Christian of a certain denomination, or a Muslim, a Jew, a Hindu, and so forth, and still practice, quote, Buddhist meditation? You'll get different answers from different Buddhist teachers, but I think if you took a consensus, the answer that you would get is yes.

And certainly, if you were to ask me, the answer would be yes big time. Not only is it compatible with any belief system or lack of belief system, it's compatible with a rationalist, humanist, skeptical point of view, and I would say it's compatible with any religion that I know of, including the more fundamentalist forms of religion, believe it or not. You might think that that's a little strange, but I see it as compatible.

I would say that it's compatible with any religion and I see it as compatible. I remember a teacher that I knew in L.A. He was of the Shingon School, which is the school that I was ordained in, originally as a Buddhist monk in Japan, and he's the one that gave me my letter of introduction to go to Japan. His name was Bishop Takahashi.

They used bishop in English to translate a Japanese term. He was the head of the Koyasan Betsuin, or Koyasan Branch Temple in Los Angeles. So he wrote me this letter of introduction that allowed me to get into the original Koyasan in Japan in 1970 to be ordained as a Buddhist monk in that tradition. One of the things I remember him saying was that what Buddhism was about was vis-a-vis other religions, was not we want you to be a Buddhist, convert to Buddhism, etc. It was about, let's see if I can remember the exact words he used in Japanese, kaisyusuru yorimo jibun no michi wo fukameyo, I think was what he said.

This was a long, long time ago. Meaning, we're not interested in converting people. We're interested in allowing them to deepen the path they already have.

And that's a very interesting perspective, an interesting way to put it. After his lifetime of living in the United States, teaching Buddhism in this country, and of course encountering all the religions that already exist here, that was sort of his take on it. I'm not trying to get people to be Buddhist, I'm trying to help them deepen the path they're already on. And I totally concur with that way of looking at things. If you look at what is core in Buddhism, you'll see that it's about developing concentration power, it's about developing sensory clarity, it's about developing equanimity, it's about using those qualities to become free from one's, quote, ego, to become free from suffering, and to become free from the screwed up behaviors that are the result of suffering.

Certainly no one can object to this kind of core endeavor. And it would be useful, applicable, appropriate for a follower of any religion. All around the world, you'll see that there's a core mystical tradition in each of the major spiritual traditions. Early Buddhism simply extracted that core essence. Then later on, around that, grew up a religion called Buddhism that can stand in contradistinction to other religions.

I think it is perfectly valid to eliminate the religious aspects of the Buddhist religion, and go back to the original core, which is compatible with, or at least the original core practice, which is compatible with any religion. The Buddha believed things that are not compatible with every religion. He believed in reincarnation, he believed in the gods, and so forth.

He was a person of the 6th century BC, his culture. So some of the Buddha's beliefs, I would not say are compatible with all religions. But one of the refreshing things about the Buddhist tradition, which makes it utterly distinct from others, is it doesn't require a complete buy-in. You don't have to buy the whole package. All you have to, we say, well, take what works for you.

Take what works for you. If you don't believe in reincarnation, then fine. Don't believe in reincarnation. At least I, as a teacher who has been strongly influenced by Buddhism, would say that. Maybe other Buddhist teachers would disagree, and that's fine. But I would say, take the parts that work for you. I'm not alone in this regard.

Mr. Goenka, for example, a very prominent and in some ways very traditional Buddhist teacher in the Vipassana lineage, says essentially the same thing to everyone in their first retreat. He said, well, you might not buy into the whole system.

Just take the parts that work for you. He has a very nice metaphor for that. If a child was eating porridge, and the child thought there was a stone in the porridge, but it was actually the cardamom spice, what would the mother do? The child says, I don't want to eat the porridge. It has a stone. The mother knows, well, it's not really a stone. But the child thinks it's a stone, sees it as a stone, so fine.

The mother would say, just take it out. You don't have to eat it with the stone. Maybe someday in the future that stone will have a taste for you, and you'll like that. Or maybe not.

Maybe you'd prefer the porridge without ever having that stone. So I think if we take the core practice of early Buddhism and define it in terms of concentration, clarity, equanimity, and positive behavior changes associated with those, then that's compatible everywhere. It is possible to be a fundamentalist Christian and be profoundly influenced by Buddhist practice.

So I would give as an example of a very conservative Christian who was profoundly influenced in his spiritual experience by Buddhism, I would give the example of the Anglo-American poet T.S. Eliot. I highly recommend his poetry. It's a little bit heady, but it's very deep, and he was absolutely a conservative Christian and absolutely profoundly Buddhist in his practice.

Israel and a Hebrew Blessing ~ Shinzen Young

What did you chant at the end of the loving kindness? A couple people asked what I chanted at the end of the loving kindness today. That was Hebrew. That was a Hebrew blessing.

I guess you probably figured it was Hebrew when you heard the word shalom over and over again and the word Israel. So for me the word Israel, there's like Medinat Israel. There's the country, the modern nation state of Israel. Then there's Eretz Israel, the land of Israel, just what that land does. Then there's Am Israel, the Jewish people. But then when I think of the word Israel, just that word alone, I don't think of a particular ethnic group or a country or even a region of the world. If you go back historically to where the word Israel came from, it was a name given to the third patriarch, not the Zen patriarchs, the third patriarch in the Jewish lineage. Who was? Well, there was Avraham, Yitzhak, Yaakov, Yaakov, Jacob. So Jacob was struggled with the forces that were making it difficult to climb the ladder to the source.

So anybody who's struggling to go up that ladder, which is all of humanity, that's Israel to me anyway when I think of that word. So that was a famous blessing that, Oseh shalom bimromav hu yaaseh shalom, alenu ve'al kol Yisrael, ve'imru amen, is what I chanted. So what's cool about it is that, I won't go into a whole discussion, but the way that words are formed in Semitic languages like Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic, which is the language that Jesus spoke, they're formed from tri-consonantal roots, typically. That means there are three consonants that carry a general sense of meaning, and then you stick vowels and other consonants in there to form verbs, nouns, and to make nuances of meaning. So shin, lamed, mem, those three Hebrew letters, they mean the peace that comes through completing. Shalem means complete, and shalom is peace.

It's related concepts. You complete something, and then there is a peace that comes. And that's exactly how it works, isn't it? When you have a complete experience, there is this extraordinary piece of the divine nothingness. That is, when you complete the sensory experience, it goes from particle to wave, and then when the wave returns to the source, in that nothingness is true, absolute rest. But it's a rich nothingness because it has all this completeness about it. And the word nirvana has that sort of connotation.

It's like ultimate rest, cessation, but also total fulfillment. So I gave an entire dharma talk in Israel on shin, lamed, mem, taking it through many of the different permutations that it has in the Hebrew language. And this is very much, by the way, in the mode of rabbis. This is how they do their teaching.

They play with the words and so forth. So it was really cool because you can explain the entire practice of the dharma in terms of those three letters. So anyway, ose shalom bimromav hu ya'ase shalom. May he or that which creates the peace of heaven make peace upon you and all Israel. Ose shalom bimromav hu ya'ase shalom, aleinu, upon you, ve'en, al kol Yisrael, all of Israel, which as I say I understand is all of humanity because we're all struggling to get up that ladder to the source. Ve'imru and say amen. You probably recognize that word.

It's the origin of the English word amen. So anyway, that's what that was. My rabbi used to say that a lot.

I remember it from a kid. So I thought it's a nice, makes a nice thing for the, at the end of the loving kindness practice. Ose shalom bimromav hu ya'ase shalom, aleinu, upon you, ve'en, al kol Yisrael, all of Israel, which as I say I understand is all of humanity because we're all struggling to get up that ladder to the source. Ve'imru and say amen. You probably

recognize that word. It's the origin of the English word amen. So anyway, that's what that was. Ve'imru Ve'imru Amen.

Jewish Mysticism & Mindfulness Meditation ~ Shinzen Young

Last night, I gave a whole riff on the Jewish meditation tradition, and I ended with this Lurianic Kabbalistic concept of what a human being or a human soul is, which I find delightful since it literally maps one-to-one with the way that I present the meditation techniques. If we want to define broadly the self, that would be body-mind experience. So in that case, in terms of the standard categories, it's touch, feel, image, talk. But then as you pay very close attention to any of those or any combination, you begin to notice the presence of change. And the more you pay attention to rates of change, the more you're also paying attention to what might be called underlying forces. This is basic, actually basic Newtonian physics. Don't have to get esoteric with quantum or relativistic. Invisible force fields can be detected in terms of how they impact accelerations. As you're noticing rates of change, you get a sense that there is a kind of fundamental and impersonal doing that sort of pervades the physicality of the body, the emotionality of the body, the mental processes.

Zen master Rinzai talked about wu-wei zhen ren. I love that expression. The true person, the authentic person that everyone has within them that has no fixed position whatsoever. And I just screwed up, started to write my own name instead of... Well, same character. The true or authentic is zhen in Mandarin, shin in Japanese.

So wu-wei zhen ren, mui no shinjin in Japanese pronunciation. That true person within us that has no fixed position, in other words, isn't a thing, but is a doing. And I'm not sure if it was Rinzai or another Zen master that talked about the invisible hand inside the puppet. And would you believe it? Some of the Kabbalistic masters had exactly the same metaphor. As you're paying attention to that expanding, contracting, vibrating field that moment by moment is churning the body-mind-self into existence in a cleft, producing a cleft within which it arises, which is totally the Kabbalistic theme, you become aware that that activity wells up and subsides.

It comes from a one rich nothing. In other words, you start to notice how there's a rising and then there's a neutralizing to a kind of nothing, and then there's an absolute continuity between the gone and the next arising. So there's a continuum. This is non-dual awareness.

There's a continuum between the nothing, the polarization of the nothing, the arising of physical, emotional, and mental self, and then the reabsorption of that back into the energy that then flatlines again. When you reach the point where that is an absolute continuous process, then you're doing pretty good in your practice. And when you reach the point where that happens as you're bopping around in the world taking care of business, then you're doing really, really, really good in your practice.

In fact, that gets you up there to the zen master, the beginnings of the zen master class of meditator. So I have you look at physicality in the body, emotionality in the body, the mental images and internal talk that are the mind, then the underlying flow, and its vanishing into the one zero. Because all vanishings, all zeros are uncreated, equal.

They're all the same zero. Therefore to the extent that you're anchored in that, your belly button and the belly button of any other piece of creation overlap. And you share the same belly button, you share the same womb, and therefore you have a sense of the fraternity and sorority of all of creation. Would you believe it? According to the Kabbalistic notion of what a human being is, what a soul is, a soul, that's the word that they often translate, but I think it's really what a person is. The soul is called naran chai.

You have the physicality of the body, then you have the emotionality of the body, ruach, then you have above that, neshama, which is the mental process. So that's image talk. Touch, feel, this is image talk. Underlying all and pervading all of that is chai, the impersonal

energy that would correspond to what I call flow, but what in China they might call chi and so forth. And it is emphasized by the Kabbalists that these last two, even though they pervade the person and the person is in intimate moment-by-moment contact with them, they are not part of human. They are the part that links the human to the source.

Specifically chai is this kind of energy and yechida comes from the root echad, meaning one. It's the one, the one what? The one nothing. The one belly button.

The one zero that is the source of the molding force. It's where it comes from, it's where it goes back to. So that's the gongs, that's the vanishings that I have you label. So if I were to have you say, okay, we're going to work in the body, mind, self, and we're going to note touch, feel, image, talk, and we're also going to note flow and vanishing, flow and gone, we would be essentially using the Lurianic Kabbalistic formulation.

Jhanas and "Focus on Rest" ~ Shinzen Young

Someone wrote in and asked, what's the relationship between what I call the, quote, restful states and the traditional practices that are known as shamatha or jhanas or absorption practices? Well, the relationship is pretty simple. The restful states are my reworking of the absorption practice of early Buddhism. By reworking, I mean I've taken some of the principles involved in that, not all of them, and put them into a completely modern type of vocabulary and formulated them as a procedure. I technically refer to that procedure as focus on rest.

I have people work with six distinct flavors of restful experience. That way, the experience of restfulness or tranquility, shamatha, by the way, means tranquilizing. It's from the same root as shanti.

That means peace. I like to make the experience of the tranquilizing or tranquility aspect of the practice to be tangible and sensory. I always like to work with tangible sensory flavors that have locations in space and durations through time so that the practice is always based in just sensory experience. I distinguish six flavors of restfulness that I have people work with. One is physical relaxation of the body, which I call relaxed or relaxation. Another one is what happens when you intentionally defocus your eyes.

Your eyes are open, but you're just sort of letting light in. This is used in East Asian martial arts where it's called far mountain gazing. It's also in shamanic cultures among native people.

It's sometimes called spirit eyes. It's a restful experience of the external world of sight. You're not fixated on objects. You're just sort of letting light in.

It turns out, actually, you can process visual information better in that state than in the sort of fixated gaze on this or that. That was actually used by some samurai. They would put their life at risk.

They would defocus their eyes when faced with an enemy, if you can believe that, with a live blade because they found that they could respond more quickly in that unfixed visual state. So I call that light because you're just letting light in. I count that as one of the restful states. Then you listen to the absence of sound in different directions. The absence of sound, you sort of defocus your ears with regards to physical sound. So that gives you a way of having a tranquil experience of the objective world. The body physically relaxes, the eyes defocus, the ears defocus. So you have relaxation, light, silence. Then you can find some restful states within your subjective world. For example, at any given instant, you may or may not have internal talk going on. Now I know you might think it's always there, but it's not necessarily always there. There are even ways that you can sort of turn it off without fighting yourself.

In general, we don't want you to fight with yourself. There are ways of finding quiet in your head where talk normally occurs. It could happen that there's no emotions in your body. I call an absence of emotion in the body. You could have pain in the body without having emotion in the body, for example. Emotion is things like anger, fear, sadness, joy, interest, smile, that kind of thing, those flavors. So conscious awareness of an absence of emotional sensation in the body is an awareness of a presence of emotional peace.

So I call that restful flavor of peace. That takes care of sort of the affective side, the emotional side of subjective experience. Then we have, of course, thought. Well part of thought is internal talk, so if you experience quiet, that's a restful state in talk space. Then you could look into your image space. Image space means where you see mental pictures.

You could look into image space but not at any images, or maybe there wouldn't be any images, there's just blank. So we'll call that blank. So a restful state in the visual part of thought I call blank, a restful state in the auditory part of thought I call quiet, and a restful state in the emotional body I call peace. That then gives you six really delicious and distinctive flavors of tranquility, relaxation, light, silence, peace, blank, quiet.

So I have people work with those to note them, to create them and note them. And that will then take you deeper and deeper and deeper into states of high concentration and restfulness. Shama-ta is interesting because it means, the shama part means tranquil, but the ta is sometimes taken to mean abiding. In fact in Tibetan it's called shi-ne. Shi means tranquil and ne means abiding. So the ne part is high concentration, one-pointedness, and the shi part is this restful or tranquilizing.

So there's a relationship. The way I interpret the, at least part, not all, but part of the traditional jhana system is that it's a biofeedback device. You produce pleasant experiences, the more you focus on those pleasant experiences, the more pleasant they become, encouraging you to focus even more, thus creating a positive feedback loop that revs up your concentration power and also takes you into deeper and deeper states of tranquility. And hence the shama-ta, or the tranquil but also developed concentration, the ta part, is the high focus.

That's my reworking of part of the classical system. And if you look at how the classical system of the absorptions is described, for example in the Digha Nikaya, you'll see that what the Buddha describes over and over again is going into these tranquil states and then seeing beyond them to something, to an absolute rest called nirvana, or nirota, meaning cessation, that is not a pleasant, tranquil experience. It's something beyond that, beyond time and space. But one of the classical ways to get there is to go into these tranquil states and then see beyond them until they are penetrated and dissolve into the absolute rest of the source. By giving you, by making them sensory experiences, you can then observe their impermanence, eventually get to their emptiness, and then that becomes a path to classical enlightenment.

Kriyas & Complete Experiences ~ Shinzen Young

What is Kriya? There's a phenomenon that comes up in meditation that I frequently get asked about, which we call technically kriyas. Kriya is a word in the Sanskrit language that could perhaps literally be translated as a cleansing action. It comes from the Sanskrit root *kr*, which means to do. It's actually the same root as the word karma. Kriya literally means an action, but it has a connotation of an action that would cleanse one or release something, release toxins.

For example, in yoga, there are certain cleansing procedures that might be referred to as kriya. But as a phenomenon that comes up in meditation, it refers to spontaneous movements, movements that just sort of happen to you, that come out of nowhere. Sometimes they're sort of small movements, the little shaking of the body, this kind of thing, but it can get dramatic, turn into this kind of thing, or in the most dramatic cases, it can involve weird grimacing and sounds. I've even had people in the most extreme cases sort of howling like animals and having animal faces and things. You can sort of imagine where ideas of werewolfism, lycanthropy and so forth, might come about if people saw this kind of thing going on.

Now, don't worry, that's the most extreme cases. Usually it's just a sort of rocking, shaking, that kind of thing. So we call these spontaneous movements kriyas, typically. By we I mean the meditation teachers of the world that have some background in Indic systems. Now the fact that there is a technical term from India that refers to this phenomenon tells you it's not an uncommon phenomenon and also hints that there may be an underlying theory and notions about what the best way to work with it is and so forth.

When people come to me with kriyas, they usually have a few basic questions. The first is, am I going to lose my marbles? Am I going to become weird? Am I going to go insane? Is this safe, what's happening? So I typically say, nothing to worry about, not an uncommon phenomenon. You're not going crazy. We've got a word for it.

You're not the first person to experience this. So I sort of reassure them that it's part of the path sometimes. The problem with the kriyas is, or the problem, let's say, with talking about the kriyas, like I am now, is that it's a little bit of a lose-lose situation. If I don't talk about it, people don't know about it and what to do about it. But if I do talk about it, people either are afraid, oh my God, what would I do if that happened to me? Or they develop cravings. If that hasn't happened to me yet, what's wrong with my meditation? So the most important thing is not to develop cravings or aversions. Some people experience this, some people don't.

It's not a barrier to progress, neither is it a sine qua non for progress. It just happens to some people. Next thing they usually want to know is, well, should I try to suppress those movements or should I go with them? My advice is typically try both. You can learn from both of those situations.

You can learn from trying to not allow it to happen, and you can learn by just, OK, give it permission to happen. Then the next logical question is, well, why is it happening? What does it mean? Here I like to use a model that's derived from the U Ba Khin lineage of Burmese Vipassana. In their way of thinking about this phenomenon, there is the deep mind, the subconscious mind, which is called the aggregate of sankharas, that's in Sanskrit, or in the Pali language they're called sankhara. These are the forces that are the habit forces within a human being.

They can be positive or negative, although there's a certain connotation that being at the mercy of any unconscious force is in some ways a negative, even if it's a good habit,

because it's a groove that drives one's perceptions and behaviors. The model that they use is that the meditation purifies consciousness by breaking up these sankharas, by smoothing out the channels that constrain our behavior, these grooves. So when a groove starts to break up, it may initially percolate up to the surface as a sensation in the body, perhaps a very subtle sensation in the body. The idea is that when you have body sensations and you have a complete experience of the body sensation, meaning that you experience a body sensation in a concentrated, sensorially clear, and equanimous state, or put alternatively, when you have a mindful experience of a body sensation, physical or emotional, it won't impart any grooves into the unconscious. But if you don't have a mindful experience of pleasant and unpleasant sensations, then they will impart grooves into the unconscious. And since we have thousands and thousands of sensations every day, big and small, and since most people don't have a very high level of baseline mindful awareness, those sensations are constantly imparting grooves, sankharas. Well, as we meditate, those grooves start to break up.

And when they break up, they sort of reverse the process. They were imparted by sensations in the past. Now they start to come up as sensations in the present. But before they come all the way up to surface, where they can be observed and completed in the present, and therefore their influence from the past wiped out, before that happens, they may hit a kind of vulnerable area in the semi-conscious part of the body and cause the body to move spontaneously.

So that's a model for why it's a purification process. What to do to optimize the purification? Well, if you can detect the sensations that underlie the urge of the body to move, if you can detect them, you can have a complete experience of them, and you'll discover that the body won't be driven to move. One of the reasons to explore not moving is that that may make it easier to detect the underlying sensations as they're coming up. However, it is by no means the case that you can always detect those subtle sensations that are driving the Kriya movement. In that case, it's okay. Just have a complete experience of the Kriya itself, the more surface sensation of the body moving and so forth. That's the best you can do at that time, and that's fine. So that's the basic model for why these things happen and what to do about them.

Kriyas & the Cloud of Unknowing ~ Shinzen Young

What is the most fascinating thing about meditation? One of the fascinating things about meditation for me is its universality. If you think of the enormous diversity of cultures and doctrines and philosophies around the world, it's rather extraordinary that when it comes down to the kinds of experiences that people have when they meditate, it's more or less the same all around the world. Certain basic things happen that seem to be quite independent of cultures, and even of the underlying doctrines and theologies and worldview of the practitioners. An interesting case of this is with regards to the phenomenon of kriyas. Kriya is something that is well known in the meditative systems that come from India or are influenced by India. It's spontaneous movements that can be at one end very mild and subtle, and at the other end bizarre and intense, and anything in between.

It's spontaneous movements that are looked upon as a releasing process. There's a fascinating book that was written maybe in the 15th century, something like that. It was written in English, but that would mean it was written in Middle English, Chaucerian English, pre-Shakespeare English.

The book is called *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and you can read it in a modern English translation. There have been many made. I like the one that was done by my friend, Father William Johnston, who is a Catholic Jesuit priest and very long-term practitioner of Zen meditation. He's got a nice translation, and because he has experience, he is qualified, I think, to translate these texts. There's this fascinating book. It's anonymous.

It's small. It was probably written back in the 1400s or 1500s, called *The Cloud of Unknowing*. What's interesting is it's used by the Catholic Church, but it's also used by some Protestants, at least the Anglican community, what we would call Episcopalian in the United States, certainly makes use of it. In fact, it's a kind of English spiritual classic. When I was first doing meditation in Japan, when I was being trained in the early 70s at Mount Koya, and I was undergoing a hundred-day isolation practice, I kept that book by me, actually, as a kind of inspiration, even though I was doing Buddhist practice, because it seemed very germane to what I was experiencing. You might wonder what the somewhat strange word, unknowing, means. Well, unknowing is the process of having equanimity with the need to know, letting go of the need to know so that you can know in a new way, an intuitive spiritual way. So, very suggestive, interesting title.

St. Thomas Aquinas, who is the standard authority on philosophy in the Catholic Church, said, I hope I'm not chopping the Latin too bad, *Deum tamquam per ignorantiam cognoscimus*. We know God directly through a very special kind of not knowing. *The Cloud of Unknowing* is a sort of step-by-step manual for how to do this. In there, there is a clear description of Kriyas.

Now, mind you, we're talking something like 15th century, we're talking Western culture, we're talking a completely Christian environment, we're talking about people that would have known little, if anything, about India, certainly would not be at all familiar with any Indic concepts regarding spiritual practice. But that book, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, has a clear description of the phenomenon of Kriyas. And I just thought that's like fascinating. Clearly, the person that wrote the book was what is called a spiritual director. That means he was in charge of guiding people in their meditation practice, and he saw this phenomenon happening. What's interesting is that he points out that people have a tendency to think that these strange movements and idiosyncratic sort of gestures and whimsical forms of behavior and whatever are a sign of spiritual progress. It's like, apparently in that day, people thought that this proves that the Spirit is within you or something like that.

The author of The Cloud of Unknowing was totally contemptuous of that point of view and pointed out essentially what I mentioned in my first segment about the Kriyas, which is that the name of the game is to neither desire them nor suppress them. You just have to sort of let them do their thing. It's just fascinating to me how there's a kind of universality across time and space with regards to the types of phenomena that come up when we practice and also with regards to how mature or immature people are about these types of phenomena. They tend to be either mature or immature in similar ways. They tend to have effective ways of dealing with things or non-effective ways of dealing with things in more or less similar ways and so forth. So anyway, I think if you're on the spiritual path, you might enjoy reading that book, The Cloud of Unknowing.

Leonard Cohen's "Love Itself" - Part 2 of 2 ~ Shinzen Young

作词作曲 编曲 混音 母带 混音师 王源演唱 混音 母带 混音师 王源
The light came through the window
Straight from the sun above
So inside my little room
There plunged a rays of love
And streams of light clearly saw
The dust you seldom see
Out of which the nameless makes
A name for one like me
I'll try to say a little more
Love went on and on
Until it reached an open door
And love itself
Love itself was gone
All busy in the sunlight
The flecks did float and dance
And I was tumbled up with them
In form their circumstance
I'll try to say a little more
Love went on and on
Until it reached an open door
And love itself
Love itself was gone
Then I came back from where I'd been
My room had looked the same
But there was nothing left between
The nameless and the name
All busy in the sunlight
The flecks did float and dance
And I was tumbled up with them
In form their circumstance
I'll try to say a little more
Love went on and on
Until it reached an open door
And love itself
Love itself was gone
Love itself
Love itself was gone
Zither Harp

Leonard Cohen, Sasaki Roshi, & "Love Itself" - Part 1 of 2 ~

Shinzen Young

A number of years ago, at a retreat in Ithaca, New York, Leonard told me that he was going to retire from music. And then, a few years later, he came out of retirement. And he came out with a CD that he called Ten New Songs, which of course sort of fits, right? They're new songs.

He came out of retirement. And the fifth cut on that CD blows me away. The whole album is dedicated to, quote, our teacher, Joshua Sasaki Roshi. Inside the works of Leonard Cohen, which are known all over the world, of course in the United States, even more so in Canada, where he comes from.

He's got a house in Montreal, where he grew up. And very much in Europe, especially France. His works are known all over the world. But what isn't known is that they are peppered with inside allusions to the teachings of Sasaki Roshi. The fifth cut on the Ten New Songs is called Love Itself. And it's Leonard's version of the Taisho, or Zen talk, of Sasaki Roshi. Unless somebody pointed out, you wouldn't realize that.

So Sasaki Roshi has only one talk. There is zero. But zero is inherently unstable.

Because it consists of all of the positive and negative in the universe. Therefore, inevitably, it breaks apart into expansion and contraction. Expansion only knows how to expand.

Contraction only knows how to contract. So in between, they create a vibration called space. And that vibration is further nurtured and matured in the cleft between them. And it evolves into a feeling, thinking self. That either knows it just came from zero, in which case we call it an enlightened self, or it doesn't. If it knows where it just came from, it knows to give it the positive that it received from father back to father and the negative that it received from mother back to the mother. Therefore, it disappears. There's nothing in between father and mother anymore.

And they come back together to create a new state of zero. Oh, you don't understand. Okay, well I'll try to say a little more than he says exactly the same thing. And then I see you still don't understand.

Well, let me see if I can say some more. But you see, each time he says it, he lives it. So he could say it forever. He lives that cycle. And if you sense that he's living that cycle, you could listen, you could hear him say it forever.

So anyway, you're going to see in this song, there's a refrain. It imitates the style of Sasaki Roshi, but there's more to it. Sasaki Roshi talks about this little room of space where father and mother vibrate. And they come into contrast, you reunite, come into contrast, reunite.

He always describes it as like a private little room where there's only the two sides of the source. Now many of you have experienced that there are different flavors of flow, different flavors of impermanence. I look upon the expansion and contraction as the fundamental flavors. When a wave comes up on the shore, the top of the wave is expanding, the bottom of the wave is contracting. And in the cleft, as they're sheared apart, is born all this foam. So there's wavy flow, there's vibratory flow, which is analogous to the foam.

But underlying it all is this expansion and contraction. But often, the most prominent experience of flow or change or impermanence is a kind of scintillating, misty, bubbly kind

of flow. And it's very blissful, often. And your whole body and mind and the external world can dissolve into it.

And it's like trillions of little moats of dust, sort of, just shimmering. Some of you have had that experience. Because it's blissful, there is the danger of being attached to it. But if you don't become attached to that, then it all sort of flatlines into zero.

All the little vibrations go back to the source. Father and mother come together and there is shalom bimromav, the peace of heaven. So if having that champagne bubbly experience of flow is like being made love to, in a sense, what's beyond that is the gone. And what's beyond the gone? Well, after gone, there's no place to go but to come back to self and world. But to see it in a different way, for having had that experience. And to do this over and over and over again until there is no fundamental separation between the experience of the source and ordinary experience. They're on a continuum. There's not a duality between the deepest, transcendent, empty, timeless, spaceless cessation. There's not a duality between that and any ordinary experience. They're on a continuum. So that's living nirvana. There's nothing in between one's humanity and that which is beyond the human.

And that would pretty much describe the world of a master. So there is the formless, there is the form, and then there is them not being fundamentally separate. So in the end, if you want to experience what Sasaki Roshi calls true love, honto no ai, use that expression, says everybody wants true love, but they don't realize that true love is zero. True love is what happens if you're willing to let go of the most celestial form of love other than true love. So you'd have to even let go of the message of the spirit. So understanding this, you are in a position to completely understand Leonard's song called Love Itself.

Lofty, Homey and Quirky Wisdom Voices ~ Shinzen Young

What is wisdom? The wisdom voice is the wisdom activity percolating up to the surface, communicating in the only way that it can, through image or talk, talk in this case, and that's Prajna.

That's what is meant by Prajna. It simply wells up and takes that form, or you're channeling it. People say, you know, well, I got out of the car, I moved without thinking.

It was a movement that just happened. So you can have thinking without thinking. It's a thought that just happens, and it comes from the same spontaneous place, and it will talk to us that way, and then eventually it will start to come out of our lips also. If it's lofty, then it's Indic style. Different cultures have different wisdom voices. If it's homey, then it's the Zen style, down to earth. If it's quirky and humorous, that's the Jewish wisdom voice.

Lucid Dreaming and "Five Ways" Mindfulness Meditation ~

Shinzen Young

Lucid dreaming is the ability to know you're dreaming when you're dreaming. All indications are that it's quite trainable, that the average person can actually learn how to do this with the proper training. There's some great websites on the internet that will teach you how to do it. The question is, if you're applying the basic mindfulness system in a dream, what are the sensory categories that you're dealing with? Are the sights that you see in the dream actually to be labeled as image? How about what seems to be touch and so forth? Are the sounds really sound or are they talk? It does sort of make sense as a question because what's going on in the dream is clearly not based on external physical stimuli usually.

It's very easy. I can tell you from my own experience, applying the five ways, working with touch, sight, sound, feel, image, talk, et cetera, essentially you can consider the dreaming world to be the same as the waking world. If it seems to you that you're looking at an external sight, even though that's generated obviously from the inside because you're dreaming, you name it as sight.

The dreaming world is like the waking world. There are touch, sight, sounds. There can be internal talk. Theoretically, there could even be mental images, sort of images inside images in a sense. The upshot is that consider the dreaming world to be like the waking world and apply the techniques as you would in the waking world. Essentially, what happens to meditators is that whoever they are in their waking life, that's who they are in their dream life. Since they are meditators in their waking life, they can also be meditators in their dream life. The same techniques that you would apply in the waking life, you apply in the dream life.

It just carries over exactly. I label the things that I see in my dreams, if I'm intentionally meditating in my dream and I see something, I don't label it as image. I label it as sight.

It's amazing. If I physically contact an object, I'll be thinking to myself, and of course that thinking is talk, right? I'll be thinking to myself, okay, I'm dreaming, so I'll touch this object. What happens? Okay, well, it's touch. It seems like touch in the external world. But then when I remember that I'm dreaming, I say to myself, oh, but since this is dream, actually, I should be able to put my hand through this solid object.

As soon as I have that talk, I can't. The solid object just sort of becomes like clay or something like that. I can actually ghostly move my hand through it, which I can't do in the physical world.

So that is a difference. But it's still touch until it starts to behave weird. But I just take that as a sign of flow. It's much easier to get flow phenomenon.

Normally, you can't get too much flow phenomenon in touching a physical wall. You can get a little bit of it, but the sight and the touch is usually fairly solidified in the waking world, unless you're in a really, really deep state. But in the dream world, at least for myself, when I remember that I'm dreaming, then the touch and the sight just instantly melts and turns into flow and whatever.

I've also discovered that... Well, I consider smells and tastes to be sort of part of touch. You certainly can get smell and taste in a dream.

It can be very interesting, actually. I was once in this dream and I was climbing this tree. I said to myself, okay, let's make this tree edible. I want this tree to be made of Turkish delight. And it immediately turned into Turkish delight. I started to eat vast quantities of the Turkish delight tree that I was climbing.

I could taste it. It tasted just like Turkish delight in the real world, except it was in the dream and there was a certain degree of control because you could just think it and it sort of becomes what you want. The point in meditating in your dreams, by the way, is not to play games like what I just described. The point is that when you're in the dream state, you're deep in consciousness and it's a wonderful venue to explore the standard techniques.

They all work. Any of the five ways you can apply just the way you do in the waking world, you can apply it in the dreaming world. And then you're making productive use of that dream time. It's optimal use of your time. You're getting meditation mileage out of it. So that would be my answer to that question.

Maximizing Psycho-Spiritual Growth with an Algorithmic

Approach (Windows & Walls) ~ Shinzen Young

We have four themes that are in the rectilinear configurations. So you work with your ordinary states, physical, emotional sensations, external sights, external sounds, internal mental pictures, internal talk. So that's a whole approach, a whole theme, and no touch, sight, sound, feel, image, talk. It's abbreviated in there. We also have a way of enjoying restful states.

So you can note the corresponding restful states, physical relaxation, and so forth, relaxation, light, silence, peace, quiet. You can start there. You can start there.

You can start anywhere. Now we've got explore dynamic states. So you can note flow. You can note vanishings.

There's another way to work with restful experience, which is the do nothing. It's got like four themes, but there's actually six procedures, each of which has various versions, as you'll remember. So you can start anywhere, you can go anywhere. Well one way you might use it is you just pick one technique, one version, and that's all you're going to do. In that case, this represents a Sears Roebuck catalog of spiritual practices, and you decide to make one purchase, and that's it. So maybe you like noting restful states. So that's what you do, and you don't worry about all this other stuff. Another way to go about it is, well, you like several of them, and you arrange them in a workout sequence for yourself, like a nautilus cycle.

Each one of these is a piece of workout equipment. Now those of you that were in the PM group process today, I gave you the full psycho-spiritual nautilus cycle. We started by noting ordinary states, sort of like, okay, we start at the coarse level of ordinary experience, untangle. Then we, okay, let's note the corresponding restful states, thinned out, a little more pleasant, because we're a little more settled now. Okay, now there could be flow in the ordinary or the restful, so we note the flow. Then we note the vanishings. Now we've got quite a momentum, so if we do nothing, there's likelihood that there'll be concentration, clarity, equanimity, even though we're not trying to make it be there, and indeed even a likelihood that there'll be quite a bit of restfulness and energy, even though we're not in any way intentionally doing anything. So we sort of like, okay, this is what in Catholicism would be called infused contemplation, more passive contemplation.

You're not doing anything anymore, you're letting the source do you. That should take you into that. Where do you go from that? Where do you go after crucifixion? Only one place, resurrection. So you reanimate in a more positive way by a focus on positive. Now you could start back here again, right? It's a cycle. If you come back here, now you're just noting what is, but because you've been through this whole thing, what is is probably a little better than what it was an hour ago. And then you just cycle around, and cycle around, and cycle around.

And it hits all the psycho-spiritual muscle groups. So the one I just showed went ordinary, rest, flow, vanishing, do nothing, positive, and then you can go back to ordinary. This was designed to make it easy for a person to interactively guide you.

Once you have internalized these categories, if something comes up in the real world that blows you away, all you've got to do is call me or any facilitator that I've trained in this system, and you will be back on track lickety split. I mean within a half an hour. I don't care how big it is.

I mean I don't care how big it is. This gives a standard vocabulary that a facilitator can be there to remind you. Most of us are not going to do the monastery thing. So how are you going to get the industrial strength experiences that people get when they expose themselves to the intensity of traditional monastic practice? How you're going to get it is, okay, you're not going to go to a monastery, but is the monastery going to come to you? You bet. You'll have an injury. You'll have an illness. You'll have something happen. You'll be betrayed. You will be betrayed. You will be mugged. Stuff is going to happen.

Stuff is going to happen. When it happens, that's a monastery if you know how to use it as a monastery. But it may be a little hard to remember that you can do that, and it may be quite hard to remember exactly how to do that on your own. But if you call me or someone like me, and if you're already familiar with this system, we can get you on track very quickly. I do it every day.

People call me. I just got mugged in L.A. at gunpoint. My son just got arrested.

My best friend just committed suicide. Okay, so they have to talk about it a little bit, and then we get down to work. That person is now in as intense a training situation as anybody ever put themselves through in the name of practice. And because there's an external person leading them through, they're able to get profound, permanent growth out of that.

So that's why I created this thing, to be something that you could sort of internalize, or you could internalize, that is optimal for an algorithmic approach to optimize your experience that you might not remember how to do, but a professionally trained facilitator does know how to do, and will take you through. And that's how it works. So let's say you start with ordinary states. Well, maybe there's a lot of flow, or maybe there's a lot of vanishing. So okay, let's explore that. Or maybe you start with restful states.

You want to start there, and things get pretty restful. So okay, now let's drop the efforting. Let's do nothing. And then, well, where to go from here? Well, a natural place to go from nothing whatsoever is to a new good something, et cetera, et cetera. So you loop and branch.

You can start anywhere, depending on what comes up. So another way that you can use this is to sort of loop and branch. That makes it more complicated. Don't have to do that, but it gives you flexibility, and that gives you the ability to optimally deal with both windows of opportunity and walls that may challenge you. Even if you don't use it as a looping and branching, optimizing algorithm, when something comes up in your life, and you call for an interactive guided session, and now, okay, we're going to take this catastrophe, and we're going to make it into your monastery, this is how we'll work. I'll take you through the algorithm, and with a lot more bells and whistles than are on here, because I've got all these special exercises. If the standard stuff doesn't work, my looping and branching algorithm is huge. So you sort of dock your little computer program inside my huge computer program, or one of my facilitators, and we optimize your experience, and then you're going to be able to get that maximum psycho-spiritual growth out of the doo-doo of life.

Meditation Teacher's Qualifications and Liberation Experiences ~

Shinzen Young

People sometimes ask, how can I know if a teacher is really qualified? How can I know if a teacher has had a liberation experience? Well, actually, merely having a liberation experience doesn't necessarily make you qualified to be a teacher. And not having liberation doesn't necessarily exclude you from being a good teacher.

I use two criteria to sort of guess whether a person has had a liberation experience or not. Notice that I say guess. I can never be really sure, but I can make a pretty good guess. The two criteria that I use are body language and personal behavior. Now, the body language is fairly easy.

All you've got to do is look at them, listen to them, and so forth. The personal behavior piece is hard, because you'd have to hang out with them. You'd have to actually be their wife or their secretary or their husband or their child, something like that, to really know the personal behavior. You'd have to be close to that person over a long period of time. Knowing the personal behavior is only something you can do in a relative way, unless you happen to have a very special close relationship. Maybe a familial relationship. So it's a combination of the flow of emptiness and impermanence expressing itself in that person's body language, voice, gaze, and so forth. That plus their personal behavior would be the two criteria I would look for to judge levels of enlightenment. Even then, like I say, I can only guess, but I can be fairly confident in those guesses.

There's a tricky thing, though, about the body language piece. I'll tell you an interesting story. I was once driving in Santa Monica, California with a senior student of mine. If you don't come from California, you might not know, but there's a lot of homeless people in Santa Monica. In Southern California, they make it a comfortable place for homeless people.

They're known for that. So there's all these homeless people there. We saw this homeless person, and we looked at each other. It was one of those weird psychic moments where we knew we had had exactly the same thought. We had, actually.

We knew it. The thought was, if you clean this guy up, put him in white clothes, put him in front of an audience, and don't let him say anything, but just let him sort of do his thing, he would have something very close to the body language of an enlightened master. Now, that may be very shocking and off-putting for some people to hear. Notice I said the body language, not the mental state. Apparently, a combination of mental illness and harsh life had more or less driven the ego out of his body. A kind of pseudo-enlightenment, actually, but certainly not enlightenment. You can have somebody that has the body language of no-self, but not really have a classical, clear enlightenment-type consciousness inside of them.

Now you see why vibe is not enough. Then there has to be the behavior. The behavior of that person was of a homeless, helpless, ineffectual street person living by begging. So that's not the behavior, typically, of a qualified teacher. In terms of, well, okay, besides, sort of, is this person capable of dealing with the enlightenment issue, how do you know they're qualified? Well, the very first thing that pops into my head if somebody asks me, how do you know if a teacher is qualified, is look at the students. The virtue of a teacher is only in the results that that teacher can get with students, as far as I'm concerned, because there aren't any teachers. There's just the activity of teaching. And so what's the effect? How are their students doing? Somebody once asked Tony Robbins what his qualifications were for doing what he does. He's a, you may know, a well-known self-help speaker.

And he said, because, I don't know, maybe there was an implication, hey, you don't have any degree, you don't have any credibility, what gives you the right to tell people what to do? And he said, well, I have a degree in results. I like that answer. That's what I look for. By those standards, there are some very enlightened teachers, very enlightened individuals who are not very good teachers. And there may be some teachers that haven't had a whole lot of enlightenment or haven't had the deep experiences of some of the great masters, but they get really good results with people. And they can deal with anything that a student is likely to go through. So I would say those are the things that come to my mind.

Look for body language. And maybe that doesn't make a whole lot of sense to you. You don't know what I'm talking about. It's something you develop a sensitivity to.

Unfortunately, it's a little bit of a catch-22. You don't know what to look for until you start to become a little bit that way yourself. Basically what you're looking to see is, is there a flow of empty energy that's animating this person? That's the body language. But that alone is not enough because they might just be crazy. So then you have to look for behavior. Are they a mensch? Are they an ordinary good person? And then what kind of results do they get with people? Those would be some things that come to my mind apropos the issue of teaching.

Mindfulness & Psychotherapy ~ Shinzen Young

When Buddhism went from India into China, it encountered the indigenous culture of China and the indigenous philosophies of China through the cross-fertilization of Indic Mahayana Buddhism and the Taoist-Confucianist culture of China was born a new direction in Buddhism called Chan or Zen. There's historical precedent for Buddhism coming into a culture and interacting with what already exists there to produce interesting new results. Now we have Buddhism coming into the Western world, all three vehicles of Buddhism, mindfulness practice which is representative of the small vehicle, Zen which is representative of the large vehicle, and the tantric practices which are representative of the diamond vehicle.

It's all coming here and we would expect that it would interact with Western culture, many facets of Western culture. One of them is neuroscience and another one is physics. Those are areas of particular interest. There's also the religious interactions, specifically with Christianity, primarily Catholicism, and with Judaism now. Then there's the interaction that it is having with psychotherapy. A hundred years ago, William James predicted that within a hundred years, Westerners would be learning their psychotherapy from Buddhists, an amazing prophetic statement. Because at this point in history, I would say that the dialogue between mindfulness practice and Western therapy is central to therapy. It's not just some marginal thing that's being done by a few people with special interest. It's the hot topic, which is utterly amazing, because I can remember reading books when I was a kid in the 50s, books by psychiatrists and so forth, who basically pathologized Buddhist meditation, considered it to be a form of mental illness.

And now, within 50 years, we're talking about major influence from Buddhism into therapy, especially from mindfulness into therapy, particularly into the more hard-nosed forms of therapy, like cognitive behavioral therapy. This is just amazing that this is occurring. So it's a natural question. What is the relationship between these two modalities? It's the question, the central question, that is now being investigated. We don't have the answers yet.

But I can make some conjectures. If I had to summarize the difference, with an oversimplification, I would say that in some sense, Western therapy and mindfulness practice seem to be rather similar. At least if you look at the key concepts and the buzzwords, they're both in favor of being aware as opposed to being unconscious. They both want you to be aware of the influences from the depths that may be influencing the surface now. They both ask you not to hold on inappropriately to things from the past, but to move forward into the present without holding complexes from the past. They both ask you to not be conflicted, not fight with yourself. They both talk about having aha experiences, insight experiences, and so forth.

So from a certain perspective, they seem to hold rather similar ideas. Where I would say the primary difference, if I were allowed to oversimplify things, is that although the ideas are the same, or roughly similar, let's put it this way, mindfulness practice implements those ideas at a much finer time-space scale and at a much more intense level. So that mindfulness practice has a quantitative difference, and that quantitative difference is so great that it leads to a qualitative difference.

So similar type things, but done at a very fine time scale, second by second. The holdings that you let go of in mindfulness practice are second by second inappropriate holdings, as opposed to the holdings that you let go of in psychological practice, which is from last year or last decade or your early childhood or so forth. Those are sort of macro holdings. Mindfulness asks for letting go of micro holdings. The clarity that you're asked to develop in mindfulness is a moment-by-moment ability to resolve experiences into feel-image-talk and to resolve the feel into a spectrum of flavors and resolve the flavors into individual

location arisings. It's a whole other level of being aware of what you're experiencing or, quote, knowing what you're feeling in that moment.

It's like a totally different level of resolution and detail. And the way of reaching the unconscious differs. Typically in psychotherapy, I call it the dredge-up. You just approach. You sort of reach down and you dredge up one or two important pivotal things to look at, whereas in mindfulness practice, it's a trickle-down. The awareness trickles down through all of consciousness and the subconscious rewires itself without the surface even needing to know, and that's global. That's throughout the entirety of consciousness. So I would say, roughly speaking, that the basic ideals are the same, but because mindfulness implements them at a more, a finer scale and with much greater intensity, this is a quantitative difference that leads to a qualitative difference.

However, the differences are complementary. One needs to know the brick and mortar structure of the building in addition to knowing the atomic structure. If you just know the atomic structure, you don't have the whole picture.

You need to know gross anatomy as well as cellular histology. So the two pictures complement. For the large structure of personality and behavior, that's the specialty of psychotherapy.

For the transcendence of limited existence and suffering, for insight into the nature of all selves as opposed to insight into the nature of a particular self, for understanding the nature of all self, mindfulness is the specialized vehicle. So it's good. They complement each other. They give different scale picture of the same phenomenon. So you get the big picture, the gross anatomy, so to speak, clarified, and the behaviors dealt with with the therapy. And then you get the microstructure, the spiritual essence, dealt with through the mindfulness, and you have a perfect complementarity.

Mindfulness & the Categories of Sensory Experience ~ Shinzen

Young

This is how I like to classify basic sensory experience. When I have people learn mindfulness techniques, I have them note their experience based on these categories.

This system was designed with two goals in mind. One is that it would tend to lead to insights in meditators because they can see how these different sensory systems interrelate. So that's sort of a pragmatic point of view that it's convenient for people having aha experiences when they track their sensory events. The other goal was to create a system based on contrasts that would be convenient for study with what's called fMRI, that's functional magnetic resonance imaging. When you study the neural correlates of experience with fMRI, you can't actually image an experience. All that you can do is image two contrasting states. So I gave a lot of consideration as to what would be the most useful contrasts, both in terms of image studying that scientists might want to do and in terms of what's likely to bring about insight experiences for the meditators who are being studied by those scientists. So with those two goals in mind, I created this system. I call it the basic states.

The right-left gives you a contrast between a more objective side of experience versus a more subjective side of experience. For example, there are external physical sounds in the world, but there's also the internal sound of your self-talk. Sometimes when external sound expands, internal talk might go away. And by watching that contrast, you can see some interesting interactions. So this would be in an auditory domain.

I'll get to these guys in a minute. Analogously, there are external sites in the world, but there's also the internal visual experience of your mental images. When you're thinking of people, places, physical objects, when you have memory, plan, fantasy, or your eyes are closed and you think about where you are or how your body appears, you're having visual thoughts.

So image is the more subjective side, and the external sites are the more objective side of visual experience. Then there's somatic experience, in other words, body experience. I believe that it's very important that people develop the ability to detect when their body has emotional-type sensations. When a person experiences anger, fear, sadness, embarrassment, impatience, disgust, interest, joy, love, gratitude, humor, smile, and so forth, there are usually body sensations, distinctive body sensations associated with that. So the real juice of emotional experience, I would claim, is not so much in the internal talk and mental image, although that of course is important, but it's the emotional-type sensations that give the strong valence or coloration or power to emotional experiences. So I think it's good that we have a word in English that means body sensation that seems emotional to a given individual at a given time.

There is no such word that has that meaning in English, neither is there any such word in any language that I'm familiar with. So I arbitrarily assigned the word feel to mean affective somesthesia. That would be a very fancy way of saying emotional body sensations.

Affective is a Latin phrase meaning emotional. Somesthesia is body sensation, body experience. So I use feel for that. That would represent a somewhat subjective side of the body relative to touch, which is everything else, all the other ordinary experiences in the body, itches and aches, pressures and pains, sleepy sensations, ordinary breathing, ordinary pulse, that kind of thing, is more of an it. If you have pain, take that as a touch. If the pain causes anger, fear, sadness, those reactions, those body sensations I would call feel. And in

point of fact, feel, image, talk represent a reactive system. They can react to touch, sight, sound.

They're also a proactive system. They can go off on their own and spin memory, plan, fantasy and so forth. You have a fundamental contrast between auditory, visual and somatic.

And then across here you have a somewhat more objective side and a somewhat more subjective side. Now a third level of contrast is between the ordinary sensory activity, touch, sight, sound, feel, image, talk, and corresponding restful states. For example, when you're focusing on external sound, it might happen that there's not any sound. That's an interesting experience. That's a restful state and you can note that as silence. What's even more interesting is if you happen to be focusing on internal talk and it goes away, well, I have a term for that experience.

I call that quiet. So you have some restful states here. If you don't have any images, you can be aware of mental blank. Or even if you have images, there's a way that I teach people to focus on a background of blank. You can defocus your external sight. Your eyes are still open, but you're just sort of letting light in. That's a restful state corresponding to external sight that's used by many different people.

Samurai, for example, used to intentionally soft focus their eyes in practicing martial arts. So that's another restful state. The contrast with sight, I call that light. And then contrasting with touch is the physical relaxation of the body. And contrasting with feel is its absence, which I call emotional peace. So this gives us a contrast between somatic visual auditory, a contrast between subjective reactive proactive versus objective experience, and then a contrast between ordinary experience and corresponding pleasant restful states. So these are the basic states. And I build different mindfulness systems based on these states.

Mindfulness and Behavioural Change ~ Shinzen Young

How can we apply the classificatory system to behavior change? One of the ways that this classificatory system can be applied is towards behavior change. Often when we think about meditation, we think of it in terms of achieving certain pleasant subjective states or certain wisdom insights. Definitely that is a side of the meditative endeavor. But I think that it is extremely important that objective behavior change be included in the stated goals of the meditative path. What do I mean tangibly by objective behavior change? Well, I mean things like one's habit around food or substances. If one is using tobacco or other drugs or alcohol and one wishes to reduce that or eliminate that, that would be a behavior change. Eating the right amounts of the right things, etc., that would be a behavior change. One of my biggest issues behaviorally is a tendency to procrastinate and to avoid responsibilities. So being more responsible, that's a behavior change. It turns out that there's a basic principle for applying meditation to behavior change.

And that principle is external behaviors are controlled by sensory events. For example, let's say that you would like to stop smoking. You decide, I'm going to stop smoking. Now what happens? Well, you have the urge to smoke.

But what's the urge to smoke? Well, sensorially, you are having withdrawal from nicotine. That creates uncomfortable touch. You feel nervous, frightened, irritated.

That's uncomfortable feel. You have images, mental pictures of smoking. And when you have that mental picture of smoking, again, you get a pleasant feel.

A smile comes on your face. You have talk about how uncomfortable you are. But you also have talk about, well, maybe I should start again. I really deserve it.

Blah, blah, blah. So some combination of touch, feel, image, talk, either pleasant or unpleasant, is creating the carrot and the stick sensory events that are your urge to smoke again. The carrot part is, smoke again and you'll have this pleasant feel.

Your talk is telling you that and the image is reinforcing it. The stick part is, if you keep abstaining, you're going to have these unpleasant touches and these unpleasant feels. So the urge is coming up tangibly in terms of four sensory events. If you can untangle those, meaning keep track of them, then they won't crisscross and multiply into a force that you cannot resist.

In other words, if there's ten units of force in touch, likewise feel, image, talk, that is driving you to smoke again, by what mathematical formula do we compute the aggregate force that is in that urge? Well, I would claim that if you can keep these elements distinct in awareness as they are arising in real time, moment by moment, that you'll have exactly what's there. Ten plus ten plus ten plus ten. So that's four times ten or forty. If you cannot do that, they will crisscross, cross-multiply, creating the impression of ten times ten times ten times ten, or a force of ten thousand that you cannot resist.

Applying mindfulness to these will reduce the power of the urge and make it easier for you to not give in to that urge. Also, if you have equanimity, if you open to these things, you'll discover that actually what you thought was ten is actually just two. Most of the power in these things is in the resistance to the things. That's being multiplied, say, by five in each case. Really, once you have equanimity, so you reduce your grasping around the sensory event to one-fifth of what it was before, now you've just got two plus two plus two plus two. So that's like eight, and the urge is, you can stay with it until it passes, and you can do that over and over again until the urge doesn't come up again. So that's the basic meditative principle behind behavior change, as applied to a specific of resisting the urge to reuse tobacco. But you can substitute any behavior that you're trying to get over, and the

principle will be the same.

It will either just involve the subjective system of feel-image-talk, or it will involve in some way touch plus feel-image-talk, in other words, body plus mind. Now, there's another basic principle in applying meditation in general and mindfulness in specific to behavior change. What I just described, the first basic principle, which is to deconstruct the urge meditatively, if you attempt to apply that principle, it will either work or it won't, meaning that you'll either achieve the behavior change you want, or you'll fail to achieve it. It is not guaranteed that the mindfulness alone will achieve the behavior change.

So if you attempt to apply the first principle, which is, see that the object of behavior is being controlled by sensory events, and then you deconstruct those sensory events with concentration, clarity, equanimity skills, that's the first principle, if you attempt to apply that first principle and it works, great, you've done your job. It is possible that it might not work. It's insufficient. So the second principle says if that doesn't work, then you have to go for an external accountability structure of some sort. That means you have to go to a counselor, a therapist, a 12-step program, a sponsor, a friend, a something that's on the outside that is giving you manageable assignments in changing your behavior. So you combine that external accountability structure with the continuing of your meditative approach.

And that, with time, should get the job done. For example, in my own case, one of my habits, which was a pretty deep one, a 10-year marijuana abuse situation, literally evaporated without the tiniest struggle, literally overnight, as the result of applying a mindfulness technique. On the other hand, another major behavioral struggle that I've had in my life, which is with procrastination and avoiding responsibility, well, I ended up having to have 18 months of psychotherapy with a psychiatrist, a real doctor, an MD.

And by the way, this wasn't all that long ago, maybe, I don't know, six years ago or so. So I needed to create for myself that accountability structure because the meditation alone wasn't doing it. However, the combined effect of the psychotherapy and my meditation practice was very strong, stronger than they would be individually, so they potentiated each other. And I've been having a lot more success with that than I ever thought possible.

Mindfulness, Cancer & Healing - 1 of 3 ~ Sat Dharam Kaur, N.D.

Interviews Shinzen Young

I'm speaking with Shinzen Yang, an internationally recognized teacher of mindfulness meditation. Thank you for agreeing to speak with me, Shinzen.

My pleasure. I'm interested in your recommendations for women who have been newly diagnosed with breast cancer or are recovering from breast cancer in terms of a meditation technique that may help them both to recover as much as possible from the disease and help them to heal in general. What would your recommendations be? There is a vast range of possible ways that you can focus your attention to deal with the situation of having breast cancer.

The way I like to analyze that situation is first to frame it within a broader context. What's true of breast cancer would be true actually of any kind of cancer. What's true of any kind of cancer would be true of any disease or health situation, including an injury if you were injured and had to go to the hospital.

In general, when one is facing some sort of health crisis of any kind, there are two broad ways that people use meditation to deal with that. Those are not mutually exclusive. One can do one, the other, or both, but I think it is important to realize the relationships between them and what they are. One way of meditating, and by meditating I just mean focusing in some systematic way. That's all I mean by meditating.

One way to meditate or focus in a systematic way has as its goal to influence the objective course of the healing, objectively. We want to diminish the cancer. We want to heal the wound quickly and so forth. I call that impacting the objective course of the healing. There are a wide range of procedures, different kinds of focuses, that are aimed at that goal. In our discussion before we started taping this interview, you talked about a number of approaches that you had studied that have history and background and so forth.

If we look at them, as I recall back, some of them were specifically aimed at, okay, there's going to be healing. There's going to be an actual change in your situation. The cancer is going to get smaller or something like that. Can you remind me what some of the approaches that were sort of along those lines are? One of the approaches was the approach of Bill Bengston, who worked with mice and humans, but he tried to teach university students how to heal cancers, tumors, and mice, and found that when those students were creating images in their minds of positive things that they wanted in their lives, and one of those images also being that all of the mice were cured and that they were toasting a glass of champagne together because all of the mice were cured, that that imaging and the repetitions of those images as they were holding the mice for an hour a day in a cage allowed them to actually, unbeknownst to them, cure those mice after about a month's time.

They thought at the end of the experiment that the experiment was a gullibility experiment, that every few days new mice were put in the cage who had smaller tumors, and they, at the end of the experiment, didn't believe actually that they had cured the mice, but it was their mental state at the time that seemed to have influenced the healing with those positive images they had. And this was an intentional creation of images. Right. Right. Okay, very good.

So that would be the goal. Are there other procedures that you can think of historically where the goal has been to change the object of course? Well, the Dr. Mears, Ainsley Mears

from Australia, he worked in the 1970s with his patients with meditation techniques for cancer. He was also a medical hypnotist.

And his technique was to create a sense of relaxation, to have the patient create a strong relaxation state, a stillness of mind, an observation of thought, and a very quiet, quietening process of the mind without any real imaging of, you know, I'm going to cure this disease. A change, right. Yeah. It was just to create this place of deep stillness. And he seems to have had a 10% success rate in curing cancer. When this was presented to people, was it presented as if you do this, it will have an impact on, positive impact on your cancer? That was sort of the stated goal. I know that while they were doing the meditation, they were not to focus on that in their mind. I think though that he became known at the time for this technique that was helping some people cure cancer. So the implication is if you do this calming and observing technique.

It may happen. What I would say is that, and I know that there's some other methods, one that I think you don't think very highly of where you try to visualize like Pac-Man eating up the... Yes. And in fact, Dr. Mears, one of his patients shrank her tumor by doing his technique about becoming completely still and quiet and relaxed. And he advised his patients to practice for an hour or two a day, actually. It was a long period of time. By the way, that is a significant point.

Yes. We're talking about a quick fix, trivial. But you want a significant change, you may have to put in a significant time and energy. And one of his patients practiced his technique, shrank her tumor, and then tried the Simonton technique of actually visualizing the cancer shrinking, visualizing the white blood cells attacking the cancer cells. Eating it like Pac-Man. And while she did that, the tumor came back. And then she abandoned that technique upon his recommendation, went back to the stilling, quieting technique, and the tumor shrank again. So that's a very interesting case.

Very good. When we look at the range of things out there, very often what will be talked about is, okay, if you focus in this way, it's going to cure your cancer or it's likely to cure your cancer or it's going to help bring an objective change in the situation. So I would consider that to be one basic model. There's another paradigm, another way to look at things, that complements that and can be used in parallel or perhaps in lieu of this, what we're talking about. The other paradigm says, my interest in learning this meditation technique is primarily to reduce the suffering that I experience due to this situation. And it may or may not have an objective impact, but it has a high probability of reducing the suffering, whether it has an objective impact or not. I think both approaches are equally valid.

But my sort of go-to approach personally, if I have to teach one or the other, is I'm going to teach you ways of focusing that will reduce your suffering. The reason for that is several fold. First, in a lot of the models that you and I talked about, the claim is that in fact the objective condition of the cancer has been caused by mental or emotional distress. That's a claim. I'm not going to comment on the validity of that claim, but that's commonly believed and even in standard medicine. Certainly it can be a contributing cause, maybe not the whole cause. I believe I could be wrong about this, but I think that the official position of the AMA, the American Medical Association, is that mental and emotional factors weigh in, in one way or another. And that's established medicine. To whatever extent the objective situation is actually the result of suffering—mental, emotional, what have you—to that extent, if we reduce suffering, then there'll be an impact on the objective situation.

Mindfulness, Cancer & Healing - 2 of 3 ~ Sat Dharam Kaur, N.D.

Interviews Shinzen Young

However, it may be that the object of situation is not caused by suffering or that that doesn't weigh very large, that other factors are large, and that there's not a cure. It doesn't get cured. You stay sick or you get worse.

There's also the term, the term of the disease, which is called the disease of the heart. There's not a cure. It doesn't get cured. You stay sick or you get worse. There's also the genetic factors, too, that may be just strongly weighted, not in favor of a cure.

That's right. What are you going to do? Well, now you can't actually maybe do something with gene therapy and what have you. But my point is that even if you had gene therapy, sooner or later, something's going to get you. If you learn the techniques that reduce your suffering, perhaps in addition to learning the techniques that are designed to specifically change the course. That's why I say that the two can go in parallel. You do whatever interventional medicine you do to change the course.

You use whatever mind-focusing techniques you can relate to, or consciousness-focusing techniques, better than that, to change the course, to actually objectively impact the disease, the health situation, the injury, whatever it may be. Let's do all of that, certainly. But there are these other things that we can do that are designed to do that as maybe a nice byproduct. But they're primarily designed to reduce suffering, no matter what's going on. Why do I like to start with that? Well, number one, it may have an impact objectively on the disease.

Number two, even if it doesn't, you're okay. Since sooner or later, something's going to happen that can't be changed. Often, when people are diagnosed with cancer, they're in a fear state for quite a while. So anything that will reduce that fear state is also going to be beneficial. I think you said that some of the researchers that you respect say that it's actually that fear state that may be a primary.

Right. Dr. Hammer is a German medical doctor who developed a medicine he calls German New Medicine, which is... German? German New Medicine, which is... Deutsche Neue Mediziner? I'm guessing. My German isn't that good.

He believes that all cancers are caused by an abrupt, unexpected shock that the person has gone through that needs to be resolved and expressed. They got hammered? They got hammered, that's right. He calls it a hammerhead.

Really? Hammer shirt, I think he calls it hammer shirt, yes. It's the resolution of that shock that he believes will help to promote healing. If we can reduce your suffering, it's good two ways. It may also improve your objective conditions. Many people, both in the alternative medicine and in standard medicine, would agree with that general premise.

But also, just in case nothing can help, this will help. Your physical discomfort doesn't go away, but your suffering does. I like the idea that a person would acquire at least one technique that will do that for them, because sooner or later they're going to need it. Let's talk about the techniques that reduce suffering. How do we suffer? We suffer because of uncomfortable physical sensations. We suffer because of uncomfortable emotional sensations. Both of those are body events. We suffer because of negative mental images and negative judgmental talk.

We might say that there are uncomfortable physical and emotional body states and uncomfortable visual and auditory mental states. Sure. In Dr. Hammer's model, those would be all there from that initial conflict or shock. They would still be there. Yes, because you've got the mental images of what could happen. You've got the, Oh my God, Oh my God, and the why me and the poor me in your talk space.

You've got the fear in your body and you've got the physical discomfort in your body constantly re-initiating. Right, remembering. Reusing those three to arise moment by moment by way of reaction.

Sure. Let's call that whole, let's use another word, German word, Gestalt. That whole constellation of uncomfortable sensation in the body, which could be physical pain, it could be fatigue, it could be nausea, it could be heat, lots of things people get, right? Sure, yeah. Those are all physical type sensations.

Then you've got your mental and emotional reactions. We'll call that whole Gestalt or that whole constellation of body-mind distress the sensory challenge. Meditation techniques can be divided into two categories. The ones that have you focus away from the sensory challenge, not in a way to suppress it or deny it, but simply in a way that you're focusing away from it. On to what? Pleasant restful experiences.

Who was it? One of them, what was the one? Dr. Mears. Mears, okay.

Yeah. Okay, different kinds of cool out, mellow out. You can focus away from the sensory challenge, the uncomfortable body-mind states. You can focus away on the pleasant restful states. We can teach you, we meaning the meditation teachers of the world, can teach you actually a wide range of different ways of focusing on pleasant restful states.

Another way to focus away from the sensory challenge is to focus on positive mental images, positive internal talk, positive emotional feelings in your body. That's what Lauren LeShan really had people to do with his suggestions. He suggested that cancer patients find and create the life that gives them the greatest fulfillment, meaning and joy, and had them focus on making that manifest as quickly as possible for themselves. They would do that through image and talk.

They would also actually go out and create it. For instance, there was a woman who was bedridden in a hospital who had always loved the opera. Her family members brought her newspaper articles historically about the New York opera, and she wrote a book while she was in her hospital bed about the opera and lived twice as long as they did. That gave meaning to her life.

Sure. One thing that you can do is focus on pleasant restful states. Another is you can focus on positive image, positive talk, positive emotion. There's even other things you can do. You can anchor yourself in pleasant sights and sounds, like focus on music.

Right. All of those would be ways that you can use your attention to focus away from the sensory challenge without denying or suppressing the sensory challenge. That's important, not to suppress what you're feeling.

That's right. There's a whole range of strategies that I call focus away strategies. Of course, people immediately think, oh, well, if I'm focusing away, then I'm denying or suppressing, but that's not necessarily true. It depends on how you choose to focus away. You can focus away from it whilst totally giving it permission to just be there as a sensory event, but it's in the background. Then you're not suppressing, but you are developing core focusing skills that are very useful. That's sort of like plan A, turn away, but turn away in a very special way, not in a denying or suppressing way, but in a way that sort of creates a space that the stuff can sort of break up of its own. How long might someone have to do that? How many minutes at a time would you suggest they focus on pleasant sensations? I usually

recommend a minimum of 10 minutes.

That's minimum daily, absolute minimum. The other range of strategies at first seems a little bit hard to understand perhaps, because it's the exact opposite. Instead of focusing away from it, you elect to focus on it. Remember, the focusing away is a very special kind of focusing away. It's not like, oh, I've got to get rid of this so I can focus away. It's a very healthy way to focus away. Now, if your attention is drawn to the sensory challenge, you can decide to just go with that and say, you know what, I'm going to focus on it. But there's an unhealthy way to focus on the pain and the emotions and the negative thoughts. There's an unhealthy way to do that, and that's the way most people probably will end up doing that. But there is also a healthy way to focus on it.

Mindfulness, Cancer & Healing - 3 of 3 ~ Sat Dharam Kaur, N.D.

Interviews Shinzen Young

So to describe the unhealthy way? The unhealthy way is that you don't have precision about what's happening where and you're constantly fighting with whatever's happening. So you might be saying, I'm going to get rid of this, I've got to get rid of this, I've got to get rid of this. Well, it's like, no, I don't want this, and you tighten around it mentally and emotionally. So you're fighting with it at many levels of your being, both on the surface and in the depths, and you're not precise about exactly what's happening where when. That's an unhealthy turning towards the sensory challenge. So you're feeding it in a way by doing that.

That's a very good way to put it. It's feeding the fire. Now most people think, well, if I focus on it, I will automatically be feeding the fire.

The more I focus on it, the worse it's going to get. However, that is profoundly not true if you've been trained in systematic techniques. The systematic techniques will teach you how to untangle the components of the experience so they don't multiply into overwhelm.

You'll learn how to separate, oh, this part is the physical body, this part is the emotional body, this part is the visual thought, this part is the auditory, the mental talk. Let's say that a person comes to you and they say, I'm suffering at level, you say, what's your suffering? How much are you suffering right now? And they say, I'm suffering at the maximum possible. What's that number? They say, well, 10,000. It's 10,000.

It's like totally over the top. Maximum possible human suffering. That's because they're turning towards the discomfort in an unskillful way. If they were to turn their attention towards the discomfort with the disciplined skill that allows you to separate the components, what they would discover is that that number 10,000 is arising due to 10 times 10 times 10 times 10. Because all those four channels are onto it? Not because they're all on, but because they're all on and they're crisscrossing and multiplying with each other. How do you separate the channels and go to one at a time? How would someone do that in meditation? You use a technique called mindfulness that will teach you in a disciplined way how to focus on each one individually.

So you tease them out. And then when they happen collectively, instead of 10 times 10 times 10 times 10, 10 times 10 is 100, another 10 times 10 is another 100, 100 times 100 is 10,000. So you kind of pull apart the gestalt then. It's no longer a gestalt. It's just four things.

And your perception is now exactly what is there. 10 plus 10 plus 10 plus 10. They're all on. And one at a time. Well, you first learn how to have them one at a time, but then you can hold them all at once. But it's still just 10 plus 10 plus 10 plus 10 rather than 10 times 10, because now they're separate, even when they're happening all at the same time.

So do the math. If we say that without changing your sensory experience at all, but by merely changing your ability to separate it into its natural atoms, if we were to say to a person, I'm going to take you from suffering at 10,000 to suffering at 40. I'm going to take a 10,000 pound weight off your chest, but you will have to carry 40 pounds.

Sounds like a deal, right? It's a big reduction. I mean, it goes from hopeless, overwhelmed to, okay, I can handle it. And how would you suggest they deal with that if, say, they're feeling the feeling? What do you have them do? They have to be trained in specific

exercises. In other words, it's not so much I'm going to now describe to you in two minutes and you're going to be able to do it. You have to find a teacher or listen to a CD that teaches those techniques, and you just follow those exercises.

So I guess I would say, well, how do you get strong? The quick answer is go to the gym and do the Nautilus cycle. That's not, you have to actually go and have somebody show you how to do the Nautilus cycle. So you need a person or an interactive website or a CD to teach you how to do that, but I'm giving you the theory. So the theory says divide and conquer.

So there's a way of focusing on it where you first break it up into its components. Now you've gone from 10,000 to 40, that's pretty good. That means 10 plus 10 plus 10 plus 10. Now let's look at each one of those 10. Is there really 10 there? Or is there really one there that's being multiplied by 10 because of resistance? Oh, that's interesting.

And it turns out it's going to be that. So now we train away the resistance. Learning to tease out the strands is the part of mindfulness that is sensory clarity. The training away the resistance is the part of mindfulness that is equanimity. You also need concentration power so you can focus on one strand at a time in order to be able to learn about each one. So we teach you concentration, clarity, and equanimity.

That allows you to separate the strands and then reduce the resistance to each strand. So now we've gone from 10,000 to 4, which essentially says that for all intents and purposes we have eliminated your suffering, even though the physical pain, the emotional sensation, and the thoughts and the mental talk are still there. They're still there. They're not in the way. It's a miracle. It's hard to believe that this could happen. We call it the miracle of mindfulness. That's a healthy way to bring your attention to it. And it's very fortunate for us human beings that that strategy exists because you may attempt to turn away onto something restful, positive, grounding, and you may find you can't do it. It's just so much in your face.

You just can't do it. And you've got this other way of working. Just to recap, get the big picture, if you have a health situation and you would like to use your focus power to deal with that, be clear.

Am I using it to change the situation objectively? Or am I cultivating a skill that broadly reduces suffering and may change it, the object of situation too? Or am I doing both? I would suggest that a person can do one, the other, or both. But I would hope that they not do neither. And there's one other technique.

Not do either. There's another technique that I think we haven't mentioned that much, which is focusing on the positive as a part of what you've just elucidated. That would come under the category of focus away. Okay, focus on the positive comes under the category of focus away. If by positive you mean positive mental images, mental talk, and so forth. And it reminds me again of Bill Bengston's recommendations to people with cancer was to focus on seeing themselves well, doing whatever they're doing because they're well.

So there's no focus at all on the cancer or shrieking the cancer, but it's visualizing themselves doing what they would be doing most happily in their lives because they're doing it completely well. Very good. So I think we've pretty much covered the field. Thank you so much. That's very, very helpful. My pleasure. And you have a website that people can link to to help with using these techniques? Learn all this stuff? Yes. Yes, they can go to basicmindfulness.org. It's all there. Thank you so much for your questions.

Mt. Carmel Talk ~ Shinzen Young

The teachings of the Buddha are not meant to be used as a tool for self-discouragement. They are meant to be used as a tool for self-improvement. The teachings of the Buddha are not meant to be used as a tool for self-improvement.

Teachers can't avoid making bad karma. Either we describe things that could happen and how to work with them, which then will motivate you, give you a sense of what to look for, and give you a sense of how to work with it, if it should occur. Either we do that or we don't. If we do that, we've done you a service and we've done you a disservice, because those things may not occur, and it sets up all sorts of comparison mind, and the medicine then becomes the poison. There's lots of different ways you could define enlightenment.

One way that will help you perhaps be disabused of the comparison mind, I'd like to tell this story, most of you have heard this story. Many years ago, I and another American Buddhist monk and a Japanese Zen Roshi, the three of us were interviewed for Japanese television. The interviewer asked me the question, サトリとは一体何ですか? Now you might know the word Satori, that means enlightenment in Japanese, waking up.

When you get right down to it, what is enlightenment? I turned to the other American monk who was more senior than myself, and he sort of turned to the Roshi. So that got passed on to the Roshi. And then there's the Yomi Roshi, whose lineage is very prominent in North America. Here you are, a Roshi. Presumably you know what enlightenment is, but now it's for the record, for the camera.

For a half million people that are watching on television forever, you're on the spot. サトリとは一体何ですか? When you get right down to it, what is enlightenment? He goes, さあ、サトリとサトリでないとの区別がなくなることでしょう。 I guess you could say it's the disappearance of the distinction between enlightenment and not enlightenment. 意味を。 As soon as you start thinking, what am I going to get enlightened? Why is this one more enlightened than me? Why haven't I experienced this? What am I doing wrong? You are making a distinction between enlightenment and not enlightenment.

The quickest door to enlightenment right then and there, well, you know what it is. Stop making that distinction. If you keep that in mind, then people like me won't make so much bad karma by telling you all sorts of distinctions. As you give nature half a chance to gradually nurture your concentration, clarity, and equanimity skills over the weeks, months, years, for the duration, there is a good probability that at some point that triple skill set, my definition of mindfulness, will reach a sufficient critical mass. So that if you chose to work with the theme of expansion and contraction in your senses, if that was something you wanted to do, that would be available to you. If you read the classic text on vipassana or mindfulness meditation, the Visuddhimagga, it means the path of purification, it was written by Bhuttakosa, I don't know, maybe in the 5th century AD in Sri Lanka, written in the Pali language.

There are some translations, it's not an easy read, that's for sure, even in translation. In any event, you will see he describes a point in one's development, not very, rather close to the experience of stream entry or initial insight, enlightenment, if you will. There is a time when your awareness becomes dominated by the pattern of rising and passing. That is to say, things well up and then things subside. At a somewhat later stage, your attention becomes dominated by the pattern of no sooner does it start to arise, but it's already passing. As soon as the time-space volume that a sensory event would occupy is arising, that time-space volume is simultaneously collapsing.

In other words, simultaneous expansion and contraction, and then their neutralization into zero, is already explicitly described in the Pali literature. I am quite sure Sasaki Roshi never read those passages. He just experienced it in his own practice. But instead of describing it as something over there, where things are dying as soon as they are passing, which is sort of like linear or two-dimensional, he sets it up in this three-dimensional paradigm, where you're not observing the simultaneous birth and death of space. You're not observing it. God would put you in some space over here, fixated. You're not observing it fixated.

The observer is arising in the sphere itself. That just means feel, image, talk, and touch, and the world. Your body-mind and your sight-sound, if you want to cut it up that way, body-mind-self and the sight-sound-world, they are arising both inside that time-space volume that is molding them through expansion and contraction.

That means that as you bop around in the world, as you look here, you look there, you are participating in the activity of impermanence. You're participating in the source. You're not observing the source.

You're participating in the source. Maybe that's one of the differences between Zen training and vipassana. In vipassana, you sort of observe impermanence, and then if you do that long enough, it starts to inform the way your body moves, and you ride on impermanence. In Zen, long before you ever actually see impermanence, you're forced to, by the lifestyle and the koans and whatever, you're forced to ride on impermanence, and then eventually you see impermanence.

But in the end, you want to come to both. You want to be able to see impermanence and to manifest impermanence, to ride on impermanence. And when that happens, if you wish to use this paradigm, the source and the products of the source, the source is the activity of zero that polarizes and neutralizes. The products of the source are the moment-by-moment self and world as it arises in sensory experience.

I don't know what the self and the world are in any other sense, but feel-image-talk, subjective-system, and touch-sight-sound-objective, they are arising moment-by-moment in between expansion and contraction. Therefore, they are not fundamentally separate from the source. The products of the source and the source are not fundamentally separate. So, as you're going around having ordinary sensory experiences, there is this sense that there's not a two-ness between the source of creation and creation.

Natural Sensory Space Combinations ~ Shinzen Young

One of the natural ones is 2 plus 2 plus 2 equals 6. So 2 for the body, 2 for the mind, 2 for world.

So if you want to go body, mind, world, first of all, you're clumping them that way. And secondly, you're choosing not to make certain distinctions, perfectly legitimate. This path is about making distinctions and destroying distinctions. I think I say that every day. The trick is to skillfully make distinctions and to skillfully destroy distinctions. So if you want to go, well, let's keep things simple, body, mind, world.

Fine. Another natural parcellation is 3 plus 3 equals 6. Field-image talk functions as a system. You've got the subjective. And then that system is a system because it reacts as a system in combos to touch-site sound. And it also proacts to spin memory-planned fantasy. So because it's a system, it makes sense that the thing it reacts to is also a system. So you have the subjective triad versus the objective triad. So you can have 3 plus 3 equals 6.

Another natural partition is another 2 plus 2 plus 2 equals 6. But instead of body, mind, world, it's body, visual, auditory. Now, a case could be made that, in fact, that's the most natural parcellation because that cuts to the most fundamental circuitry organization of the brain. So another way to cut off the pie is somatic-visual-auditory. And you are absolutely at, you know, so that's touch-field-image, site-image, and talk-sound. So you're completely free to do it however you want. And so long answer to a short report, it worked. And that's my definition of the right way to meditate.

No Place to Stand ~ Shinzen Young

Okay, we use metaphors for this practice.

We meaning all the mindfulness teachers in the world. And those metaphors are metaphors and if they help you, good, and if they get in the way, not good. One of the metaphors for equanimity is, and it's a standard one and it's used by very famous and deep teachers, you sit on the bank of the river and watch it. But that is just a metaphor for equanimity.

That's not what equanimity is, okay. One of the things about the way I teach that people often find weird is I don't actually give you a whole base to go back to. A lot of people give you the breath, say okay, keep coming back to the breath. Why doesn't Shinzen do that? Well, not against it.

It's a totally valid way to practice. But there is a reason why I don't give you a place to stand. And I quote no less an authority than one of the great enlightened masters of China, Lin Ji, who says, inside of every human being, there is an authentic person that has no position. The authentic human with no position. If I were to characterize the experience of Zen practice at Mount Baldy, I would say it is de-centering. You've heard of centering prayer? That's de-centering prayer. Gives you no place to stand. It's very disorienting. When you finally give up the notion that you're going to have a place to stand, that's when that figure ground reversal takes place.

That's when you're doing three-dimensional Zen, as opposed to flat Zen, which would be the Zen put down of the way Vipassana is often done, from a fixed perspective. I'm over here sitting on the riverbank, watching the river. Well, if that works right, at some point you will become the river without being caught in the river, if it works right.

But if it doesn't work right, you're going to spend 20 or 30 years on the bank of that river and never be liberated. So I don't want you to have a place to stand. I don't want you to have a center.

I want the center to have you. It's a completely different experience. It's intentional. So it is hugely not a problem if you cannot find a place to stand while you do Vipassana. It's like hugely not a problem. It will be a problem if you don't have some modicum of concentration, clarity, and equanimity, though. But that's why I asked you the question about the spoken labels.

Once I determined that you were doing something, then I could say with confidence, absolutely do not try to find a place to stand in general, ever. And just let the place. I don't know if you know, but the very common word in ordinary Israeli Hebrew for God is hamakom. That means the place. The place. Let the place find you, rather than you find a place.

Noche Oscura - (The Dark Night) by St. John of the Cross

(Spanish Only) ~ Shinzen Young

En una noche oscura, con ansias en amores inflamada, oh, dichosa ventura, salí sin ser notada, estando ya mi casa solcelada. A oscuras, i segura, por la secreta escala disfrazada, oh, dichosa ventura, a oscuras, i encelada, estando ya mi casa solcelada. En la noche dichosa, en secreto, que nadie me veía, ni o miraba cosa sin otra luz i guía, sino la en el corazón ardía. Aquesta me guiaba, más cierto que la luz del mediodía, adonde me esperaba, quien yo bien me sabía, en parte donde nadie parecía. Oh, noche que guiaste, oh, noche amable más que la alborada, oh, noche que juntaste, amado con amada, amada en el amado transformada. En mi pecho florido, que entero para el solo se guardaba, ahí quedó dormido, y yo le regalaba, y el ventalle de cedros aire daba. El aire de la almena, cuando yo sus cabellos esparcía, con su mano serena en mi cuello ería, y todos mis sentidos suspendía. Quédeme, y olvídeme, el rostro recliné sobre el amado, cesó todo y dejéme, dejándome cuidado entre las asucenas, olvidado.

Non-Dual Awareness ~ Shinzen Young

I mentioned in a previous segment that the terms witness, consciousness, and non-dual awareness are used in different ways by different people. So this can lead to confusion and even unnecessary contention.

And I talked a little bit about how the term witness or witness consciousness is used. Now I'd like to say a little bit about non-dual. This is once again possibly an ambiguous phrase. One might say that a non-dual awareness is an experience of the oneness of subject and object. From that perspective, actually there are a number of ways that non-dual awareness can occur. One of them is that there's a touch or a sight or a sound that arises and there's no feel or image or talk reaction to it. So there's just that touch or that sight or that sound without a sense of an observer separate from it.

And so there's an experience of being that touch or that sight or that sound. In the Yoga Sutras, that's referred to as sabija samadhi. Samadhi in the sense of merging, but there's a seed there, sabija.

The seed is that there's a thing merged with. A deeper experience of oneness, which some people might call non-dual awareness, occurs when not only does the feel, image, talk reaction not arise, but the touch, sight, sound itself arises but it never fixates. It just becomes a flow.

And if any feel, image, talk arises, it also is just a flow. And the two flows merge and become a single wave. And then that wave dies down into nothing, into zero. The touch, sight, sound world and the feel, image, talk self arise as an interacting wave unfixated in between expansion and contraction.

They just sort of vibrate and interpenetrate. And then when they die away in that nothingness is the oneness of subject and object or the true observer from a certain perspective. So some people might call that non-dual awareness because in an absolute sense subject and object have been transcended. Patanjali calls that nirbija samadhi or merging without an object that is merged with, in other words a formless merging. In some Zen lineages it's called ryo-mo. Ryo means both and mo means disappeared. So subject and object have disappeared into the one nothing. However personally I would prefer to use the phrase non-dual awareness to refer to something else.

Something more ambitious than the things I've just described which are already very ambitious. Just to have the experience of just hearing or just seeing, it takes quite a bit of training typically. To have the experience of formless merging, nirbija samadhi, a lot of training. What's more ambitious than that? Well what's more ambitious than that and what I would personally like to use the word non-dual awareness for is the habitual abiding in the cycle of zero polarization, zero polarization over and over and over again. So that sounds very abstract. What do I mean by that? So let's say that you have that experience or it's not exactly you have that experience, there is the experience of both disappearing into zero.

Of the objective world and the reactive world of thought and feeling. They've become a wave and those two waves have merged and they've flattened into a oneness that is a nothingness. And you are that nothingness. That is the true self, aka the no-self. What's next? So that nothingness is going to break apart and once again polarize and in the cleft self and world will regenerate. When the self and world reappear, if you realize where they've just come from, then the self and world are not fundamentally separate from that zero. They're arising in a sense inside zero and there is very quickly a return to zero. And then the next arising arises sort of inside zero and there's a return to zero. So that you go through your day hundreds and hundreds of times a day having an experience of touching

the timeless, the zero, and then time being born but not really the fundamentally separate, the umbilical cord that connects to the zero is not completely severed. So you're born but not really born and your world comes into existence but not really because it's still enfolded in the two sides of zero. And so you come, in the words of the neo-Platonist philosophers of Western antiquity, you come from the good, return to the good, without ever really leaving the good in any fundamental sense. Then this is non-dual in the sense that there's not a separation between source and the daily life that's born from source.

So you're just bopping around in the world doing what anybody does, but you and your world are born but not really born. So there's not a fundamental cleft from a practical point of view between the transcendent and the ordinary. And so there is not, that's the real non-duality as I would have it.

Creator and creation, that duality has been seen through. So a person that, in terms of the Zen ox-herding pictures, that's somebody that is firmly mounted on the ox, okay, can never be bucked off the ox, no matter what life throws at them. So you're riding this powerful ox called consciousness or emptiness or source or God or nature, and you can't be bucked off by whatever wells up from the inside or hits you from the outside. You're still never fundamentally separate from nothing. I would use the term non-dual awareness for that.

Nurturing the Positive: Creating, Holding and Radiating Positive

Subjective States ~ Shinzen Young

A final theme is to intentionally create, hold, and radiate positive states in feel-image-talk. You'll remember I described feel-image-talk as the core subjective system.

That's the world of thought and emotion. We have internal control over it to a certain extent, particularly talk. We can decide to create a certain talk and repeat it over and over again. Essentially that's a mantra practice. But it's also a cognitive therapy practice. If you have irrational talk going on, irrational cognitions that are word-based, you can selectively attend to the antidote to that, which would be a more rational cognition.

In cognitive behavioral therapy, that's what they have people do. I would say that that person is intentionally creating and holding positive talk, positive in the sense of rational as opposed to irrational, or appropriate as opposed to inappropriate. We can also hold positive images.

Once again, they can be either more rational images, or they can be images of behavior changes or performance improvements that we would like to make, or images of outcomes that we would like to see happen, or images of symbols, archetypes that represent spiritual goals for us, or just images of people, places, objects that make us feel good, that activate pleasant emotional feel, that would be an antidote to uncomfortable emotions, depression, fear, and so forth. It's pretty easy for most people to intentionally create a positive dimension in talk and hold that. A little harder for image, but doable by many people. Feel is even harder, but it's doable. You can actually learn in a systematic way to turn on positive feel. By that I mean pleasant feel, that would be interest, joy, love, gratitude, those kinds of things, compassion. Intentionally creating, holding, and radiating positive states in one or a pair or all three of the fit system. I call that approach focus on positive.

Om Mani Padme Hum: Meaning and Some Mindful Strategies

When Chanting ~ Shinzen Young

We're going to chant what is probably the most famous mantra in the world, OM MANI PADME HUM. OM and HUM don't have a literal meaning.

They are sort of energy words. Mani means a jewel or a gem and Padma means lotus. Padme is the locative case in the lotus. So it means something like hail to the jewel in the lotus. You're free to interpret jewel and lotus any way you want. Maybe the whole spiritual path. The jewel is the wisdom, the liberating insight, and the lotus is the compassion, the spontaneous service to others, insight for yourself, service to others.

But there's other possible interpretations. This mantra is associated with the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. A Bodhisattva is someone who practices with the twin goals that I just mentioned, that their practice not only liberate themselves, but that they be able to serve others at all the levels of meaning that are implied by that word. So Avalokiteshvara is called Jemresi in Tibetan, Guan Shiyin or Guan Yin in Chinese. Similarly in Japanese, Kanzeon or Kannon, Guan Taem in Vietnamese or Guan Am in Korean.

In India he was a he, but in East Asia morphed archetypally into the compassionate mother form. We like to start off the day with energy and concentration so that help people wake up and so forth. So at 5.30 we do this chant. And the idea is to chant with the totality of your being. Chant with gusto and abandon, which is the expansive side of nature, but also chant with your ears.

Listen to the sounds that you're making, how are they matching the chant leader, which is me in this case, and broadly everyone else in the room. So I will vary the pace, this is called Moku-gyo in Japanese or Moktak in Korean. And I will vary the pace, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, so you have to listen for that. I will also vary the tone. I'll reset the tone of the room. If you hear me go a little bit higher, then try to match that.

I'm trying to gather everybody. You don't have to chant exactly the tone of the leader or of the group, but you do have to chant harmonic to that. So it's in rhythm and in harmony. So that's the chanting with your ear basis. And then the rest, the chanting with your whole being, is just totally give yourself to it. Now, I like to look upon chanting as a formal meditation period. So it's a good thing to organize in your mind, well, what am I going to be focusing on during the chant to make it a useful meditation period? And there's lots of possibilities.

Pick what's appealing to you. One thing you could do is just focus on the pure sound of the chant. A lot of our distractions are into internal conversations. When external sound space expands, internal talk space may contract. So you can listen to just the pure sound of the chant. You can focus on the physical sensations associated with chanting. There's the breath sensations and so forth associated with the chant. If you are focusing on just the sound and just the physical impact of the chant, we would say that you're sort of losing yourself in the chant.

Other possibilities are to work with restful states. The chant tends to quiet internal talk, so you can listen to the quieting effect. Tends to relax the body, so you can focus on restful experiences, relaxation, if you know how to work with these.

If you don't now, you will by the end of the retreat. Physical relaxation, emotional peace in the body, blank screen, quiet head, you can defocus your eyes. Some people even focus on

silence while they're chanting. You say, well, the sound is dominant. How is that possible? Well, some people know how to listen through or around sound to a background silence. So some people like to explore the restful impact of the chant.

Or you can, as I say, explore an ordinary experience. It hits, you've got the sound, you've got the physical touch of the chanting. Lots of times people will get energy flows associated with the chanting process. So you get like vibratory energy in your body, and that can start to pervade all parts of your experience. You sort of hear it in your talk space, see it in your image space, and so forth. So some people like to explore the focusing on flow, energy, and so forth that the chant induces.

That's another possibility. Traditionally when people did chanting, they actually visualized, in this case, they visualized the deity associated with the mantra. In this case, it's Avalokiteshvara. So they actually did a sort of focus on positive.

They would visualize the deity, listen to the chant externally, but also internally as a mantra, and access emotions of joy, compassion, and so forth. So they use it that way. So you might want to work with one or a combination of those. Lots of possibilities.

You can choose whatever appeals to you. But do have a clear idea and explore that. Now, when we do the mindfulness practice, we do noting, which involves often mental labeling as an option. Usually people find it unproductive to attempt to label things while they're chanting. It sort of takes you away from that full involvement with the activity of chanting.

But if you get really, really spaced out, then you can implement a mental labeling process. So that's sort of a few basic guidelines for how to make the chant a meditative process for you. GIROURNAM GADJIGAR – CHANTING Om. Om. Om. Om. Om. Om. Om. Om. Om Nyi Nyi Nyi Tha Tha Tha Nyi Om Om Om Nyi. .

On Rites, Rituals, and Ceremonies ~ Shinzen Young

People sometimes ask if they come to one of my retreats, will they have to participate in any kind of ceremonies or rituals? I've even had people ask, if I come to one of your retreats, will I have to bow to you? Well, I can tell you emphatically that you will not have to bow to me unless you want to make me feel uncomfortable.

But I can deal with that, that's just a rising of self-referential fit. So if you want to test my practice and see how I can deal with being made to feel uncomfortable, then yes, you can bow to me. But otherwise, that would definitely not be a feature of my retreats.

In fact, I am most happy if people look upon me as just like anybody else, like somebody you could challenge or say, you know, you screwed up or I disagree with you and so forth. So no, you're not going to have to bow. And no, you're not going to have to do any kind of rites or rituals or ceremonies. Rites, rituals, ceremonies, we find them everywhere. We find them in our early beginnings, the tribal world. We find them in Christianity, particularly in the Catholic form or forms of Christianity.

We find them everywhere. Historically, the Buddha, who lived approximately 2,500 years ago, seemed to be pretty down on rites and rituals in the sense that he clearly stated that rites and rituals in and of themselves don't have any effect on the external world and actually don't have any effect on our internal spiritual progress. The rites and rituals in and of themselves. And since in his culture, rites and rituals in and of themselves were considered to have a lot of effect and to be important and people's religious life, spiritual life, is often centered around these rituals, to deny the efficacy of rites and rituals was pretty damn revolutionary and actually got a lot of pushback.

So when we look historically at Buddhism, there would seem to be a negation of rites, rituals, ceremonies, and so forth. One of the things that the Buddha taught was to pay careful attention to your experience. And he said that if you pay careful attention to your experience, you will see that the nature of your experience is anicca, impermanent. And you will also realize that that's the nature of everything. Things change.

One of the things that changes is Buddhism. It's a conditioned phenomenon. All conditioned phenomenon, phenomena change.

That was the last words of the Buddha, anicca, bhatta, sankhaya. All conditioned things change. Conditionedism as a cultural historical phenomenon is most assuredly a conditioned thing.

It may point the path to something beyond conditions, but it itself is conditioned. And therefore, true to the Buddha's own teaching, Buddhism changed. Some people held to earlier forms of practice. Some people evolved new forms of practice. Some people held to earlier terminology and conceptual frameworks.

Other people developed new terminology, new conceptual frameworks. Buddhism disappears from its native soil of India around the year 1200 AD. It was a long process, but if you want a sort of, okay, to think in easy, round numbers, you can think of Buddhist history as spanning on Indian soil approximately 1700 years. There's the 500 years of the BC, and then there's about 1200 years of the AD. Fortunately, Buddhism, by the time it was wiped out in India, had been propagated throughout the rest of Asia, preserved, and now, in fact, has been reintroduced into India. During that 1700 years, changes took place about 500 years after the Buddha's death, very, very roughly speaking.

Once again, just to give you some simple whole number benchmarks. A reaction to early Buddhism arose that said it's not enough just to be liberated for your own liberation. It's

equally important to contribute to the liberation and broadly the welfare of other people.

Those two are on the same footing. So that's called Mahayana Buddhism. The Buddha's life exemplified that.

He served, but his teachings tended to tell people you need to sort of get yourself liberated. About 700 years after the Mahayana revolution started, the Vajrayana revolution started, so from say 700 AD to 1200 AD, there developed something called Vajrayana out of Mahayana. Vajrayana is known by a lot of different names, but we'll just use that one for now. What's interesting about Vajrayana is relative to rites and rituals, it's at the other end of the spectrum. It's all about rites and rituals.

So does this mean that Vajrayana is the ultimate degradation of the original teachings of the Buddha? Not at all. The Buddha said rites and rituals in and of themselves are not efficacious, but rites and rituals, if you wish, can create an ideal situation to develop concentration, sensory clarity, and equanimity. They can be vehicles for a meditative practice.

So if you make it a vehicle for a meditative practice, you use the simplified situation, the repetitiveness, the symbolism, and so forth, then your rite and ritual can be a legitimate practice. There was a famous Kapalistic master in Judaism who said, Judaism without Kavana is idolatry. Kavana is the Hebrew word for high concentration, implying that if you just superficially do the Jewish liturgy, you might as well be worshipping idols. On the other hand, if you intentionally focus and use that environment to cultivate a certain state of consciousness, then it's a powerful practice. We don't use rites and rituals at my retreats, but we often will do a sweat lodge afterwards, for those who wish to, to go back to a very ancient form of rite and ritual, one that most assuredly develops deep concentration, clarity, and equanimity.

Open Up and Turn Towards Challenging Letting Go States ~

Shinzen Young

Letting go, if we use that term as an equivalent for equanimity, will certainly, on the average, eventually cause us to feel better and better and better. However, for short periods of time, particularly in the early years of one's practice, one can go through periods where the deeper one goes, the more uncomfortable one becomes. One of the classic manifestations of that is the more we relax, the more icky, sticky, yucky kinds of antsy, unbearable sensations arise within us.

I have a whole article about that. I call it the icky, sticky, creepy, crawly, doesn't really hurt, but I can't stand it flavor of sensation. That has a very peculiar characteristic that the deeper you drop into samadhi and the more you relax, the yuckier it gets, at least for a while, creating a negative feedback loop, causing a person to be disinclined to drop into the deeper states.

In fact, I once heard a senior Burmese teacher who I had studied with, Usil Ananda, refer to it as samadhi pain in English. I'd never heard that phrase. Maybe he made it up, but clearly he was familiar with the phenomenon. That's one of the forms that going deeper makes things yuckier. There are other manifestations of that disorientation. For example, you go deep and you get disoriented or you seem more vulnerable, etc., etc. I can only say that these are temporary phenomena. They're not characteristic of the big picture, the long-term practice. Essentially, we can say that the spiritual path is a path of shedding gradually one coping mechanism and acquiring another coping mechanism for life.

The coping mechanism that's being shed could be succinctly characterized as deal with what comes from the outside and comes from the inside by tighten up and turn away. That sort of works. It armors.

It's basically an armoring and denying strategy, which can sort of blunt things, but in the end doesn't really work very well. Hopefully, a person will eventually mature to the point where they realize, oh, there's a better way of going about dealing with the impact of the intensity of the outside and the stored poison and pain on the inside. They cultivate that better way. The tricky thing is that that better way is ultimately a better way. However, it is the diametric opposite of the former way. It could be succinctly characterized as open up and turn towards. The open up is the equanimity piece.

The turn towards is the sensory clarity piece. Because it's the exact opposite of the previous strategy, it's difficult to avoid what I call awkward intermediate states where the old strategy is being shed so it can't quite shield you anymore. In other words, the mesh of your being is somewhat opening, but it makes you vulnerable because it's not so open that the slings and arrows will pass through without catching. You don't have the tight mesh that sort of shields you. That creates this awkward intermediate stage.

There's no way around it because that's the price of going from one coping mechanism to another. If we think of enlightenment as the most stable state, the ground state of our being, then there are other states that would not be as deep as that. Let's say that we're in a relatively grounded state here, but we would like to go to the global optimal, the most grounded state possible for the system, which might be called our source. It will often happen that in a thermodynamic system, in order to make the transition from a relatively stable state to a relatively grounded state, we have to go over this metastable, ungrounded situation. One actually passes through a lot of those things, but there'll be a tendency to drop eventually to the deepest ground state. That's sort of the price one may have to pay

for moving on to the next level of what we call the ultimate endowment, that is the ultimate survival, but all of the following can happen naturally. That's a good question.

That's the thermodynamic question younprung should be finally ask, where is there such a technology for survival? That's why we do a big international project in BNP and MD to support the nature, nature consortium efforts that the BNP is actually serving. Just let the discussion be needs and what the big Christina Eicster is thinking. Thank you very much. Thanks RIP Liz traffs web Alice g. g. SCBA g. SC attachment g. SCOTT. .

Ordinary Consciousness is the Way - Part 1: Mindful Awareness &

Varieties of Flow ~ Shinzen Young

I decided a long time ago that I would talk about all the kinds of experiences that may happen to people, even though there's a certain danger in that because it sets up expectations, cravings, aversions, comparison mind, desires, and so forth.

So I just give you the little heads up. Nothing that I'm going to describe tonight in terms of sensory experiences are required for the classical path to enlightenment. You may have experiences like what I'm going to describe.

You may not. There's lots of different arcs that people go through in traversing the territory between surface and source. So one of the themes that can come up for a person is the theme of impermanence, *anicca* in the Pali language, *anitya* in Sanskrit.

I have a set of techniques for working with this theme. I call it focus on change. There's nothing mystical, schmistical, or special about the fact that sensory experience changes. If you've ever noticed a sensation get stronger or get weaker, anybody ever notice that? Then you've noticed impermanence.

It changed. Intensity levels vary. You may think that my back's been aching in an unvarying way all afternoon. You say, my back hurt all afternoon. So my back's been hurting all afternoon. Sort of sounds like that, right? The afternoon started.

The afternoon is over. Sounds like it's a constant function. But if you pay close attention, it's not exactly a straight line. It's sort of like, well, it was a little more, then a little less, and a little more, then a little less. There's maybe a little bit of ripple on that if we speak more accurately. As we begin to look a little bit more accurately still, this changingness may become more evident. A sense of rising, passing begins to appear.

Remember last night I said that the more you focus on the impermanence, the more sensitive you become to it. That's sort of like the clarity and the concentration piece. But the more equanimity you have with things, since equanimity makes you more flexible, I would compare concentration to muscle strength, and maybe clarity is like definition in training. So equanimity would be analogous to flexibility. So as you become more flexible, of course, you can reflect the flow of impermanence, spirit if you wish. So at some point, you may actually get a sense that what was just the hint of a ripple or became peaks and valleys, that actually there's rising, passing, rising, passing, rising, passing, rising, passing, like that. I sometimes like to ask a rhetorical question.

Do mountains dance? And I would suggest to you that there's three possible answers. Yes, no, and it depends. And I would say it depends. It depends on how patiently and how carefully you look at a mountain. If you look with the patience of centuries, in other words, great equanimity, timeless.

Equanimity is a kind of timeless world. Some of you have gone into this. You may have had an experience either under conditions of great ease or under conditions of great peril. Time sort of slows down, and there's an altered sense. Well when you drop into equanimity, the deeper levels of equanimity, you have the patience of centuries.

And viewed with the patience of centuries, in other words, in time-lapse photography, what does the surface of the Earth look like? A roiling, streaming protoplasm, really alive with flux. So it depends on how patiently you look, in other words, how much equanimity there

is. It's also how carefully you look. If you look at anything beyond the level of the atom, or the molecule for that matter, it's just a dance of energy, a mountain. But if you don't look really finely, or you don't look so there's not the clarity piece, if you don't look patiently, there's not the equanimity piece, then the mountain seems solid as a rock, as the expression goes.

So subtle is significant. If that hint of ripple is an entire world rising, passing, rising, passing, rising, passing, there are different flavors of impermanence or change. One is change in intensity.

I just sort of graphed that. Another very significant way that sensory experiences change is they sort of shift in shape. Remember, we've made a big thing about the spatial nature of experience, that you can localize, perhaps not with great precision, but you can sort of get a general sense of size, shape, and position of body sensations. And indeed, even auditory thoughts have a sort of size, shape, and position in your head, visual thoughts up in front, in image space, and so forth. So if you sort of zoom out and cover the whole area of, say, a sensation, you may notice that it shifts a little bit here, shifts a little bit there.

Subtle is significant, may not be all that dramatic, but it's like a millimeter here. It sort of like moves over here, moves over there. And as you're watching that little waviness and whatever, and you're infusing it with equanimity and time is passing, those shifting shapes can become much more significant and fascinating. You can get so fascinated with how it moves that you become less concerned with whether it's pleasure or pain. It all starts to feel good. Even uncomfortable sensations feel good because of the way they move.

There's like a fascination with it, almost a massage to it. Marshall McLuhan said the medium is the message, right? But I would take it one step back. The nature's deepest message is not the medium. It's the movement of the medium. That's a primordial message that flows through all of nature. And since our sensory systems are part of nature, flows through us.

Ordinary Consciousness is the Way - Part 2: Mindful Awareness &

Varieties of Flow ~ Shinzen Young

One of the sensory experiences that you focus on is a restful state, which is the darkness, brightness in front of or behind your closed eyes.

I call that, I say that represents a blank mental screen. Now although that darkness, brightness could be stable, in which case actually that can be good. That becomes what's called a casino and that can stabilize consciousness and become a basis for absorption states. On the other hand, very often that darkness, brightness is sort of swirling, vibrating or whatever. That's impermanence, that's flow. And most people, at least occasionally, get that sense of flow in the blank on their mental screen. And if you focus on it, the more you focus on it, the more fluid it becomes.

It sort of massages you, it comforts you and so forth. So my generic term for continuous type changes is flow. And then if something disappears, that's gone, vanishing. So in the restful aspect of image space, there may be flow.

Images come. They typically, they disappear, so that's a vanishing. Even when they're rising, they may fade in, fade out, melt, morph. So there's usually some, even if there's image activity, there's some sense of change.

What can be really interesting, this doesn't happen to a lot of people, but sometimes you can have mental images that they're real. They're alive. They're animated from inside, just like living things. They're 3D and they just move as though God's hand were inside a puppet, making this thing animated.

Sometimes people get freaked out when that happens. But if you just get fascinated with the flow of expansion and contraction in those realistic images, then you're going to go to the source. It's going to take you to the formless doing that molds not only those images, but the visual so-called material world, everything. In other words, if you ever have, not that this happens very often, but sometimes people quote, see spirits and whatever, there's two ways that you can relate to that. One is, well, it's sort of a message and you can honor its content, but that's the world of powers and that has its place.

But what we would prefer is that you not be so interested in that message, but be interested in the movement of the media. Because when you're seeing spirits, you're very close to seeing the great spirit, but you have to let go of your preoccupation with the spirits and just see the underlying pure flow of formless energy that is what is behind making them seem so real. I know half the people hearing this are, I'll never experience that, I never experienced that, and the other half is, I hope I don't experience that. Some people experience this and if you do, you'll know how to make use of it as a liberation path as opposed to either something that wigs you out or something that shunts you off into a lesser God.

Let's put it that way. In your visual thinking, either the restful aspect of the blank or the active aspect of image activity, there could be flow, things could vanish, things could change and move and melt and morph, and you could decide to focus on that and to sort of ride on that, get fascinated with it. The more you focus, the more pronounced it gets. That's the theme of flow and go. In visual thinking, how about auditory thinking? Well, sometimes there's not too much happening there. There's a kind of quiet, but then there's an underlying current, a kind of buzz. That's a kind of vibratory flow in the subtle auditory processing. In Tibetan, that's called nam dok ok je.

They actually have a term for that, a technical term. Nam dok means thinking, and ok means underneath or beneath, and je means a stream. I took great pleasure in finding out that this thing that I had always called subtle processing and made part and parcel, as you know, of the techniques, sure enough, in Tibet, it was known and they have a technical term for it.

Somebody told me that, a Tibetan scholar, a couple of months ago. Anyway, so you can have that subtle sort of vibratory flow in talk space. Even when you have explicit words in talk space, they may boom in talk space. That's expanding. That's expansive flow.

They may grip and hold you. That's contractive flow. In your auditory thoughts, you could have flowing experiences.

What's interesting about what I call talk or auditory thinking has some sort of interesting characteristics. One is, it's for most people the hardest to stop, not that I'm advocating you stop it, but if you try to stop it, it's hard to stop it. But it's very easy to initiate. You can think about anything you want in talk space. You can repeat a mantra or some litany, and there's a lot of control in initiating talk.

It's really hard to stop doing it once it gets going. The other interesting thing is that talk is probably the easiest sensory phenomenon within which to notice abrupt vanishings. People will often report this to me as though it were a problem. As soon as I notice my internal talk, it disappears.

What am I doing wrong? It's not a problem. That's an insight, insight into impermanence. You can note the vanishings, the gongs.

As you can see, the mind is mental experience, visual thinking and auditory thinking has a lot of potential for impermanence, for focusing on the theme of change. How about the body? If you zoom out and cover your whole body, it's pretty hard to keep the whole thing in awareness and perfectly stable. It tends to puff out a little here, pull in a little bit there. That's flow. Sometimes people get tingling, vibration, undulation.

That's flow. A problem that people report in the body is there's pressure. People usually blame themselves for it. It's like, well, something's trying to expand, but I'm resisting it kind of thing.

They make themselves responsible. If you have pressure, you can ask yourself, is it inward, outward, or bidirectional? Instead of making it a problem, just look upon it as force flow. Pressure is actually momentum flux. You can look upon that as a kind of flow.

Einstein did. Instead of making pressures something I'm resisting or I'm fighting or I'm whatever, it's just there's an outward force. That's an expansion. Even if there's no volumetric change, it is an expansive flavor of flow in that force is flowing out, pressure force. Inward and just yield to it. It might make it worse for a little while, but then at some point you get a sense that, yes, that's not a problem. That's part of the flow of nature too.

Ordinary Consciousness is the Way - Part 3: Mindful Awareness &

Varieties of Flow ~ Shinzen Young

There was a Zen master, Soryu, maybe you know who this was.

I can't remember the origin of the expression. Ping chang shin shi dao. Well you might know dao, the cosmic way. Shi means is.

Shun, you might know. It means mind or consciousness or heart. The ordinary consciousness is the way, the cosmic way. Well what's the ordinary consciousness. The ordinary consciousness is scattered in all directions and obsessing on one thing, then scattered in all directions and obsessing on one thing, and scattered in all directions Or maybe scattered and obsessing at the same time, same instant. Is that the cosmic way? Absolutely. That scattering, that's just nature expanding, that's expansive flow. That thing that you call fixation, that you make a problem, that's just nature contracting, contractive flow. If you look at it that way, you don't have a problem.

It's just space dancing. So in the mind, in the body, both in pleasant guises and in unpleasant guises, and if it presents itself saliently, you might want to make it a theme in your practice. In fact, it could present itself so intensely that you sort of have no choice but to make it a theme in your practice because there's hardly anything else that you can detect. That's in the most extreme cases an experience that's technically called bhanga. You can look it up on the internet, B-H-A-N-G-A, when the flow and the vanishing become so intense that they just dominate your experience. Once again, plenty of people have become enlightened without ever having that experience.

Just something to know can happen. How about external experience? How about sounds? Well, do they sort of vibrate? Do they sort of boom? Is it easy to detect the vanishing of certain kinds of sounds? If you choose the right kind of music with well-defined phrase structures, you can listen to the gongs, to the unborn absolute silence whence the music comes and whither it returns moment by moment just by choosing the right kind of music to do a music meditation with. As well-defined phrase structures, da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da, gone. Da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da, gone. Da-da-da, gone. Da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da, gone. You can hear those endings very clearly defined.

So, sound space could be an exploration of impermanence. Sight is much more tricky to work with. But if you defocus your eyes, things get sort of swirly, and then you might say, well, that's just an illusion. But then you're using that to develop a kind of equanimity with sight, and then when you start looking in the ordinary way, they're still sort of more fluid.

One of the payoffs that comes from late-night sitting and all-night sitting, we'll have another yaza, late-night sit, on Thursday, is that correct? Is that right? So you'll have an opportunity, about three in the morning, your eyes will start to swim, okay? And so will the external world. And that can be an interesting venue to penetrate the somethingness of the so-called material world in front of you in sight space. So although it's a bit more challenging, we can have the experiences of impermanence, flow and vanishing in sight space. In fact, if you look carefully, each time your eye shifts, when it goes from one side to another, the world that was just falls away. It's a little tricky.

You have to sort of look out of the corner of your eye as you shift, but it definitely goes ka-chunk. That's vanishing in sight space. All of our senses have, both in their ordinary active guise of touch, sight, sound, feel, image, talk, or in the special, tranquil, restful, sort of meditative experiences of relaxation, light, silence, peace, blank, quiet. In all of these

experiences, there is the possibility for some hint of either flowing kind of change or abrupt vanishing.

If one wanted to pursue this as a theme, one could. Why would one perhaps want to do that? Well, it can be very—although sometimes it can be harsh, sometimes often, and in the end, it's very soothing. You get the sense that the substance of your being is being worked on, energia, a working within that is working out the poison and pain. It's a kind of purificatory experience. It's also a unifying experience because flow tends to flow, and it cuts across the distinctions. In this path, there's a place for making empowering distinctions, distinguishing touch, sight, sound, feel, image, talk, these different dimensions of sensory experience. There's also a place for those distinctions disappearing, and one of the ways that those distinctions disappear in an empowering way is that the flow and vanishing unifies them, and larger and larger pieces of sensory experience turn into a flow field. When external sight and internal image, external sound and internal talk flow together, then the boundary between inside and outside disappears, and that's a very natural way to come to an integration, a unification. Since the fundamental separation of inside and outside is more or less synonymous with fear, clearly you understand why I choose the word empowering in speaking about the theme of impermanence..

Paradigms of Change: Impermanence, Flow, Expansion &

Contraction, Arising & Passing ~ Shinzen Young

What is the focus of the book? The focus on change comes from, originally from the early Buddhist perception of anicca, or impermanence. But if you look through Buddhist history, you'll see that over the ages, the notion of impermanence has been, has itself been impermanent.

And you're not surprised. It's changed over time in some lineages. For example, if you work within the Upa-Khin lineage, which involves the technique of body sweeping, where you systematically move the awareness up and down through the body, and eventually in other patterns also. So you're making these sort of reciprocal scans of somatic awareness. This tends to create an awareness of a subtle, vibratory, bubbly flavor of flow that people find very pleasant. They are very carefully instructed not to form an attachment to that, but simply observe what is.

And then sometimes the opposite of that happens. We think it's very solid and intense and horrific. Okay, don't form an aversion to that.

Just keep sweeping through. It's a brilliant innovation, because it gets you down to a very fine scale of somatic resolution. And at that scale, the vibratory nature of the nervous system, the vibratory nature of nature, will present itself to you. And Upa-Khin talked about that as impermanence.

That's anicca. But whereas the Buddha talked about it always linked impermanence to dukkha, right, things pass, and we hold on to them, and we set ourselves up for suffering, pinning our happiness on things that aren't going to last. Here we get, in the Upa-Khin lineage, a positive take on impermanence. It's a kind of purifying energy that gets activated within you and starts to work on you, which sort of links it to notions of the Holy Spirit working on you, energia, long, long before that was ever used in physics in its present meaning.

It was used by Christian monks and nuns to describe the energia, the working N, the ergia, the working N within one, of the Holy Spirit that sort of dissolves the somethingness and the impurities within you. Well, Upa-Khin calls that activating impermanence, and he puts a positive spin on impermanence, while at the same time, of course, acknowledging the original Buddhist notion of impermanence as a possible source of suffering. Like a good scientist, built on the work of the Buddha, or either he or whoever his teachers were that came up with this notion. My own teacher, Joshu Sasaki Roshi, has vastly innovated with regards to the notion of change or impermanence. He likes to describe it in terms of expansion and contraction. To say that when you look carefully, you see that all the different flavors of flow that can occur, vibratory, undulatory, even inward-outward pressures and so forth, these can all be interpreted in terms of two fundamental flow patterns.

One expansion, the other contraction. You can have a sensation that's as solid as a rock, but if you analyze the pressure, you can usually find there's an outward pressure and an inward pressure. Oh yeah, they're banging together and clashing and producing a horrific pain, but the fact is, if you let the part that wants to press in, press in, and the part that wants to push out, push out, if you let that happen, it gets worse, worse, worse, worse, and at some point, they interdigitate. And yes, indeed, it's just expansion and contraction, empty space.

So you can take solid experiences and work with them. And he gives this gigantic list of synonyms for expansion and contraction. Expansion, or you can call it life, you can call it affirmation, you can call it future, you can call it outside, and then contraction, you can call it death, you can call it negation, you can call it past, you can call it inside.

So all these synonyms, many of which don't seem to have anything in common, if you get attached to the words, but then if you listen deeply, you'll see that there are pairs of binary contrasts that in some way or another involve the notion of affirmation versus negation, or bigness versus smallness. In the path of purification, the Vicitta-manga, which is sort of like the classic commentary on the Buddhist canon used in much of Southeast Asia, there's a place where the author, Bhattakosa, describes a stage in practice where you're observing the rising and passing of phenomena. And then you become aware that no sooner does something arise, but it also passes. Udayabhaya is the word that's used in Pali. Udaya is rising up, vayaya is passing away. So at some point, there is a simultaneous udaya and vayaya. But it's described as it's passing as soon as it's arising.

Instead of saying observing phenomena rising and passing, or even arising and passing simultaneously, Sasaki Roshi says, be aware of simultaneous expansion and contraction. Now, why is that a subtle but significant paradigm shift? Well, if you listen to his talks, he'll sometimes get real emphatic. He'll get up there and bang his fan, and he'll raise his voice. It's like, whoa. And a lot of times what he gets most emphatic about is something you can't remotely understand.

Either you can't understand it, or it seems like absolutely a banal triviality. Like sometimes he'll get up there and he bangs his fan and he says, you must never forget, never forget, never forget, as soon as you turn to the west, the east is behind you. As soon as you turn to the east, the west is behind you.

Never forget that. It's like, what? It's like, yeah, I mean, but like, you've got to listen with the wisdom. As soon as you turn to the west, the east is there. As soon as you expand, contraction is there. Any binary contrast to him exemplifies these principles.

In other words, never forget, as soon as there seems to be a rising, passing is right there. That's what he's talking about, but he'll never tell you that. You've got to figure that out. Then he'll get up there and he'll say, you'll never get enlightenment doing two-dimensional Zen. Flat Zen is not Zen. Real Zen is spherical. Real Zen is a ball simultaneously expanding and contracting. Never do flat Zen.

What's flat Zen? Flat Zen is, I'm over here observing rising and passing over there. Once you start thinking in terms of expansion and contraction, the observer gets yanked into the process and dissolved. So the three-dimensionality of it prevents the fixation of the sense of an observer, which is the main criticism Zen tends to give to Vipassana practice. Instead, be aware, as soon as something is arising, three-dimensional space is expanding and three-dimensional space are contracting. You and surroundings are a spherical surface being gestated into existence and annihilated by the simultaneous fountain of the efflux and reflux of the source, which is not a thing. It's a pure doing. Sasaki Roshi sometimes says, a good doctor can cure your illness, but only the greatest doctors can show you you were never sick.

Parts & Wholes, Efforting & Do-Nothing: A Certain Momentum ~

Shinzen Young

As you know, I like to describe the practice in terms of contrast. The practice is born between, like a lot of things, like maybe everything. One of the things it's born between is the interplay of efforting and dropping effort. Another thing it's born between is working with parts and working with wholes.

So if you get really good at working with parts, that's going to impact your ability to work with the whole without making so much effort. What you're describing in this global awareness where there's a lot of mindfulness and it's covering vast experience, but you aren't having to make an effort very much to keep track of things, that's the momentum of that local work that you did, working with the individual parts, which was efforting. That coming together with the practice of do nothing, which was its own practice, those develop a certain momentum. So when you start working with the whole and you're not efforting to penetrate the parts, you're working with the whole, but a momentum of clarity is present from having worked with the parts effortingly and you're maintaining a minimum effort, which you know how to do because you've practiced the no effort whatsoever.

Now you get this delicious thing that's in between, where it's half like do nothing, but it has all of the crispness of a bear down, like, okay, penetrate this sensation kind of practice. That's why I said, good, what you're reporting is essentially what I hope is going to happen with time.

Peter Marks on the Origins of Body-Image-Talk (BIT) ~ Shinzen

Young

This paradigm that I give you where we can divide the mind into the image piece and the talk piece, and then that interacts with the body, the touch, feel, whatever. I didn't come up with this, this idea. But the person who did come up with it is in this room, so I'm going to make his feel image talk space activate. Where's Peter? If it's the first time or so, you may not know who this man is.

This is Peter Marks, the inventor of body image talk, and essentially the person responsible for this approach to meditation that I teach being available consistently in Canada. The fact that I kind of stumbled onto one day saying, I noticed that there's these pictures and these, I mean, that he kind of is far too generous in what I've contributed to this. I mean, believe me, it's like, it's like kind of, I came to know with three boards, but he did the arc himself.

Well, here's what happened. He was giving me a guided, okay? This part I know about because I journaled this part. He was giving me a guided, and I was just telling him what I was experiencing, and he said, what did you say? That's how, that's it. I didn't come to him and say, coach, I've got a really great idea.

If he hadn't have picked it up, I might not even have known I said it. I mean, that's the honest truth because I thought that's what everybody saw, you know? But there is. What did I say? Oh, I was just, I was out loud. I said, oh, I see. Well, he was having me look at what we now call active states, right, of image and talk, okay, or of just thinking. We just, just thinking.

I mean, if you read a lot of the stuff, it's just thinking. They don't talk about breaking it down the way he has, right? So I just, I just basically, he said, what are you experiencing? And so I just, I just said, you know, talk, talk. We didn't have any of the restful stuff at that time. Well, remember, Joe? I mean, we didn't have restful stuff. Rest is within five, six years, isn't it, I would say? Four. Four years, is that right? Yeah, yeah.

So, yeah, yeah, yeah. And so, and so I was just saying, you know, thinking and talk and talk and then said picture, picture. And that's what I call it. I call it a picture.

And he said, what did you say? I said picture. Now, you see, it's hard to believe with his mind that he hadn't experienced that. But I suspect that he had experienced it, but he just goes so deep that he just misses some of that surface stuff.

I mean, I have no idea. But for each of you, you likely know the first time you did this, you had a predominant way. This is what I think my students, there's a predominant image or talk that they come up with, right? And then once you introduce them and give them a little bit of a heads up, then they'll say, oh, yeah, I am. And now that you're doing it, you know that at every minute you're having ten hits of image, ten hits of thought, and also the rest states all at once, right? The more you start to really look at this stuff, you see it's all over the place all the time, right? I mean, it's just layered, scaffold upon scaffold, right? So that's why it's just so fascinating to see the way he's, I mean, this divide and conquer piece, you know, it's just, that's the other thing about him, this, these unique ways of just summarizing it. Yeah, we've come up with a lot of things. I was either blessed or cursed to have some of the early days of him kind of feeling his way on some of these things, you know, and some of the, you know, sweat work we did and that, it just, things just kind of evolved, I think.

But more important to your second point, I mean, it's just, it's just so great to see what, I mean, he literally has, you know, rounded this thing out to 99 plus 9% of what it is, you know, I mean, and just, and just really, as I say in the acknowledgement of this book slash manual that I've written, just such a great acknowledgement that he is just, you know, relieving suffering on this planet with this stuff just in such incredible ways. There's something else that I've had to really restrain myself today because in my own lingo, in my own time, all the time, I teach to bit, excuse me, be fit, body sensations, feeling, image, and talk. So that's be fit, okay? And that's, that's about 10 years ago, that's what we were.

We were body sensations, feeling, image, and talk. And there's several of us oldies that still have not really bought into the idea of, of, should I, should I, should I, yeah, yeah. I don't know where to go with this because it's, you know, it's public and all that, but, but hey, the big guys heard me tell them a dozen times and we have some very, very animated discussions over, you know, and I basically say, you know, I think you're being dead right on this one, Shinzen. I think you're absolutely right in separating, you know, kind of touch and feel, and I'm sure that it's, you know, the feel is maybe all in the body. I mean, you know, so therefore you can legitimately fit spaces, body, and image.

However, I think for the average person learning it, they relate to a body sensation like the pain in my knee and they relate to a pain in my heart different. So that's why I've continued to teach just be fit. So I just say this because stay open to this.

And if he was here, he'd say the same thing. Don't just buy what I tell you. Like make it your own. He's always saying make it your own. So some of us have just not chosen to kind of come on board with some of the current stuff, but for the most part we are.

Purification and Fulfilment: Four Formulas ~ Shinzen Young

What is the role of electromagnetic theory in the development of human happiness and human suffering? James Clark Maxwell described the whole of electromagnetic theory in terms of four fundamental field equations. I somewhat jokingly also have a set of four equations that describe the issue of human happiness and human suffering in terms of the body.

Start with the first one here. Suffering equals discomfort multiplied by resistance. So what I mean by discomfort in this case is physical or emotional uncomfortable sensations. So one form of discomfort would be pain, but tiredness is a form of discomfort, too hot, too cold, hunger, things like that.

Those are all forms of physical discomfort. Then body sensations such as those associated with anger, fear, sadness, shame, impatience. Those would be emotional uncomfortable flavors in the body.

So physical or emotional uncomfortable flavors in the body I generically refer to as discomfort. Resistance means any interference with the natural flow of those sensations. That means any fighting with their arising or any holding on, preventing them from passing in their natural pattern. So any interference with the natural expansion and contraction of body sensation is resistance. So when you have physical and or emotional discomfort in your body, the degree to which you fight with that by pushing and pulling is the resistance. Now we tend to think of resistance as a mental thing based on our attitudes. Well, actually that's a rather small part of the resistance. That's part of it, but most of the resistance is in the body circuits themselves at a very deep primordial level. When the body begins to make a sensation, it also will begin to interfere with its own product.

Fortunately, through meditation practice, we can train the body out of the habit of resisting interfering with its own sensations. The intensity of the discomfort multiplied by the degree of interference with its natural flow measures the perceived suffering that you get from that. That's the first formula. Suffering equals discomfort multiplied by resistance.

Now, this is a linear approximation of something that's probably a much more complex mathematical model, but this will give a sort of rough approximation of what goes on. There's both good news and bad news in this formula. The good news is that if you have a lot of intensity of discomfort, but you reduce the resistance to a small amount, then your perceived suffering will go down, even if you have huge discomfort. In fact, the best news of all is it is theoretically possible, with sufficient training or just by the evolution that comes through living, to reduce resistance to zero, in which case, even with huge discomforts, the perceived suffering would be zero, because no matter how large this is, if this is zero, anything multiplied by zero is zero.

So that's the good news. What's the bad news in this formula? The bad news is that you can have very small discomforts, physical or emotional, uncomfortable sensations in the body, that are wispy, hardly even noticeable, perhaps. It could even be so mild that they're below the threshold of awareness. But if they're subject to huge subliminal resistance, interference, impedance, you will have the impression of huge suffering.

That's the bad news. A lot of the distortions that take place in human behavior are due to rather tiny emotional-type sensations, some of them below the threshold of awareness, that are filling the body and subject to huge resistance, therefore cause a huge perception of suffering and distort our behaviors in the objective world. So that's formula number one. The sort of flip side of that is purification equals discomfort multiplied by equanimity. Equanimity is the opposite of resistance. Equanimity could be said, at least to a linear

approximation, to be the reciprocal of resistance.

So as the resistance goes down, the equanimity goes up. As equanimity goes up, the discomfort turns into not only a freedom from suffering or a reduction of suffering, but a positive flavor of purification, which leads to fulfillment. So it is actually possible to have a fulfilling, empowering experience of physical and even emotional discomfort in the body.

If you bring enough equanimity to it, you'll actually get a taste of purification, which turns into a kind of taste of fulfillment. Something meaningful and useful is happening to the depths of one's being because of how you're experiencing a physical pain or even an emotional discomfort in the moment with high equanimity. So discomfort here, the opposite of discomfort, pleasure. Frustration equals pleasure multiplied by resistance. If you push and pull on the natural flow of pleasure, resist its arising, resist its passing, then it doesn't give you fulfillment. It gives you a sense of frustration.

This is the Imelda Marcos phenomenon. How many shoes will fulfill you if you can't get fulfillment from one? The answer is no amount will do it. Because you don't know how to turn pleasure into fulfillment.

That's this last equation. Fulfillment equals pleasure multiplied by equanimity. The good news here is that with very small pleasures, tiny little pleasures actually, and enormous equanimity, enormous non-interference, you can derive enormous fulfillment.

So the bad news is this formula, which leads to Imelda Marcos, people with huge pleasures in their life that can't get any satisfaction. They're frustrated. That's because they have not trained their pleasure circuits out of the impedance.

So that's the bad news. The really good news here, even with relatively small amounts of pleasure, physical or emotional, a human being can derive enormous fulfillment if they train their pleasure circuits into equanimity. That fulfillment actually brings the same flavor of purification that you get here. So you can purify consciousness in two ways, by experiencing discomfort with equanimity or by experiencing pleasure with equanimity. That's the good news for everybody.

Reality & Sensory Experience ~ Shinzen Young

I usually don't talk about reality. I prefer to talk about sensory experience. Sensory experience is something I have a lot of confidence with. When I make statements about sensory experience, it's based on years and years of my own investigations, working with my own sensory experience, other people's sensory experience.

So, as I say, I have a lot of confidence in that. I don't speak about the underlying reality that's behind sensory experience, or even if there is a reality behind sensory experience, or what is it? People will often ask, well, what do we really see? What do we really hear? The reason I don't talk about it is that I don't have confidence that I have good answers about it. I have my own conjectures, but they're just that. When it comes to sensory experience, I know I can teach people things that are true, deep, useful, and broad. Now, in general, things that are true, deep, useful, and broad are considered good science. So I think I can give good science for sensory experience. In terms of what's behind sensory experience, or what's really out there, I notice that very intelligent people seem to be arguing about this for a very, very long time. Intelligent people that have given a lot of thought and research to the question of what is objective external reality, that is to say, scientists and philosophers, people who specialize in this field, do not seem to be able to agree and have not been able to agree for a very, very long time.

That indicates to me that although someday the question probably will be answered in a satisfactory way for humanity, at this point in human history, it's still contentious and conjectural, and therefore not something that I, as an amateur, would want to make any statements about. So I limit myself to what I know for sure. I know for sure that our sense of perceiving self arises through feel-image-talk reactions to touch-sight sound. I know for sure that sensory experience is a very, very important process to touch-sight sound.

I know for sure that suffering equals pain multiplied by resistance, et cetera, et cetera. For me, these awarenesses of sensory experience are enormously liberating. I know for sure that when you bring enough concentration, clarity, and equanimity to any ordinary sensory experience, that ordinary sensory experience becomes so utterly extraordinary that it could be named spiritual. To me, this is important stuff, and I have absolute confidence in it. If you ask me, well, what's the object of reality reflected in touch-sight sound, feel-image-talk, the sensory experiences we have? I say, I don't know.

Could I make a wild conjecture? Sure, but it would be a wild conjecture, not something that I would speak with a lot of confidence and certainly not something that I would try to convince any other human being of. If I were to make a wild conjecture as to what's really out there, I would guess that every touch-sight, sound, feel-image-talk experience that we have is actually an experience of everything, everything altogether in a way that the human brain is not conditioned, evolved to perceive. We can't imagine what everything at once is, the whole causal nexus, the suchness. Our brains aren't designed to process that. That would be my guess, for what it's worth.

Recycle the Reaction - Beginner, Intermediate, & Advanced

Examples ~ Shinzen Young

I define mindfulness in my own personal way as bringing a three-fold attentional skill set to experience.

So the three skills are concentration, sensory clarity, and equanimity. As a result of bringing mindfulness to a sensory experience, that experience might change. The change in the experience that occurs is what I call the reaction.

The reaction could be pleasant or the reaction could be unpleasant. The idea in the Recycle the Reaction axiom is to always remember that one of the things you can do with the reaction is be mindful of it. So you take the reaction and you recycle it into being an object of the practice that caused the reaction.

So if you can remember that axiom, that deals with an awful lot of situations that come up in practice that cause people to have questions. Because it's like, okay, I did this technique and it caused this wonderful pleasant experience. What should I do? Well, apply the technique to it. I did this technique and it caused this horrific experience.

What should I do? Well, one of the things you can do, apply the technique to the reaction that the technique caused. At a beginning level of practice, one of the most common phenomena that people have is that they'll do the technique and then they'll go to a certain level. They'll feel like they've dropped into some sort of state. And then if they attempt to maintain the technique further, they just are thrust out of that and they pop back into what seems like square one.

It's like they're just back to ordinary consciousness. I call it the 20-minute glass ceiling, sometimes jokingly. You ask people, how long do you sit for? Oh, I sit for 20 minutes. Now, there's nothing shabby about sitting for 20 minutes.

In fact, I give people an even smaller minimum for daily practice. But people will often say, I sit for 20 minutes and then it's just time to get up. I'm back to my ordinary consciousness again and it's time to get on with the day and whatever. And it's like I'm not meditating anymore. And if I try to meditate beyond that, I'm just into scattered mind and ordinary consciousness.

So the reaction to attempting to meditate beyond the 20-minute glass ceiling is you're back to the state where you started. So recycle the reaction says, that's fine. You don't need to do anything like that.

You don't need to get deeper again or struggle to get back to where you were 10 minutes before that. You just take that reaction. It's coming up in feel, image, talk, activity, and you focus on that reaction. You recycle it.

You make use of it. And then you will grow through that, even though it doesn't seem like you have that deep state that you might think is the sign of quote good meditation. So that might be a representative sort of common thing that happens to beginner meditators.

At a more intermediate level, it's actually sort of the opposite. Often people will come to me and they'll say something like, I was meditating and I dropped into this deep state and then. Now when they say and then, I pretty much know what they're going to say. I give it 80% probability that they're going to say, and then I became terrified. In other words, they

spontaneously dropped into a deeper state than they'd ever been in, and there was a kind of no self experience. The reaction to that was fear, which is actually a very common reaction.

What to do? Recycle the reaction. Really love that fear to death, know that fear to death. Just let it happen. It's coming up usually primarily in feel space, that is to say the emotional body. So you apply your technique to it. And however long or short that fear reaction to going deep comes up, you just work with it and that's sort of your task.

You recycle the reaction. At some point you've worked through the fear. The depths of your being knows that there's nothing objectively dangerous in that experience, and so you are able to continue to progress. Another thing that happens to intermediate meditators where they have to recycle the reaction is, as the result of doing the practice, they develop an aversion to being around ordinary people, their former friends, their family, because they realize how different they've become and it's like they can't relate.

That's definitely an intermediate phenomenon. That's not where this practice is meant to lead. In fact, this practice is meant to lead to the very opposite of that, a joy in being with ordinary screwed up people in their screwed upness, just hanging out with them because you know that you have something to give to them at a subtle level just by who you are. So if you get that reaction of not wanting to be around non-spiritual, screwed up ordinary people, then you see that that reaction is coming up in your own feel-image talk and you apply your practice to it until you work it through. Among advanced meditators, you get this very tricky thing called the dark night of the soul or the pit of the void, where everything is very flat.

It's nice because there's not the horrific drama and suffering that you had before, but it seems like your humanity has been taken away and the old edge and the old fire isn't there anymore. That's also a reaction to this practice. When you bite into emptiness, the first thing you encounter is the skin of the apple.

It's not representative of how juicy the fruit actually is. So if you sort of freak out because the enlightenment has a bleak side to it, then you watch your reactions to that. You work that through. You recycle that reaction and the true spring and bounce and vitality of the void will eventually manifest itself within you.

Reparenting Our Freaked Out Infant - Noting All Vanishings &

Gone in Pure Feeling ~ Shinzen Young

What is the significance of Vanishing? I was focusing on vanishings, and the vanishings became ubiquitous, just like it's everywhere. But in the past, when I've noted vanishings, say with the breath, it's actually been a sort of soothing experience with sort of an afterglow of peacefulness. I found this experience of noting vanishing to be highly agitating. I think the implied question is, what does that mean and what should I do? Uncomfortably stimulating, agitating. Noting nothing whatsoever has resulted in a lot of uncomfortable something. How closely correlated would you say, and a certain amount of guessing may be involved on this, how much correlation would you say there is between the fact that you were noting vanishing and the fact that you're sort of hyped up? In other words, does it seem highly correlated with that, that that really had something to do with it? Or would it be more, well, the potential was there and I might be hyped up because of other things. I'd like you to make a guess. Is it because you said, well, I'm sort of excited about this prospect and that, and I haven't had the sugar fix or the coffee fix, so it's not that, but it might have been some other things you sort of intimated. Do you think that the noting of vanishing played a large role in this, or other factors may have entered in? The answer, not sure at all, is completely valid.

There's a pretty strong correlation between the paying attention to nothing and a lot of agitating something. That's good. That's what I wanted to determine.

Or it may be uncomfortable, but it's good as far as practice goes. Is it mostly, well, you report a lot of talk, but would you say that the agitation is primarily in feel, image, or talk? It's primarily in feel. I don't want to put words in your mouth, so correct me if this is wrong, but the gist that I'm getting is I was noting vanishings, which usually is a peaceful experience for me, and I usually note vanishings just in the breath, the ends of the in and out breaths or external sounds, but two things happened this time that are very different.

First of all, the vanishing globalized to it's like everything's vanishing, and secondly, it was agitating and specifically agitating at the level of pure emotion in the body. Did I more or less nail it? Okay. That's called precision.

We have a vocabulary that allows for this kind of precision. Now that I've honed it down to that, I can give a pretty confident answer with regards to the two implicit questions, why is this happening and what should I do about it? Why it's happening is because you really did the technique well. The vanishing points us to the most primordial, primitive experience that a human being can have, which is a non-human experience, and actually the ultimate grounding, groundless grounding. However, if it points us to the ultimately primordial or primitive experience that any human being can have, so primitive that it's not human, there must also be the second most primitive experience that a human being can have, that's pretty close to it. That is definitely a human experience, and that is the experience of primordial chaotic feel of the infant. You died a thousand little times, petit mort, little deaths, into the gons.

When you came back, you came back as a little infant body with freak-out chaotic feel. That's really, really, really good. That's the good news. Why? Well, that in and of itself wouldn't be good news, but that combined with the fact that you're an experienced meditator is very good news. Because then you just note feel and its vanishings. You'll be working through the first thing that separated you from your spiritual source, the very first thing, in the first weeks and hours of life. You get to work at that level.

All you have to do is note feel and its vanishing, and all the other vanishings. See, right now you're an adult meditator. Then you were a helpless infant. Now you've got a super adult.

You're better than an adult. The adult meditator will apply the technique of note vanishing and include the feel vanishing in that technique. The adult meditator will therefore work through that primordial level of freak-out of the infant.

That's the linchpin on the freak-out of the adult, and of the teenager, and of all the intermediate levels from infant to adult. Sasaki Roshi says that the first thing that happens after zero breaks apart is expansion and contraction pull in opposite directions, and they cause a creation of a cleft of pure space. But because expansion is pulling out and contraction is pulling in, that space vibrates. It vibrates into pure heat of feel. Jō netsu in Japanese.

Jō means pure feeling, unalloyed with anything else, and netsu means heat. He says if you can detect that, that is the beginning of the self. That's the primordium of self. The true primordium of self is the space, and the source of the space is spaceless.

But the first thing that is in some sense a self, and not impersonal, is that pure heat of feel. And if you can detect and complete it, then the part of it that came from the expansion goes back to expansion. The part of it that came from contraction goes back to contraction. And the freaked out infant becomes its cosmic parents.

And then zero is reestablished, the next gone. And you are that. And you do that long enough, you will have completely reparented yourself.

And the adult that then will arise from that process will be called an enlightened human. OK. The comment was I was thinking of taking a nap.

But now maybe I should sit. Either is fine. Either is fine.

There is a case for either one. You need to take your ego death in manageable doses. Don't worry, it will probably happen again.

Or maybe that's a do worry, I don't know. But it took a long time, but that's the way I like to work. To really find out what's going on, I don't like to shoot from the hip as far as answering people's questions. But you see how we pinpointed exactly what was going on? We had a precise vocabulary. And I gave you what I would consider to be an optimal response strategy. And we are done.

Retreat Farewell - May 2009 ~ Shinzen Young

Our retreat will be ending tomorrow. We came here mostly what we were doing, sadhana, which means work on ourself for ourself.

When we leave, we should continue our sadhana. I mentioned the factors needed for success, a short-term investment to learn some terminology and concepts, a short-term investment to learn one or more focusing techniques, a long-term investment to apply those concepts and techniques, actually a lifelong investment to apply those concepts and techniques in daily life, and the establishment of a rhythm of day-to-day practice and periodic retreat. So this is retreat.

Why do we come to retreats? Several things, not just one. One thing, we build up a momentum all day, every day, what we've been doing, practice all our waking hours, been practicing in stillness, in motion, in life, a momentum builds up that will often take us to new levels. But if we didn't back it up with day-to-day practice, then those might be peak experiences. But if we back it up with day-to-day practice, they tend to be plateaus from which we can then grow more as a tendency.

So momentum is important, an important reason why people do retreats. Another thing that happens at retreats is we get social network and social support from the other meditators. We also get an environment where it's easy to practice, relatively.

Of course, the name of the game is freedom, so you have to be willing to practice in environments where it's not easy to practice also. And then we get contact with teachers, people that can give us input into our practice. We get private interviews, different kinds of contact with teachers.

When I said the factors that you needed, I mentioned those four things, you might have thought, well, something's missing, community's missing, the teachers are missing. No, that's implied in retreat. For most people, the source of social support and pure support and the source of professional input comes when you do retreats. And then many teachers will give you a contact that you can contact them in between retreats. Upon leaving the retreat, continue your sadhana. The other side of this practice is seva, service.

We talked about that. Upon leaving the retreat, service is very big because you're going to be teaching. You're going to be doing a lot of teaching on leaving this retreat.

Maybe you're saying, wait, this is the first retreat I ever did. What do you mean I'm going to be doing a lot of teaching? Well, you know that I define teaching in a very broad way. Anybody that changes as the result of doing this practice, that change in their life is a teaching.

It's a sermon to the people around them. If you are changing for the better as the result of this practice, then that means you are teaching because you just carry that with you. That's the subtle level of teaching.

Then there's the descriptive level of teaching. Hopefully you've thought about how you could describe this practice to people. And when people ask you, hey, what happened at the retreat, you can give a coherent description of what it's like. That's a kind of teaching. So you will be teaching.

Some of you are moving into the more explicit role of teaching, actually, showing people what to do. And that's wonderful. So continue your sadhana, continue your seva. You know the idiom, I hope it was as good for you as it was for me? You all heard this, right? Well, I hope this retreat was as good for you as it was for me. This was really good for me because

of you, working with you, the privilege of working with you, of contributing to your growth. You folks did a lot of quality work here. And so it was really fun and empowering and encouraging and enlivening for me to be able to be part of that.

And it's a privilege to do this kind of work, that I get to spend time with people like you. A bodhisattva in Tibetan, they're sometimes called sembachambo. It means a great hero or heroine of consciousness. So I want to thank each and every one of you for who you are and what you're becoming and for the gift that you've given me this retreat.

Retreat Welcome, April 2009 ~ Shinzen Young

Once again, welcome. As I always say, it is well that you have come. You've come a long way to come to this practice. And we'll be talking about this practice. We'll be talking about the concepts that you need for this practice. And we'll be giving you a chance to do the techniques that will develop the core skills of this practice.

You already know the big picture. We do this for ourself, and we do this for others. People go through a certain education process in school. And usually at the end of school, it's like, OK, I've sort of done the education piece. So life is sort of a school for people.

And at some point, most people reach a point where they have the perception, well, I've grown as much as I need to grow. I'm an adult. I'm established. I've got this or that.

I don't need a radical new something. I've completed my education. But some people mature to the point where they realize that there's one more level of learning as a human that is available if you want to.

That's what each and every one of you has reached. You've reached that point of maturity where you're ready for sort of the last lesson for the human. You have to go through a lot of different lessons. But the last lesson is the one that is designed to bring you to total happiness, happiness that is dependent on conditions, but also to a happiness that is independent of conditions for yourself and for others.

This might be called total happiness. So this is the continuing education that we came here to get. And I want to congratulate each and every one of you for being that old, that adult, that you've reached the point where you're ready to do what few people are actually ready to do at this point in human history.

Things were different in the past and things will probably be different in the future, but recently, the last many thousands of years is recently, rather few humans have reached this point. But you have. And that's extraordinary. It will be my privilege, my joy to facilitate this process for you, and I am totally jazzed, stoked, ready to go. We're going to have a great week. Thank you. LE toppings on my plate.

Sasaki Roshi & Burmo-Japanese Mindfulness Fusion ~ Shinzen

Young

you I would say his main innovation is the reframing of the Buddhist perspective called Anicca or impermanence in terms of expansion and contraction.

In early Buddhism they talked about a stage in one's practice where after paying very close attention to sensory phenomena one's awareness becomes dominated by the perception of sensory events rising and passing. The word in Pali is Udayabhaya. Udaya means coming up and Vyaya means passing away.

You combine them together and you have the word Udayabhaya. So there comes a time in one's practice where the sensory clarity is so great that you're aware of the risings and passings of sensory events and that dominates your awareness. A stage after that is an awareness not of sequential rising and passing but an awareness that no sooner does something arise but it's already passing. This is described quite clearly in the classic text on mindfulness practice called the Visuddhimagga. The Visuddhimagga was written probably in the 5th or 6th century AD in Sri Lanka by a man named Puttakosa.

So in it he talks about this stage where no sooner is there the arising but there's the passing. Now I'm sure that Sasaki Roshi never read the Visuddhimagga but he's done decades and decades and decades of practice. He's 102 now.

He began his practice when he was 14 years old and what a practice! Japanese Rinzai Zen, heavy duty samurai boot camp, monastic training from the age of 14. So the good news is he really really really has deep experience. The other news is it's hard to understand what he's saying because it's just so profound and advanced.

I sincerely doubt that he ever read the Visuddhimagga but he has had all the experiences described there and has formulated them though in a somewhat different way. He talks about simultaneous expansion and contraction which is the same thing that Puttakosa talks about when he says no sooner is something rising but it's also passing away. So it's right there in the ancient literature. However if you formulate it as it is done in the Pali in terms of rising and passing then there is the danger that there's going to be a meditator over here observing the rising and passing over there.

And in fact that would be a common criticism that Zen people might make of mindfulness practice. Well the expansion contraction formulation solves that problem because now instead of it's rising and passing at the same time you have the notion which allows for a two-dimensional thing over here that I'm observing back here. Expansion and contraction is three-dimensional. It's all-encompassing. When something arises it arises in three dimensions and that includes the observer as part of the arising. The observer is expanding into existence and contracting out of existence simultaneously as opposed to a two-dimensional thing that you observe.

It's now a three-dimensional thing that you participate in. So I would say the main innovation of Sasaki Roshi is formulating impermanence in terms of expansion and contraction and the notion that if you simultaneously totally give yourself to the expansion and contraction you become the expansion and contraction. And then there's nothing but expansion and contraction and at some point they cancel each other out into a flat line of zero which is the unborn, the primordial state of the source.

Then there is an abiding in zero until it repolarizes. When it polarizes once again in between, literally in between the forces of affirmation and negation, the forces of life and death, in between are born the feel-image-talk-perceiver and the touch-sight-sound-world. Both of them are born simultaneously in the cleft that surrounds self and world. This gives a model for how consciousness works and it allows for an experience where you participate in expansion, you simultaneously expand and contract. You and your world simultaneously are born in between the clefts of life and death and then life and death cancel out into zero and you go back to zero and then you and your world come out of zero again, born in the cleft in between expansion and contraction.

And then that cleft collapses back into zero and this is the cycle of impermanence which Sasaki also calls the activity of the Dharma or the activity of consciousness and so forth. So I would say his main innovation is this three-dimensional paradigm that vastly broadens and generalizes the early Buddhist notion of impermanence and actually gives, in a sense, a mathematical formulation for what's going on in consciousness. As far as the main difference between his teaching and mine, he has you experience this through koan practice.

What I've done is I've taken his model and I have mounted it within the noting practice of Burmese vipassana. To me that makes it more systematic and available to a larger audience. So instead of the sort of intuitive but very energetic Zen koan approach, I take a more prosaic algorithmic noting technique that I got from Burma and divide into a whole sequence of steps starting with just focusing on ordinary experience and then breaking it up finer and finer until by small manageable steps of noting certain phenomena I can bring the average person to actually experiencing this very advanced paradigm of expansion and contraction. So I would say that in some ways I'm very much part of the modern world in that in the modern world we have cuisines and music forms that are called fusion where you take two traditions and you fuse them in a way that's harmonious. So what I've done is I've fused the most creative of the contemporary Japanese Zen masters with a Burmese form of attentional skill training and so it's a sort of Burmo-Japanese fusion that was created by a Jewish science geek.

Sasaki Roshi, the Complex Number System & the Source of Love

~ Shinzen Young

Sasaki Roshi makes a lot more claims about his paradigm than I do.

He may be right. I only claim it's a useful way to analyze how consciousness works moment by moment. He implies that it's more than that, that it's a universal grand theory of everything. You can look at everything that is in terms of a paradigm of mutually contrasting activities that can cancel into a neutral, and a neutral that can cancel into a neutral and a neutral that can polarize into mutually contrasting activities.

He says this is sort of like the way everything works. It is not inconceivable that in a hundred years, two hundred years, a thousand years, whenever, finally a single unified grand theory of everything is hit upon, that it turns out to have something to do with binary contrasts that can cancel. There's some hint that that might be the case because so far our best model for everything is the complex number system, our modern concept of number.

And the complex number system consists of three types of contrast, each one of which can neutralize to a non-contrasting state. There's the multiplicative domain, which is a stretch-squeeze thing. You stretch-squeeze, or nothing moves, which is one, multiplied by one. Or you can multiply by a number whose absolute value is less than one, that will squeeze things.

You can multiply by a number whose absolute value is greater than one, that will stretch things. But if you multiply by one, it's a neutral element. Then you have the additive domain, where you can move to the right, move to the left, or not move at all, or front, back, top, bottom, or any direction of any vector. Well, in the complex plane it's a two-dimensional thing. In other words, move in one direction, move oppositely in that direction, they cancel out. That's additive zero.

And then there's a rotational component in the complex numbers, where you can turn to the right, turn to the left, or not turn at all. T.S. Eliot talks about the spirit as the dance. Except for the point, the still point, there would be no dance. And there is only the dance. If you look at a dancer, what do they do? Like Martha Grant writes, stretch your arms out, bring your arms in, okay, this sort of stretch-squeeze, but they also move up, move down, they jump, they move to the right, they move to the left, they turn to the right, turn to the left. All the actions of the dancer are actually quantified with our modern concept of number. Also, it turns out that the quantum weirdness is in a sense a consequence of our modern kinds of numbers, the complex, what are called the complex numbers. The waves that are complex waves allow for these weird things to happen. Among them, something coming from nothing, which is rather extraordinary. The neutral state can be a source of polarized something. It is possible that he's right.

Who knows? Only time will tell. But the fact that our number system seems to be built on binary contrast that can neutralize three different flavors of them, actually, the fact that he says consciousness is this contrasting, neutralizing activity, could be that this is pointing towards a grand theory of everything. The whole point in experiencing this is that it's analogous to the peristalsis of a formless womb. And as you begin to experience yourself and the world coming from this doing and returning to this doing, even though the doing is impersonal and empty, it's also a source of unconditional love. When we contact it, it has that effect on the human part of us. And we naturally from that want to serve.

Self-Enquiry & Mindfulness Meditation ~ Shinzen Young

How does self-inquiry relate to mindfulness practice? Someone wrote in asking, how does self-inquiry relate to mindfulness practice? It's a really interesting question.

In a sense, it would seem like they're very, very different. If you're not familiar with what's meant by self-inquiry, actually there's a range of traditions that teach it, including Zen, some Zen teachers, but also many people working within the Hindu tradition, the non-dual tradition, and so forth. Basic idea is you're constantly asking a question like, who am I or what am I? Whatever comes up, you're saying, well, who's experiencing this? What's experiencing this? You're having a thought, well, where did the thought come from? Who's thinking this thought? It's an approach that's been discovered independently in a number of cultures, used all around the world, actually. As I mentioned, there's some Zen teachers that teach it. There's also within the Hindu fold, and then people not affiliated with either Hinduism or Buddhism would give you a similar kind of model. As I say, they all have the same basic idea, it's like turn consciousness back on itself, turn the awareness back on itself. That would seem to be a very different practice from mindfulness. Mindfulness asks you to keep track of what's going on. However, if you really look deeply into what mindfulness practice is about, you will see that there's an interesting symmetry between self-inquiry on one hand and mindfulness on the other hand. It is true that the initial experiences that a person has when they do mindfulness can be described as, I'm a meditator over here observing stuff over there.

However, with time, two very significant things take place. One is that the habit of meditating begins to meditate. In other words, there's not so much that sense of, there has to be an I here doing the meditation. There's a momentum of concentration, sensory clarity, and equanimity, those three things.

A momentum of that builds up and it just carries itself. One important change that takes place with time, with mindfulness practice, is that sense of efforting and thinking that you initially needed in order to observe things, that goes away and there is just the observing. Just the clarity, well, if you want to call it observing, there's just the concentration, clarity, and equanimity. That's one change. A second change is that you develop a sensitivity to what's called impermanence. Now sometimes impermanence can be sort of continuous or vibratory or wavy, but another aspect of impermanence is noting the moment when things vanish. If you read the classic Visuddhimagga, for example, the path of purification written in probably the 5th century in Sri Lanka by Buddhakosa, he talks about a stage where your awareness is dominated by rising and passing, and then a stage where your awareness is dominated by just passing. You're just aware of endings, endings, endings.

In my vocabulary, I have people note it as ko. It's nothing mystical shmistical. You've all experienced it. You pay attention to your internal conversation as soon as you notice the talk arises, it sort of vanishes. Mental images disappear. Sounds come to an end.

It's no big deal. Something everybody experiences, but you can reach a point in your practice where that you become really, really aware of how many vanishings there are in things that you thought were quite solid. So at some point, you're just noting gone, gone, gone, gone. The place, each time you're noting a vanishing, for just a moment, your attention is adverted, that is to say, turned towards the source of consciousness. Because where something goes to when it vanishes is where it comes from when it arises. So if you want to turn the attention towards the source, you can take one of two strategies. You can say, A has arisen. Now let's look back and see where A came from. That's one way to go about it.

That would be the self-inquiry way. And it's very powerful. It works very well for some people.

But it doesn't necessarily work well for everyone. Another way to go about it is, well, instead of saying, A is arising, where did A come from, constantly asking that. Another way to go about it is, A has arisen. Now A disappears.

Watch A disappear. And that spot is going to be where B arises from. So you watch the vanishing piece. And if you want to be present at the very instant of the arising of B, you can do that by noticing the vanishing of A, the thing that preceded it. That's the gone of A is the origin of B. A and B meaning any two successive sensory experiences, big or small. That's what I meant when I said that there's a kind of symmetry between the two ways of working. So within the mindfulness tradition, there is actually something that more or less corresponds to self-inquiry. And it's hugely, hugely important. But it's not done with the model of keep looking back, keep looking back at where things are coming from. It's done with the model of keep watching where they go to when they pass away. Same place though.

Sensory Clarity - 1 of 2 - No Self As Thing ~ Shinzen Young

There is a famous scripture which serves as a Buddhist FAQ, Frequently Asked Questions, document or might be in some ways looked upon as a Buddhist catechism. And it's called the Questions of King Melinda.

It's in the Pali literature. Melinda was a historical person. And interestingly enough, although his questions are recorded in Buddhist literature preserved in Southeast Asia, King Melinda was a westerner. He was King Menandros, who was part of what was left in Northwest India after Alexander the Great died.

There were these Greek rulers. We say India, but this is India in its broadest sense. It would now be part of Afghanistan, actually, Bactria, where his kingdom was centered. This is a sort of early dialogue between East and West. Because he asks a series of questions to a Buddhist monk named Nagasena. Before this whole discussion starts, Nagasena asks the king, are you willing to have a discussion with me and perhaps have disagreements and whatever, and even debate? Are you willing to do it the way an academic would do it? Or are you going to do it the way a king would do it? And Nagasena says, what do you mean? He said, well, if academics have a disagreement and one sort of gets the better of the other or shows them to be incorrect, it's just, you know, they just accept that. If a king is shown to be incorrect, he executes you.

So which way are you going to do it? Like an academic or like he's like, you know, because if you're going to do it like a king, I'm out of here. He may have been an arhat, but he wasn't stupid with regards to the preservation of his low self by his gandas. So the king says, who are you and whatever? And he says, well, I'm called Nagasena, but there is no thing called Nagasena. And then the king tries to sort of trip him up on something.

And so then Nagasena makes this metaphor that's very famous in Buddhist literature. He says, well, your majesty, when you arrived here, how did you get here? Well, I was in my chariot. And then he goes through all the different parts of the chariot. And he says, well, is there really a thing called the chariot? Are the wheels the chariot, the hub, the bed, the axle tree, the yoke, et cetera, et cetera. He goes through all these parts, and the king has to agree, no, that's not the chariot.

That's not the chariot. And then Nagasena says, and it's the same with us. There's just rupa, vedana, sanjna, sankhara, and vijnana.

That doesn't constitute a self called Nagasena. And the king sort of gets it in this scripture and says, OK, you're right. You win on that one. I guess I can see your point. The point being that chariot as a thing is just a convention. Usually I find the arhat Nagasena's argument unconvincing myself. Does that sound arrogant and irreverent? If it were really, really, really convincing, then all the philosophers of the world would be saying, these guys are right. But in fact, there's a lot of philosophical objections to this argument. If you get some professional philosophers in and let them get to work on it, they might really tear it apart.

I think he's right. There is no thing called a self. I'm not just quite sure that this particular metaphor clinches it as a proof, the way it is portrayed as doing in the scripture. But I would like to clinch it for the world so that there are no quibbles or objections and everybody agrees.

Whoa, yeah, can't deny that. I would like to suggest another angle of attack on this idea. I agree with the idea.

I think it is one of the most important ideas in the history of the world. One of the things that is noticeable in this argument is that rupa means the physical body. It's not a sensory

experience. We know it exists through a sensory experience, but it's not being presented as a sensory experience.

It's being presented as a concept, body as matter. Samskaras are not direct sensory experiences for most meditators. They can be for some meditators. You can directly experience it. Consciousness as an entity in its own right, as opposed to consciousness in a certain flavor, such as Tutsite sound-feel-image-talk, that's not ordinarily experienced by most meditators. What if we just take the parts that are direct sensory experience? Why would we want to do that? Because well, direct sensory experience as opposed to concepts can be brain-imaged. My idea is let's take either broadly Vedanā-tami body, that is to say physical and emotional sensations, so that would be touch-feel, as they do within the Upa-Khin lineage, or let's really look at the most gripping part of Vedanā, which is the emotional type pleasures and pains that we go through. Let's take the feel part and let's make sanjna, or concept, not a concept, but a sensory experience, image-talk. So let's sort of streamline the model to feel-image-talk.

Now I didn't just pull this out of nowhere. There is an implication in my original school of Buddhism, Shingon, which is a form of Vajrayana, that the sense of self arises through mental image, internal talk, and body sensations, because the practices that are done in Shingon to have an experience of oneness with the deity involve the physical type sensations in the form of mudras, mental images where you visualize the deity in front and also yourself as a deity, and you visualize your surroundings as the palace of the deity, and you replace your internal talk with the mantra. And then you get the emotional feeling of the deity, whatever that tone is. So there's an implication that body image-talk broadly and feel-image-talk more narrowly, that these are sort of natural building blocks of identity. If people tease apart the feel-image-talk, which is, there's nothing conceptual in that, that's completely a sensory skill.

They get the same insight, oh, there's just feel-image-talk, there's no thing called a self here. So that's the way I have people work with this. Now instead of using a classic metaphor of the chariot, I use a much more homey, like your TV set or a computer monitor, not the liquid crystal ones, but the CRT ones. That's my metaphor.

Sensory Clarity - 2 of 2 - No Self As Thing ~ Shinzen Young

You're watching TV and there's like something white on the TV screen.

And this is assuming it's a CRT, a cathode ray tube. And I come in and I say, there is no thing called white on that screen. And you say, are you crazy? Just look, it's white. And I say, are you sure? Here is a magnifying glass. We agree that this magnifying glass does not change what is there. It does, however, increase resolution. Resolution is the ability to separate things that ordinarily fall together in perception. That's all that resolution means. You all know the difference between a high resolution screen and a low resolution screen.

The large amounts of data coming through allow for separation of points that truly are separated, but they would tend to fall together. So we go up and we look at the white and lo and behold, as we get closer, the perception white goes away and the perception red, green, blue arises. The Buddha said, if you look very carefully, the perception I am goes away and the perception five aggregates of identification arises.

Or in another formulation, the perception body goes away and the perception four elements, earth, water, air, fire, arises. Another metaphor, chop up a cow. If you can believe this, it's in the Buddhist scriptures. It's like, you can't believe this is there, but chop up a cow. Can you imagine chopping up a cow in public in modern India? Well, apparently in the Buddha's day it was done.

That'd get you in a bit of trouble. He said, suppose a butcher went to a public square and took a cow and began to chop up the cow. At some point, the perception cow would disappear and the perception meat would arise. That's actually in the Buddhist scriptures. What he says is, it's even more interesting. He doesn't say just any butcher. He says, suppose a very skillful butcher, who really knew what they were doing, were to very skillfully chop up this cow. Then, I guess if you don't know what you're doing, the perception meat won't arise. The perception of, oh my God. But a skillful butcher, the perception cow will go away and the perception meat will arise.

So, I think you see my metaphor here. The perception white goes away and the perception red, green, blue arises. Well, I would claim that when you look very carefully at at least your core subjective self of thought and emotion, the perception that that is a thing and I am it will go away. The perception feel, image, talk that aren't me will arise.

So that's my metaphor. Why I think that this is worth looking into is this is 100% a perceptual research project. There's nothing conceptual in it.

It's not like you have to conceive of the five aggregates. Like, oh yeah, there must be habit forces within me. Yeah, there must be a thing called consciousness. Yes, there's the physical body, etc.

etc. This is a phenomenon of perceptual psychology and therefore is amenable to the research methods that we would use for any other sensory perception. We don't know how red, green, blue mix to produce something that is none of them, to wit white. We don't know how the visual system does it. I mean, we know in some vague ways some things about the circuitry. But we do not really understand how an illusory emergent property arises. But someday we will. It is possible, I am choosing my words extremely carefully, it is possible that when a person resolves I am-ness into feel-image-talk, something like the resolving of white into red, green, blue takes place.

Notice I said something like. I don't know because we don't know about the red, green, blue thing. Is white there or not? What do you say about something that disappears as soon as you look closely and reappears as soon as you are not paying close attention? What is

the existential status of that white? Does it exist? Well, if you don't look carefully it does.

But then if you look carefully it doesn't, so it sort of exists but doesn't exist. Something like that may be going on when people that have used my methods get a sense of freedom from their limited identity. The perception I am a thing goes away and the perception feel-image-talk arises. If indeed these are analogous then it is now possible to turn the lens of science on that perceptual shift.

Well, it's not now possible but it will be possible in the next 50 years, 100 years, 200 years. And maybe we can come up with a very convincing argument that yes, indeed, the Buddha was right and Nagasena was right. If we were to take this metaphor further, if we were to go beyond the perception red, green, blue and deeply penetrate what is red, green and blue light, where it's light coming out, right? There are three different flavors or colors we call it. If you ask what do they all have in common, at a deep level, what's red, green and blue light? What's light? What's colored light? These are waves of radiant electromagnetic energy.

And from the point of view that they are radiant electromagnetic energy, they're just different frequencies of the same phenomenon. The word vipassana means vipassana, means to see separately in the sense of separating out strands. But v in addition to apart, vipassana means to see apart. But v has another force as a prefix, it means through or into. So first you vipassana in the sense of separate the strands, but then your awareness soaks into those strands and you start to experience feel-image-talk as vibrating space, which is sort of interesting because radiant electromagnetic energy, if you ask a physicist, they'll say, well, it's sort of vibrating space. Now I don't know how far we can take this metaphor.

I'm not so naive as to suggest that it's anything more than an interesting parallel, but it is an interesting parallel. So after you've teased out the strands, the concentration, clarity and equanimity go into the strands and the strands start to present themselves as vibrating void. And then there's no distinction between feel-image-talk because they're just vibrating void. The focus in technique harkens back to the early Buddhist notion of separate the strands and then penetrate the strands and see their empty impermanent nature.

Sensory Clarity: Untangle and Be Free ~ Shinzen Young

This notion of sensory clarity as a vehicle for insight and liberation. We don't have any historical record of this before the Buddha.

Although he said there were Buddhas in the past, etc. etc. Basically the idea is you take the sense of self and you break it down into components. Now there's a lot of ways you can go about this.

The four great elements, the four foundations of mindfulness, the five aggregates. There's a lot of possibilities, a lot of ways that the pie can be chopped up. If you're more on the, I don't know, scripturally oriented side, you're very concerned with the particular sets of categories that are used to untangle the web of limited identity.

But for me I'm not so concerned with the categories themselves as the general idea. I think it's one of the most significant discoveries of our human species. A parallel discovery took place in the West and in fact is one of the things responsible for the domination of Western culture.

But in the West the principle, the principle of separate the strands and you can understand how the thing works and gain a handle on it. That principle was never applied internally but it was applied externally to the external natural world in many, many domains starting with the Greeks. And the Greeks gave us a word for that process.

It is a Greek word that means to break something up in order to understand it and be empowered. Analysis. Analysis now implies some sort of intellectual formulation. I'm going to analyze the situation.

But originally the word analysis meant exactly what those morphemes mean. It meant take the complicated thing, break it down into its pieces, see how the pieces interact with each other and you'll understand how the complicated thing works. It's divide and conquer.

Strategema de divide et impera. The strategy of if you can untangle, if you can find out what the fundamental dimensions of the system, what are the primes, what are the atoms, what are the components that are involved in this system, then you're going to get a handle on it. The West eventually discovered that the whole natural world could be analyzed in terms of mass, length, time, thermodynamic temperature, and electrical current. Their interactions will give a complete understanding of the natural world, at least as known to modern physics. But it took centuries and centuries and centuries of contention, argument, confusion to finally be able to define these components of the natural world.

But it allowed for the arising of physics, and physics allowed for better ships and better cannons and better machines, and that allowed for the domination of Europe over the rest of the world. The West used divide and conquer in order to conquer the material world. But in the East, the Buddha discovered divide and conquer in order to conquer our limited identity, in order to conquer our suffering, and the screwed up behaviors that come from our suffering. He was called a conqueror.

Some people don't like the divide and conquer. They think the conqueror is bad. But actually, one of the words that was used to describe the Buddha was Jina, J-I-N-A, and that means the conqueror. Because when he was born, the court astrologer was called in by his father, King Siddhodana.

The Buddha was born in the Kshatriya caste, which is the warrior caste of India. And the king asked the court astrologer, what do you foresee for my son Siddhartha? The astrologer said, your majesty, you've given birth to an extraordinary child. He will either stay in the palace

and conquer India, which for them meant conquer the world, Jambudvipa, meaning expand your empire from being a little clan up in northeast India to like you're running the show now, or he will leave this palace and conquer himself, conquer his limited identity, and make his mark in history that way.

His father wanted him to conquer the world, and so tried to keep him inside the palace. So this notion of if you want the more gentle formulation, untangle and be free, if you want the more sharp formulation, divide and conquer. This is sensory clarity, the third component of mindfulness. And as far as I can, as I mentioned, as far as I can tell, this was like a unique discovery and was central to the development of a whole new direction in human spirituality. These are skills, concentration, sensory clarity, equanimity, are skills that can be developed with time.

Shinzen Young - The Science of Enlightenment (Book Trailer)

What if you could approach meditation practice with more ease and less struggle? What if you could tap into the intellectual joy of understanding the science behind it? And what if you could use that joy and clarity to work smarter in your practice? You discover that nature is constantly providing windows to transcendence, and you get even more mileage out of your practice and its application to your everyday life.

The concept of enlightenment would be within your grasp. It's often said that the things experienced by advanced meditators cannot be put into words, but I disagree. And I've dedicated the last 40 years of my life to the endeavor of creating a precise and accessible language for describing what happens as the result of deep meditation practice. By working smarter and knowing how to spot nature's windows of opportunity, more people will have the tools to benefit from meditation, and more people will flourish in their existing practice.

Imagine how that could change our world. In my senior year of college, I studied abroad in Japan. During that year, I was befriended by some Zen monks. I sensed that they had a kind of secret sauce, a way to be deeply happy independent of conditions.

Eventually I decided to discover for myself what they were talking about. I knew I would meditate my whole life and probably eventually get good at it. But I was also impressed by the power of modern science and technology. So I decided to train myself in physics and mathematics as well. I currently divide my time between teaching meditation and designing research related to it. I derive great joy from discovering parallels between mathematical structures and meditative experiences.

And I like to think of myself as being on a mission to take the mist out of mysticism. Many people are quite pessimistic regarding the future. Degradation of the environment, senseless violence, economic chaos, and political extremism all seem to bode ill for humanity in this century.

Of course, it's impossible to predict the future. But there's a very real possibility that the marriage of the best of the East and the West could pull the bacon out of the fire and lead to a dramatic improvement of the human condition. This reasonable and reassuring thought fuels my days. What if informing meditation with the spirit of science ends up creating the zeitgeist for the next century? I wrote *The Science of Enlightenment* to bring that dialogue to a broader audience. And I invite you to join me and take your meditation practice further than you may have thought possible.

Shinzen Young and Soryu ~ Primal Feel and the Zen Keisaku - 2

of 2

What is the difference between a Zen and a Vipassana? Soryu has decided that he is sick of me perverting the true teachings of Zen by mixing it with Vipassana.

And also my cavalier and arrogant attitude, claiming that there have never been any good meditation teachers, although there have been and are great ones, needs to be chastised in public. You didn't expect that, did you? So we're going to show you how it's done. And he's good at it. And he's like a professional, I don't know if you know, but he's like arguably the best tennis player in Vermont.

He's a professional athlete and he's young and he's strong. He might break it, okay? Okay, so would you like to say anything? Why don't you come up here and tell your Keisaku stories? I actually went through a similar experience, so I don't have very much new to say. I went into the temple and for the first period of time the Keisaku actually seemed...

Maybe this isn't the same. It seemed kind of fun. I was young and felt very tough, and I was good at meditation and all this. And I liked it that I was in a tough place with people who'd hit me.

And it was kind of fun. And there came a point, which I actually talked about earlier today, when I started to notice how distracted I actually was, which I'd never noticed because I was too distracted to notice. TSL, distracted from distraction by distraction. So I was distracted to the point that I sometimes believed that I'd be thinking I'm pretty good at this and not noticing that I was distracted from my meditation when I was thinking how good I was at the meditation. And there came a very horrifying transformation when I noticed that I actually couldn't keep my concentration in my estimation at that point for even one second. Couldn't keep my mind on anything for a second. And I started to have a great deal of insecurity. And it was really at that point when the keisaku turned into something horrifying.

And then the person would carry the keisaku. At least for me, the self-talk was all negative about them. What's this terrible person doing trying to hurt us and wreck this monastery with violence and all of that? And it was really quite a while before I managed to work through that. In a similar way, though, Harada Roshi actually began to regularly carry it. For a long sit, he would carry it very slowly through the zendo. And it was that presence that it really felt as he moved it.

You mentioned that wave. It was like there was just a force of such energy penetrating, just penetrating my body, penetrating. And it particularly would penetrate my legs, which were in extreme pain. Early on, I decided I would only sit in full lotus. I don't know why I decided that, but I decided to only sit in full lotus. And that meant that I was in extreme pain pretty much all the time.

Definitely the most pain I've ever experienced. And as you would walk, this sphere, it's like a sun. It's like a comet. It's just like this amazing force of power would move and would start to penetrate my body. And there was so much resistance to the pain and to the keisaku coming that I would resist that power, which made it hurt so much more. And it wasn't until I really just freaked out one time as he was about to hit me. It wasn't until that happened. And I was shaking, you understand, just shaking and trying to bow like this. It was just unbelievably terrible. It wasn't until there was a point there when it's just too much and it's just easier to not do that anymore.

Just easier, not better, not, oh good, I've got a great idea. I'll stop resisting. Not like that. It was just, I just can't anymore.

Just no. And so at the moment it penetrates finally. Sometimes I say it's sort of like going to the bathroom when you really have to. You finally just let yourself, you can finally go to the bathroom. And it felt kind of like that, but just coming in and flowing through. And then it's uplifting. It's just uplifting.

You feel kind of like you're floating. So I actually came back also to the US and I was using it. I actually haven't really used the Keisaku that much here. And I don't think it's a good idea to make it seem as if this is sort of like war stories or like this is a heroic device or something. It's not. It's just a tool. I don't think that a system that uses it has everything going right.

To not use it is just great. But today we'll show you how it's done. Sorry. Well, I have to deserve it, right? Okay.

Game face. Okay. Okay. Oh, yeah. So now you know. Thanks, Aria. So I'm sorry. It's a little giddy. It's just good. You know what's going to happen. All right.

Shinzen Young ~ Guided Compassion and Healing Meditation

Something has happened, it reached out, and it's hurt many people. In connecting with that, we connect with the enormous web of similar things that have been happening for tens of thousands of years all over the planet.

This immense pool of poison and pain of humans hurt by other humans. We can connect to that. We have that within us. There's a place inside that's so far in that it's out in each one of us.

You can call it boundless consciousness. Connecting with that place, we can see, as the Buddha did in his night of enlightenment, the vast net of hurt. We can see the causes. We can see the effects. And we can feel compassion for the victims, compassion for the perpetrators, compassion for ourselves.

End And not only can we feel this, but it can be a source of empowerment to motivate us to do even more in whatever way we can for this healing of the world. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Shinzen Young ~ My Primary Mission: A Deep, Broad, and Subtle

Formulation

What is your primary mission? Since my primary mission is to create a truly rigorous formulation, just from my own personal perspective, I'm duty-bound to present what I think is the most precise scientific theory of what's actually going on, which may not be the simplest one to teach to the masses.

But unless we have a really deep, broad, and subtle theoretical understanding, I think in the end we won't be able to teach effectively. So that's why I do that on purpose. That's a choice. I would prefer to teach the deeper, broader formulation, even though people don't quite get it right away. Because I want the dialogue to progress through time. I want our understanding, our scientific understanding, to be able to evolve. So that's the reason I formulate it that way.

Shinzen Young ~ Primal Feel and the Zen Keisaku - 1 of 2

There's a lot of research that has been done on this. When I lived in Japan, they would carry, to keep you awake and also to sort of help you with physical discomforts, but mostly to scare you into alertness, they carry what's called a keisaku in the Rinzaï-zen tradition. called a kyo-saku in the Soto-zen. It's the same Chinese characters that mean wake up stick, literally. Wake, waking stick or wake up stick.

But also the same character that means wake up, it also means startle actually. And I used to carry the keisaku and whack people and people used to carry the keisaku and whack me. And when I came back to the United States, I initially moved into a Vietnamese style Buddhist temple in Los Angeles, the International Buddhist Meditation Center on New Hampshire in Koreatown.

It's still there. And because I had been in Japan and had the Zen background, I initially sort of taught in the Zen mode. So I had a keisaku and I used to use it at retreats.

And this is way, way, way back in the 70s. Security was not, you know, the crazy fear that it is now at airports and so forth. So I would actually carry the keisaku onto the plane. Sometimes they'd ask, you know, at the checkpoint, sort of like, what's that? Right? And I said, well, it's used for giving a Japanese massage, which is true. When it's done right, and I've had the privilege of having it done right by real masters.

I once got sakud by a roshi, not Sasaki Roshi, a different roshi, who was also a kendo master. Imagine what it would be like to be a basketball being dribbled by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Okay? That's what my body felt like. It was like he could dribble me at the end of the keisaku, like pick me up and put me down.

I mean, obviously physics laws don't allow for that, but it sort of seemed like, I mean, he had that much power at the end of that thing. And when it's done right, it hits on what I think is called bladder 21, which is both a stimulating point and a mellowing out point at the same time. And boy, that is what it does to you. Okay? It causes a shower of endorphins. It doesn't, I mean, hurts a little bit, but it doesn't really like hurt the way you might think it hurts. All your muscles relax, all the pain goes down right down into your toes if it's done right. And you are awake.

You are definitely awake. So I used to carry it, you know, at IBM, at the International Buddhist Meditation Center. But what I noticed is that as I began to move more into the vipassana mode, I noticed that, first of all, initially people are like really scared. And then they develop an addiction to it and want it. See, they could request it the way I was doing it. So it's like, oh, I'm sort of fostering fear and then addiction here.

And maybe, you know, it's like, well, so I just sort of got out of the habit. Years later, I discovered Sasaki Roshi, and I translated for him for five years, but didn't really study with him. But then I guess, you know, the center of gravity just gradually had a strong enough influence that I just couldn't resist. So I started to go to sessions at Mount Baldy.

So it's like, by that time I meditated for quite a while. It's my first session at Mount Baldy, and they're sitting, and they bring out the keisaku, right? They walk in a very menacing, threatening way, intentionally, with a kind of mincing pace that sort of like gives you the impression at any instant they're gonna turn, they're gonna suddenly turn around and beat the living crap out of you, okay? Now, mind you, it feels good, okay? And I've had it done to me, and I'd done it to people for years and years and years previously, okay? So I'm sitting there, and it's like the guy starts to walk by, you know? And this terror arises within me, this primordial, intense, intense terror. Actually, I couldn't even control my body. I actually started to move, so I got hit, okay? Which felt good, but so you might think, and that

happened every time for the whole session, and for the next session, and for the next session, okay? It was like that's what the whole thing was about, was like I'm like sweating bullets and shitting bricks every time these guys are carrying the stick, which is frequently during the day. So now you might think that the self-talk would be like, what is wrong with me, okay? That I'm having this huge overblown reaction, but that's not the self-talk that arose, not in the slightest. What arose was wisdom function that understood what was happening, why it was happening, and what to do about it.

So what was the difference? What, 15 years ago when I was in Japan, and they'd carry it with the same threatening, you know, whatever, okay? And I didn't even notice it. I was so lost in my thoughts, and you know, in my memory, plan, and fantasy, whatever, I didn't even notice what was going on. Years and years and years of meditation, be careful what you ask for, you know, how many people come to me and say, oh, if only I could have a peaceful mind.

Well, you can have a peaceful mind, but there's a price to pay for a peaceful mind. What's left if the image and talk turns off? What's left of you? What's left of you is a frightened little infant's body is what's left of you. And so when Darth Vader is coming out of the world of threatening archetypes, okay, that's all that was there. Now, could I have turned that all off by rationalization? Easy, just start thinking. It's like, okay, that's so-and-so, and I've known him for years, and he's a friend of mine, and if he hits me, it's gonna feel good. I could rationalize away the fear, but that's not the idea. The idea is to scour down into the infantile animal levels of your being, no matter how embarrassing that might be, no matter how inconvenient that might be, you don't rationalize it away, you train the body at that primitive level, and it doesn't, you just, it's like, okay, that's what's happening, and I know exactly what to do, and eventually it reached the point where as soon as they started to carry the kesaku, this wave of power fear would spread to me, turn into flow, cause me to merge with the person carrying the kesaku and the entire room, and it was like just catharsis city, this bliss city. So you want oneness? Well, one way to get it is work through separateness at the primitive level of the body.

Shinzen Young's Welcome to New Viewers

My name is Shinzen Young, and I would like to welcome you to my YouTube channel.

Literally welcome. It is well that you have come. If you're watching this, you probably have some interest in what might be described as the spiritual path.

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. Obviously, there are many approaches from which this can be done. At this YouTube channel, you'll hear me describe one of those approaches. 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. 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. I would say that those are the two basic themes of a deep spiritual path. 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. When you can see those as complementary endeavors, I would say that you have reached spiritual maturity. 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.

It turns out that when you develop this skill set, which, by the way, anyone can develop with time, practice, and competent instruction, 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. It becomes spiritualized. In the Christian tradition, this is sometimes referred to as the practice of the presence of God, meaning that you don't have to go to church anymore because you can't get away from church. Every place you look is a beatific vision. Every sound of the world is a sacred hymn. Every ordinary sensation in your body is the massage of the Spirit.

So that's ordinary experience experienced with an extraordinary awareness. That's the essence of the mindfulness approach. Within mindfulness, there are a number of different traditions, different ways of developing that skill set. What you'll learn from me is eclectic. I've drawn from a couple of the Burmese traditions, but I've also been influenced by something that is historically not part of mindfulness, which is Zen and also Vajrayana.

I've taken the influences from those. Vajrayana, if you're not familiar, is a practice primarily associated with Tibet. I've taken from those traditions, but sort of woven them within the framework of the mindfulness way of working. Why I like to use the mindfulness framework is for several reasons. First of all, it's possible to present a really deep and complete spiritual path within the framework of mindfulness without there being any specific religious doctrines involved.

You can just extract it from the background. Historically, the background is Buddhism. There is certainly a thing called the Buddhist religion, but you can extract the mindfulness practice from that thing called the Buddhist religion and make something that is acceptable to anyone. I don't know if you can hear in the background, but they're chanting mass where I am right now. We're at the Carmelite Spiritual Center in Niagara Falls, Canada.

I'm running a mindfulness retreat. Why is it that these Catholic priests welcome us? Well, they realize that we're teaching something that is certainly compatible with their Christian contemplative practices. The Carmelites are a meditating or contemplative order. They know that we're not trying to convert people to Buddhism, even though our technique is derived historically from Buddhism.

We're not trying to convince people to believe in reincarnation or to worship icons of the Buddha or something like that. We've extracted the essence of the practice, the concentration, clarity, and equanimity skill cultivation. We've extracted it from the doctrines. I like to say we give people hardware and we'll let you run your own software, your own philosophy, which could be Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, or radical, secular Marxism. It could be whatever you want. We give you the hardware. You run your own software. I find that the mindfulness framework makes it very easy to do that.

Also, the mindfulness framework allows us to discard the cultural aspects that are associated with Asia. I just came back from Israel, where I ran a retreat that was... I had 90 Israeli people there. They were all Jewish.

There's actually a law in Orthodox Judaism, and some of those people were Orthodox, that you're not allowed to have any statues, any idols in the land of Israel. Well, that's not a problem. That's just a cultural piece of baggage from Asia. It's not central to what we do. You don't have to chant in Sino-Japanese or eat with chopsticks in order to attain enlightenment. So, the mindfulness framework allows us to extract the essence from the cultural background. The other thing that I like about the mindfulness framework is that it is very harmonious with science. In fact, it's basically like science. The nuts and bolts of science is to track how much of what, when, and where, interacting in what ways, and changing at what rates. Those of you that have a background in science, technology, or engineering know what I'm talking about.

It's the nuts and bolts of science. Well, it turns out that the nuts and bolts of mindfulness is essentially identical, except applied to sensory experience. It's how much of what, when, and where, interacting in what ways, and changing at what rates, with regards to your experience of self and world. So, the mindfulness perspective fits very well with modern science, and it is amenable to study through the methods of neuroscience. Because we can extract from the doctrinal background, we can extract from the cultural baggage, and we have something that is not only compatible with, but actually potentiates the scientific point of view. For those reasons, I like the mindfulness perspective on the spiritual path. So, at this channel, that's the perspective that you'll be getting. And I hope that you'll find it useful and can apply it to the nitty-gritty of your inner life and your external behaviors.

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Sight Space: How Detecting Shifts Can Lead to Flow ~ Shinzen

Young

The sources of shifting in visual experience are several.

Obviously if you turn your head, you turn your body, that causes huge shiftings and that's a source of shift. Then you have what might be called the large scale movements of the eyes, like sight, sight, sight, sight. But then there's like sight, but then I could be aware of shift, shift, shift, like smaller movements from place to place within the object. Each one of those is a sight too and probably those small shifts are some combination of saccadic movements, which are physical, plus movements in the visual cortex where in the brain the center of attention is shifting around, even though there's not a physical basis for it. And any of the shifts from the gross movements of the body to the shifts that actually are not based on the physical but are based on what the nervous system is doing centrally, any of those scales of shift represents a new instance of visual experience. And in fact that's the whole trick in getting the flow in sight space, is to detect each large and small scale shift. And just like the body, as you become aware of how the attention shifts around, starts to become undulatory and soft, the external visual experience goes through a similar change as you're sort of with each shift like that. I encourage people, maybe you can guess what I'm going to say now, both, right? Do it with the glasses on so that you get the normal 20-20-20, but also the glasses off, well that's just a little bit like Yaza or something, it's artificial but it could be a platform to learn some stuff. I myself now am in total pixelated flow. Now I'm also in pixelated flow but much higher frequency.

Simultaneous Zooming In & Out During Positive & Restful States

~ Shinzen Young

What is the difference between positive and negative? Very good point. Because normally it's like what I have people to do when they're freaking out in pain and emotions and things.

But if you do it in positive, then it turns into bliss city. How can I do it with restful? You just need to notice that physiologically it has to happen or the out-breath won't occur. So when you breathe out locally in the core of your body, there's automatic relaxation. As that's happening, if you spread awareness to how the whole body is also settled, the five limbs, the two arms, the two legs and the head, that's actually an example of zoom in and out on a restful state. The restfulness from the core spreads and affects the whole body. So each out-breath just completely inundates you with physical relaxation. And that's a zoom in out on a restful flavor. That's very natural.

Six Common Traps on the Path to Enlightenment ~ Shinzen

Young

Most people, if they're going to get caught someplace, that's going to prevent them from becoming enlightened.

It's going to be in allocating so much time and energy to finding the right map, the right model, the right teacher, the right situation, that there's little time and energy left to actually do the practice. So we might call that the map trap. The second trap, speaking broadly about the spiritual path, is what we might call the fundamentalism trap. You buy into a mythological system that allows you to make dramatic and significant improvements in both your happiness subjectively and your behavior objectively. Even small positive changes in a person's life in terms of being happier subjectively and behaving better objectively, that's what I mean by positive changes, even small positive changes in a person's life are very, very difficult to come by.

Ask any psychotherapist. To have huge positive changes in a person's life quickly, dramatically, that's not a small thing. Something really good happens. The problem is your intellectual horizons have now become closed. The very mythological structure that allowed for these positive changes prevents the next stage in positive change.

The antidote for not getting caught in a good place for the fundamentalist is to realize what I just said, if they can. Let's say that you do a meditation practice. You can achieve states of calm and concentration, and that's certainly a good thing. But year after year after year, that's sort of where you're at.

You sit down, everything is sort of tranquil, time passes quickly, you get up, you're refreshed, but that's about it. Well, that's a good place, but you can go beyond that to a better place. So we might call that the tranquility trap. The antidote for that particular getting caught in a good place is you take these blissful, tranquil states and then you clarify them. By distinguishing different flavors of restfulness, that brings a clarification component into the tranquility piece. You think that you're going closer and closer to the source by exploring the world of archetypes, special powers, body experiences, former lives, you name it.

It can be a good place, but it can also limit you. You think you're making spiritual progress, going deeper and deeper and deeper towards the formless source, but actually you've turned 90 degrees, you're now on a trajectory that's at right angles to going down to the source of consciousness, but you don't know it. You're going out, out, out, exploring the power realms. If you deconstruct the realm of spirits mindfully, it will take you to spirit, and that's the antidote to the realms of power trap. You interpret the experience of the power realms as a sensory event, just like any other sensory event, power or bizarre, you treat it as though it were banal, and you apply concentration, clarity, and equanimity to it, as you would with any other sensory event. That then allows you to go deeper and deeper and deeper towards not the realm of spirits, but the realm of the great spirit, shall we say, that formless doing, the dharmakaya. It can happen that you get classical enlightenment.

It's the real thing. It's permanent, you've seen the no-self, but you think you know more than you do, and you might even start teaching from that place. That's another good place you can get caught in. Enlightenment is a many-faceted jewel. You can see it from many, many sides. In my experience, it's a continuum, a vast continuum, with many facets.

A person could easily miss some of those facets. Just because you've seen the no-self doesn't mean you don't have a long, long way to go to become truly liberated from your old habits. What shall we call it? The enlightenment trap. Well, the antidote to that is the courage to take feedback from other teachers, and to find teachers vastly senior to yourself, to take feedback from them.

Constantly take feedback from your environment. One of my teachers used to say, Kyō no satori wa ashita no machigai. You may know satori. It's the Japanese for awakening. Today's enlightenment is tomorrow's mistake, meaning you have to be constantly willing to move forward. The observer trap is the characteristic weakness in the mindfulness way of working.

Now, that doesn't mean that it's a showstopper. It just means when you work within that way, you have to be aware that this could be a problem and you have to be aware of what the antidote is, what the fix is. Two parts to the fix. The first is to bear in mind what I just said, that there is this possible danger. If you're not aware of this possible danger, then you might fall into that trap.

You know that this could be a possible danger. Well, then how do we not have that happen? Well, think about when you learn to drive a car, assuming you have learned to drive a car. When you first attempt to do it, I remember when I first learned to drive a car, I was on a stick shift and it took so much effort and I had to think about everything. I could just barely do it. I thought to myself, I'll never be able to operate this car and do anything else.

I'll just have to be constantly thinking about the two dozen things I have to be constantly thinking about. But you know what? After six months, I'm just bopping along on the freeways in LA, listening to the radio, munching on a burrito, talking to somebody, and it's rush hour traffic, it's smog, it's chaos and no problem. What happened? The fact of having driven so much was driving the car.

In other words, the driving became second nature. First practice develops concentration, sensory clarity, and equanimity. At first, you have to think about it and it takes a lot of effort. At some point, the concentration, clarity, and equanimity start to go on autopilot. Then the subtle mental images, subtle internal conversations, and subtle emotional sensations in the body that create the sense that there is someone meditating, that there is a self directing this process. Those sensory arisings start to get enfolded within the momentum of the concentration, clarity, and equanimity without the need for more of them to be directing the process. In other words, just as with the driving metaphor, the habit of driving eventually can drive the car. So in the mindfulness metaphor, the habit of mindfulness eventually meditates you and seeps around and dissolves the sense of a meditator. And that's how it works.

Sleep Interruption & A Good Night's Rest ~ Shinzen Young

Sleep interruption on the meditative path is actually, I would say, not uncommon, particularly at retreats, but it can also sort of spread into daily life. We can look upon the meditative path as a journey from the surface of consciousness to the source of consciousness. Another way we can look upon it is that we are sort of pouring concentration, clarity, and equanimity from the surface down into the depths. Actually those two metaphors refer to exactly the same thing.

If we take the second metaphor, that here we are on the surface and we're sort of shining the flashlight of mindfulness on the surface of consciousness, and some photons are trickling down into the depths, giving the depths what they need to rewire themselves. If we take that metaphor, then it's not surprising that there should be some interruption in or some impact on sleep. Sometimes as the result of meditating, a person may find that they sleep deeper and better than they ever dreamed possible.

Other times there can be exactly the opposite effect. There's consciousness inside the sleep. You don't really, you may have difficulty falling asleep or there's still awareness going on during the sleep and so forth. I should say that the long-term effects will be to sleep both deep and consciously.

So if in the short term you find that you're not sleeping deeply because some consciousness is coming in there, then there's no need to freak out. There's a very senior vipassana master named S.N. Goenka who teaches in the U Ba Khin lineage of Burmese vipassana. He gives some very good advice to students about what to do if you have any disturbance in your sleep patterns.

He says do two things. First, continue to lie down with the body very still so that the body physically gets rest. In other words, don't flail around, don't get up, actually don't even get up and sit and meditate.

Make sure the body gets well rested by being lying down and still. That's guideline number one. Guideline number two, make sure that consciousness gets rested by maintaining a continuous meditation technique. So those are the guidelines I give to people if they get disturbances in their sleep due to the practice.

As I say, it's not inevitably the case that you're going to get disturbances like that. Meditative practice may make you sleep deeper than you ever dreamed possible. But on occasion, it could have the opposite effect. In fact, the guidelines of keep the body still and relaxed and keep consciousness engaged in a meditation technique, I apply not just to the effects of meditation in disturbing sleep, but it's my general guideline for anybody that's having insomnia or difficulty sleeping for whatever the reason may be, including emotional turmoil or physical pain or just some sort of sleep disorder. I say part of the negative cycle that people get into is they have difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep. And then they're freaking out because, well, if I don't get a good night's sleep, I'm going to have a crummy day. And then the worry over that further agitates and prevents them from getting sleep.

So how to break that vicious cycle is a cognitive reframing. Instead of the notion, I've got to get a good night's sleep, you entertain the notion, I've got to get a good night's rest, which may or may not involve actually losing consciousness. It's possible to get a good night's rest without losing consciousness at all.

And in fact, in very experienced meditators, that's indeed what happens. I had one Taiwanese master that I lived with for about a year in southern Taiwan in the city of Tainan, and he attempted never to lose consciousness at night. He would sit for four hours from

eight to twelve, and then he would lie down for four hours from twelve to four. During that period when he would lie down, he would maintain a mudra like this, which would be a biofeedback device.

If he lost consciousness, it would collapse and wake him up. And he attempted every single night to spend the entire night conscious, but deeply, deeply resting. And I've trained people with chronic pain and whatever who can't get to sleep really ever very well, I train them to get deep rest, keep the body still, keep a technique going.

So if the disturbance in sleep happens for any reason, either because these photons are trickling down, causing the unconscious to rewire itself, and so you have weird dreams or difficulty sleeping, or just whatever the cause may be that's disturbing the sleep in terms of dreams or not falling asleep, so what you do is you simply keep the body still and keep your technique going. And as the result of that, you will train yourself to get deep rest, good rest. And in very experienced meditators, yes, it is true, the difference between waking and sleeping sort of goes away. In other words, like the Christian mystics used to say in the Middle Ages, *ego dormio sed cor meum vigalet*, I sleep but my heart waketh. You have the depth of sleep but there's consciousness there and that is a very fulfilling state of consciousness to put it mildly.

Spiritual Teachers' Behaviour: Feedback & Ethics ~ Shinzen

Young

How can we help? One often hears stories of prominent spiritual teachers who have been knocked off their pedestal, sometimes due to pretty flagrant abuses. I think it is important to realize that there are also plenty of spiritual teachers who do not participate in abuses, flagrant or otherwise.

Also, it's important to realize that even though there may be some flaws in a teacher, relative to who that person would have been otherwise, they've made stunning transformation of themselves. In other words, it's important to keep the big picture in mind. There's a Japanese proverb, *hyaku nichi no seppo hei shitotsu*. It means you can give perfect sermons for a hundred days, but all you have to do is fart once, and that's what everyone will remember. So it's important to, I think, keep the big picture in mind. Also remember that most people, in fact the great majority of people, that practice these techniques are not teachers.

You never hear of them. And the great majority of them have made stunning and radical overall improvements in their lives, although there are still areas of uneven growth. I think we shouldn't have unrealistic expectations about teachers. Well, then how is it that these teachers have this uneven growth, that they're so strong in certain areas, but in a sense stunted in other areas? I think that the main cause of this is some combination of unwillingness or inability to get feedback from other people on their behavior. So what do I mean by unwillingness or inability? Well, sometimes things are set up for a teacher in a way that they actually can't get feedback from people because they're put on a pedestal, and students automatically assume that if they see some flaw in the teacher, that it must be a flaw in the student. The tradition sets things up that way. So there aren't actually feedback loops to the teacher.

Who's the teacher going to get feedback from? Well, another more senior teacher, if they're willing to put themselves under and keep themselves under a more senior teacher, even when they themselves are relatively senior, if they're willing to do that, then some feedback structure will be in place. But many people are not willing to do that. After 30 or 40 years of practice, they want to be completely independent. So then who's going to give them feedback? Well, their world is primarily the world of their students. So they would have to get feedback from their students, but their students may have a mindset that the teacher is better than they really are and therefore be afraid or unwilling to give them feedback. Well, then who will give them feedback? Well, maybe their family will give them feedback. But if their family is not their student or not a meditator, it's easy for teachers to dismiss the feedback of people that haven't had a lot of meditative experience. So that's the unwillingness to take feedback. So some combination of inability to get feedback and unwillingness to take feedback, if you maintain that consistently, you do run the danger of having blind spots in your development. So I think it's of the utmost importance that a person from the get-go decide that they will listen to feedback from everyone, whether that person is an adult or a child, whether they're an advanced meditative practitioner or are clueless with regards to the spiritual path.

A willingness and an ability, meaning that the structures are in place, the channels are in place, and you're willing to use those channels, that people will approach you on your stuff. Then you take a consensus. See, one of the problems for teachers is that an awful lot of the time when students do call you on your stuff, actually it is their stuff. It's the students' stuff, not yours.

And that gets to be, that consumes time and energy. And maybe even 80, 90% of the time, it's really them, it's not the teacher. But that 20% or 10% of the time that it is the teacher and that there's something for them to listen to, they have to be willing to invest that 80% or 90% of time, which is a lot of time. In general, teachers, if they're good at teaching, they're overworked. They don't have any play, any extra time and energy.

They're just going 24-7 flat out, at least most of the ones that I know that are good at what they do. It's a lot to listen consistently to what the students have to say about you as a person when a lot of that data is not of any use to you. But I think it's essential that you be willing to invest that even though it's a bear.

Because there will be patterns, a consensus will emerge with time about your blind spots, and that will help assure a more even growth pattern. And in fact, my general approach to ethics is a little different, maybe radically different from most people's approach to ethics. I suspect that most people's approach to ethics is that there are certain principles that should be followed, or maybe certain rules that should be followed, or maybe in the really extreme case, an elaborate, legalistic, ethical system. But that's not my approach at all. I actually say that the four basic precepts of Buddhism about not taking life, not taking what's not given, not speaking falsehoods, and not doing things in the sexual domain that would be harmful to people, I say those are some basic guidelines. I certainly have that much in terms of axioms. But beyond that, I think that the main way that one cultivates ethics is an openness, a general openness to feedback from all other human beings. With regards to how you're carrying yourself in the world.

Standard (Relative Rest) and Advanced Focus On Rest (Do Nothing) ~ Shinzen Young

One of my pet phrases is, when you say, nothing is happening as I'm sitting there, either literally nothing is happening, in which case you are in cessation. You're in nirvana itself. And that's great.

Or, that's not the case. In which case six things are happening in your body. Your body is physically relaxed, your eyes are defocused, your ears are defocused, your body is emotionally neutral, your mental screen is blank, and your head is quiet. That's six sensory events are going on. If you pay attention to those as tangible events, then something is happening when nothing much is happening. And that brings a clarity component into the experience of nothing much is happening. And guess what? That will now tend to bring a growth component back into the big picture of your practice. The absorption jhana shamatha practice, as it's described, represents a thinning out of self and world.

What is thin is penetratable. You go into these absorption states and then you penetrate the restful factors, or the jhanic factors, for me it's restful factors. The awareness soaks into them and what do they become? Flow and go.

They break up into vibrating points. So there's what's called sukha vipassana, which is dry vipassana, where if we put it into my language, you go directly from touch, sight, sound, or feel, image, talk, you do a direct penetration and it dissolves into vibrating void. That's called dry vipassana. Or there's the absorption path, where you get things all thinned out, in once again my personal language, instead of touch, sight, sound, it's relaxation, light, silence.

Instead of feel, image, talk, it's peace, blank, quiet. Then you penetrate those into flow and go, because they're more easily penetrated, because they're more thinned out. But either way, gets you to the same results. So focus on change, once again, enters in when you do the vipassana, what are called the vipassana jhanas, where you're penetrating the jhanic factors. So that's why I have to focus on change.

Focus on rest, as I like to teach it to people. There are two sort of ways of doing it. The standard way that I just described, working with restful flavors. And then there's the advanced version of focus on rest, which I call do nothing. But I have a very clear definition of what it means to do nothing. Do nothing isn't twiddle your thumbs and let your mind wander. There's a certain way to do nothing that allows you to do that, to have that be a growth experience. And the do nothing is my reworking, once again, a reworking. I don't claim these are the same thing.

It's modified, reworked. But it's my reworking of the whole bundle of approaches that we find worldwide that might be described as anti-meditation. In the sense that instead of making an effort, instead of engaging in the noble quest, you, in the words of one of the teachers in that tradition, Papaji, you call off the search.

I love that phrase, call off the search. You stop trying to meditate. And you stop trying to do anything and you just abide without trying.

You come to abide in the nature of consciousness. In the Tibetan tradition, this is Dzogchen and Mahamudra. In terms of Zen, some of the early Zen tranquil illumination schools of Zen where they wouldn't, they just like, it was a non-doing, some interpretations of just sitting, some interpretations of choiceless awareness, some interpretations of non-dual awareness

sort of work this way. As I mentioned, there's two sides to the path and it's paradoxical. There's a place for bearing down, there's a place for easing up, there's a place for doing something and there's a place for not doing anything at all.

So the not doing anything at all I call deny. If I had to say what's my model in it, it's Dzogchen as I understand it, which admittedly I'm certainly not a scholar or a deep practitioner of that tradition, but I have some sense of what it's about and I use my own categories and sort of made something that is based on their themes. They talk about the spacious nature of consciousness, but they also talk about the effortless, spontaneous, dynamic nature of consciousness. I take that effortless, dynamic nature of consciousness to be the flow aspect. Even within the sort of do-nothing approach, you're certainly not meditating on change, you're not doing focus on change, but the fact is as you come to abide in the spacious nature of consciousness, the dynamism of that spacious nature presents itself to you as effortless expansion and contraction. So even the do-nothing is not totally unrelated to the themes of focus on change.

Strengthening a Weak Ego Structure Through Mindfulness ~

Shinzen Young

How can we prevent the weakening of our ego? Sometimes people are afraid that if they have a weak ego structure, they shouldn't be practicing meditation because meditation will further weaken that ego structure. However, and this is ego structure in the sense of ego strength, which is a good thing.

However, I would say that it depends on the kind of meditation practice that you do and on the orientation. Because I've had people that have come to me who have official psychiatric diagnosis of borderline personality, weak ego structure, in the sense of another person. They lost all sense of themselves, but not in the good sense, not in the healthy merging sense, but in an unhealthy sense that was dysfunctional, uncomfortable, and caused suffering and disorientation. What I do for people that are in that situation is just a slight modification of the standard meditation that I give to dissolve the self.

Except with this slight modification, it's an exercise in strengthening or in improving ego strength in the psychological sense of ego strength. The problem is when they're confronted with the other, the sights and sounds particularly, or the physical touch from another human being, they lose contact with themselves, as I said, in a not good way. So what I taught them how to do is when the other looms, that they keep noting feel, image, talk, to keep a strong contact with those subjective elements. The problem was that they were losing consciousness of the strands that produce the self. So with a technique superficially that looks similar to the first step of the deconstruction of self, I gave them the ability to keep contact with the feel, image, talk, even when strong other arose. And just that attentional exercise vastly strengthened their ability to maintain boundaries and to remember who they were in a psychologically healthy way. So I think that there's a lot of subtlety involved in this issue of psychologically healthy self, spiritually healthy self, and so forth. And I've found that the sensory categories that I like to use and the focus methods that I like to use can actually be used either to deconstruct ego in the sense of ego as a problem, but they can also be used to strengthen ego in the sense that ego is a desirable thing in its psychological context.

Tea, Coffee and Meditation ~ Shinzen Young

We need a few more swigs.

Forget about the instant level, we're not even at room temperature. It is certainly historically the case that the custom of drinking tea was introduced from China into Japan in association with Zen. It was the Song Dynasty style of making tea, which is the powdered tea that's in with the matcha in the Japanese pronunciation. That came in with the initial introduction of Zen at that same period that I was talking about in Japan in the 12th, 13th century and so forth. However, China had had tea prior to that, and I don't know to what extent it was drunk in Japan. I mean, everybody says it came in the Kamakura period with Zen from China. But tea goes back at least as far as the Tang Dynasty. But in the Tang Dynasty, they made it into bricks.

It's like a brick, and I guess you pull it apart like the bole, the chao bing. They're very expensive. They come from, actually not too far from where Philip's ancestors come from, in South China. I've had those, and somebody will tell you that this is like \$2,000 in bole, brick tea. But then later on in the Ming Dynasty, they started to steep the leaves, and that's called sencha. That was introduced into Japan also by a school of Zen, the Obaku school of Zen, that came in at the transition between the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the early Tokugawa period. So there's been like three different ways that tea was made, brick, powdered, and then just leaf, which is the modern way.

And two of those ways were introduced by different streams of Zen that came into Japan. There's no problem with the stimulant if the choice is the Zen lurch and the keisaku beating. So the alternative is, well, a little stimulant. Now in fact, sometimes business magazines like Fast Company and whatever, they do stories on Green Mountain Mindfulness program, my program, and the slant they always use is, isn't this weird? A coffee company is teaching tranquility, how strange is that kind of thing? When I think of meditation, yeah, there's a tranquility component, but there's also a clarity alertness component. And then some people get jangly if they drink stimulants, so of course that's not good in that case.

But that doesn't seem to happen to me, so it works out. I've never closely researched the history, but I've heard sort of anecdotally that coffee fulfilled the same role in the Islamic Sufi meditative tradition as the matcha did for the Zen, but I'd have to look that up and see if that's really true. Okay, let's do it.

Teacher's or Student's Issues Impeding Spiritual Progress? ~

Shinzen Young

What is the main thing to look for in spiritual progress? The main thing to look for in either of those circumstances, whatever the causality, whether the teacher is inducing it or whether you're creating it all on your own, the main thing to look for that's going to get in the way of your spiritual progress is developing a dependency on a teacher. Some teachers foster that dependency through some mixture of altruistic and selfish motivations perhaps, but also students have a tendency, whether the teacher has issues or not, students have a tendency to develop dependence on the teacher.

So I would say that's the main thing to look for. Whatever the cause may be, am I developing a dependence on the teacher? If so, well then you want to take measures to militate against that, because the name of the game in the spiritual path is happiness independent of conditions, independence. A competent liberation teacher does not want students. A competent liberation teacher wants colleagues, wants peers, wants people that are independent and free of that whole sort of investment with the individual teacher.

So sometimes people ask me, oh, Shinzen, you've given me so much, what can I do to repay you and so forth? And the impish side in me just blurts out, forget about me, that's the biggest favor you can do, forget I ever existed. Just take what you have learned, take the principles, take the skill set and run with it on your own. Forget about the person that taught you those things. The way I look at it, there's actually only one teacher in the universe throughout all time and space, and it's not a person, it's a doing. All the individual teachers are just reflections of that one teacher activity. Mythologically or archetypally, we could say that that would be represented by the thousand-headed, two-thousand-armed goddess of compassion. And the individual, I mean, don't take the math literally, right, maybe there's ten thousand heads historically, some bigger than others. But all sort of appendages on the same activity. Even that goddess is not a person, it's just an activity called teaching, which should grow and improve with time, like science does, I would hope. Dependency on the teacher, I would say, can impede your progress.

So watch for that. That's why I sort of like the Zen tradition way of working. When you do San, or at least the Rinzai Zen way, well actually it's true of Soto Zen too, but specifically in Rinzai Zen, during a Sesshin or intense meditation practice period that typically lasts a week, you have what's called San Zen or Dokusan, which is one-on-one interaction with the Roshi, depending on the temple or the center, that can be two or three times a day, or it can be up to five times a day. For most of his teaching career, before he got very old, Sasaki Roshi used to see his students, every single student, five times a day.

Now I think he's down to three or four times a day at 102. And there could be 60 students there, so do the math. So they're coming in for the interview. The interviews though are not like Vipassana interviews, where we talk about your practice and explain things in a linear way. They're very non-linear, transfer of an energy of emptiness from the Roshi to you. You might say when Catholics take communion, they experience the true presence of Christ. Well, when you go in for San Zen with a Rinzai Zen master, you experience the true absence of that master, which is a kind of dynamic doing, a bouncy emptiness.

And some of that is transferred onto you by the intense interaction that you have with that Roshi. They never talk about it in explicit terms. But it is a kind of Shaktipat, if I were to use the Hindu terminology.

But unlike Shaktipat, where it's formalized and they talk about, okay, the guru's going to zap you, it's never talked about in Rinzai Zen. You either develop the sensitivity to capitalize upon it, or you don't. So you either figure it out or you don't figure it out.

But that's mostly what you're going in there for. It's not to pass these koans. It's to internalize the passage, the freedom of the Roshi by merging with him or her. So you get this zap, but then you have to go back to the zendo, to the meditation hall. What follows the transfer from the teacher is not a big celebration of how great the teacher is. What follows from the transmission from the teacher is you go back to the meditation hall, where it's always either too hot or too cold, there's bugs biting you, your buttons are being pushed, people are abusing you, they're hitting you, they're yelling at you, you're exhausted, you're confused. Now, can you apply that hit that you got from the Roshi, can you apply that, can you truly internalize it and make it yours by applying it to the nitty-gritty of the real world right now? So you're thrown back on your own resources. You don't waste time glorifying the teacher or even thinking about the teacher.

Whatever you got, now you got to make it yours. And the goal in this training is to produce peers, it's to produce colleagues, it's to produce people that are completely confident. They're confident in themselves. So this way of training, the reason I like it is you sort of get the best of both worlds, because you do get a transfer, but it's set up in such a way to make it impossible for you to develop a dependency, at least if it works right. Whatever that teacher has given you, you have also had to work on your own very, very, very hard to internalize and apply that. Your spiritual path is not a path of dependency on the teacher.

The Absolute Witness ~ Shinzen Young

People often ask me about, quote, the witness and about non-dual awareness.

One of the difficulties in answering questions on these topics is that there's quite a bit of ambiguity as to what the words, the witness or the phrase non-dual awareness should refer to. In other words, these words and phrases are used differently by different people. And so to give a sort of single answer to questions regarding these without taking into account the fact that the terms may mean different things to different people is the road to disaster, actually, gross misunderstanding and possibly even contentious malaise. So, one can use the word witness, I think, in two senses. One is the sense that there is a thing over here that's sort of observing the its over there and in some way detached from the its that are being observed. So there's one sense of witness. In that sense, the word witness is a very different word. It's a different word for something that's being observed. So there's one sense of witness. In that sense, witness is just a way of describing a certain level of equanimity. And from that perspective, yeah, that's a good thing to have that sense of I'm just witnessing.

Stuff is, you know, there's the phenomena are coming and going and they can't get to me because I'm back here. I call that a distance-creating metaphor for equanimity. I should point out it's not the only metaphor for equanimity.

You can also have a distance-collapsing metaphor, which is I'm so totally with the phenomena that it can't get to me because I'm like glued to it. But in any event, if we want to use the word witness in the sense of a metaphor for equanimity, that's fine. That is not at all, however, at the same level as witness in the sense of the absolute witness. When you have a sense that there's a sort of observer, a thing that's observing or a person that's observing, but sort of separate and detached, that's good because it's equanimity, but it's also important to realize that that's being produced by subtle feel-image talk. I wouldn't say that that's the absolute witness or pure consciousness, but it's a good thing. It's a stage that people go through.

However, it's of the utmost importance that a person not get stuck in that stage and think, oh, well, this is the ultimate goal of things. Then what is the true witness? In my way of thinking, the true witness is contentless consciousness, that in my system you directly eyeball for just a brief second every time you observe a phenomenon disappearing. In other words, whenever any phenomenon disappears, what is actually happening is that the two forces that are molding that phenomenon, you can call them life and death or affirmation-negation or expansion and contraction or expansion and contraction or a whole lot of other things, the two forces that have molded that phenomenon cancel out and there is a cessation, neurota, a collapsing or disappearing of time-space for, quote, a fraction of a second. That's, of course, a time metaphor, right? By an external clock for a fraction of a second. There's a little puncture in the time-space continuum. Of course, that little puncture eats up all of time and space. It's the black hole that sort of eats up the universe and then spits it out again in the next moment of consciousness.

My teacher Sasaki Roshi calls that zero. That's what I would call the true witness, but the true witness doesn't see anything and it's not back here somewhere because there is no back. It's not in the back. It's in the center. It's not in the center. It's in the center because there is no back.

There is no forward. There is no extension in time and space. It eats up time and space. It's not inside time and space. When you become the true witness, there's no sense of witnessing anything, any phenomenon. There's no sense of anything. It's contentless consciousness.

It's nothing whatsoever. Now, some people wouldn't call that the witness. Some people would just call that emptiness or the source or cessation, a nerota, a moment of cessation. If you had to say there's a witness, in an absolute sense, that's what I would point to.

That witness punctures the time-space continuum thousands and thousands and thousands of times every day for everyone. The only difference between the so-called enlightened people and everybody else is they notice it and they know that they are that nothing. If you read in the Yoga Sutras Patanjali, the classic text of Raja Yoga, he begins the Yoga Sutras by saying, *atah yoganushasanam yogas chittavrtti nirodhah atadadrashtuh svarupe vasthanam* So, *atah yoganushasanam*. Okay, this is the science of yoga.

Yoga is *chittavrtti nirodhah*, the cessation, *nirodhah*, the cessation of the fluctuations of consciousness. Then and only then does the *drishti*, the true observer, abide in its nature. If we wanted to call that nothingness, that very special nothingness, the true observer, we could. But that's very different from the sense of there's somebody back here detached watching things. In order to go from there's somebody back here detached watching things to the experience of cessation, you have to be able to detect the disappearance of the subtle feel-image-talk that creates the sense that there's any thing or person extended in time and space or positioned in any location. You have to see the disappearance of the subtle feel-image-talk that creates that impression. And the place where that relative witness disappears to is the place of the absolute witness.

The Best Path? ~ Shinzen Young

What is the best spiritual path? People often ask me, what is the best path? What's the best spiritual path? What's the best meditative path? And so forth.

When I get asked that question, a couple of things pop into my mind immediately. The first is that I feel this urge to say, the best path is the one that works for you. It's been my experience that different approaches work best for different people at different times.

It's not an absolute, what's the best path, who's got the real answer, which one is the pure, the authentic, the true, can take me to the place where the other ones leave off, etc., etc. I don't really think that's the issue so much. I think the issue is what works for you at a given time.

And it might change over time. There are people that started out with me doing mindfulness practice and had certain experiences. And I recommended that they go to a Zen teacher, my teacher, Sasaki Roshi. And after doing that practice, they decided they wanted to work more within the Zen framework, the traditional Zen framework. So they transitioned from Vipassana to Zen.

It can go the other way too, though. I have among my students people that have long, long, decades-long Zen practices that now feel more comfortable working within the mindfulness framework. A number of years ago, we had a meeting at the Spirit Rock Mindfulness Center in California, Jack Kornfield's place, of Western teachers, Western teachers defined as people teaching in the Western world. And I suspect there was a couple hundred of us there at that meeting. And Jack asked us an interesting question. He asked us, how many people in this room would say that more than one lineage of practice had been significant in their life? In other words, how many people in this room have done Vipassana and Vajrayana practice, for example, or Vajrayana and Zen practice, that kind of thing. And of those people teaching in the West, more than half of them said that very different lineages of practice were significant for them in their development.

I find that very interesting. In a sense, the sort of immediate or perhaps somewhat cavalier answer that I feel like giving is, well, the best one is whatever works. It's pragmatic and it may be different at different times for you.

One might say, but isn't there a path that is in some way absolutely better than others? Is there some way of lining up the paths in terms of, well, this will take you so far, but then you have to do this, then you have to do this. Some people make claims like that to be perhaps a little bit blunt. I don't buy it.

I don't buy those claims. There is a way to compare maps and spiritual paths, I believe, but it takes a lot of courage. You need to be able, number one, and willing, number two, to talk about the strong points and the weak points of whatever path you teach. And that's hard. We tend to want to talk about the strong points. But it has been my experience that if you want to compare paths, what you compare is strengths and weaknesses.

And they tend to have certain strengths and they tend to have certain weaknesses. And to me, that's an honest comparison. For example, I would happily tell you what I consider to be bad about the way I teach meditation.

Maybe that would be another talk. But, well, just briefly, here's all the things that are bad about how I teach meditation. It's very complex. There's a lot of subtleties. You have to remember a lot of technical vocabulary because I'm very picky about words and precision and description. There's a lot of emphasis on implementing procedures in a certain way, although it is an algorithm, meaning you're never asked to do anything you can't do. You're

not asked to do the impossible. But you're asked to do doable things, but in a very specific way. A lot of people want to be a little more free-form about things. I tend to place things in a sort of secular type of language, which may lack some of the more overtly or explicitly spiritual symbols and terminology and so forth. So anyway, that's a few of the things that may be bad about the way that I teach.

If I thought about it, I could probably come up with some more. So anyway, if you want to compare paths, I think you want to say, okay, this one is strong in this way, this way, this way, but it's sort of weak in this way, this way. For example, TM, strong point, anybody can do it right away and have some experience of being a little bit calm. Weak point, well, it might not take you any further than that.

Now, I said might not, I didn't say it won't. But that might be, in fact, the weaknesses are tendencies. They're not absolutes. This tends to be strong this way, this tends to be weak this way, as a path. So I think if you want to compare things, that's the way you compare them.

Tendencies towards this strength or this weakness. Then the other thing that I always like to keep in mind is that all of these paths are not very good, the ones that we have now, that have come down to us that anybody has. They can be vastly improved upon, and as the result of improving upon them, we will see more democratization of enlightenment over the planet. So it always helps me to keep in mind that the best path is yet to be discovered, if there is indeed a best one. And that's exciting and wonderful.

The Big Picture as I See It ~ Shinzen Young

I started this series of talks defining mindful awareness in terms of three components, concentration power, sensory clarity, and equanimity. Then I talked about how those three components would lead to these four forms of happiness. Extraordinary happiness for yourself as sort of the root, and then they also foster ordinary happiness for yourself, and they lead you to bring both ordinary and extraordinary happiness to others. So these are like sort of the four quadrants of the picture of total happiness. I would claim that you need all four quadrants to be a totally happy person. We started with a definition of what mindful awareness is, and there were three elements needed for that.

Then we talked about, well, why do you want it? What good is it? And we sort of got these four quadrants of total happiness. Then I mentioned the five things that you need in order to be successful with mindfulness practice, learn the concepts, get one good technique. Be willing to apply in life, and regular rhythm of day-to-day practice, periodic retreat practice, day-to-day self-practice. And then those four plus time are sort of the factors that lead to mindful elevation of the base level of mindful awareness. There is mindfulness practice. It's a little time to acquire a few concepts, acquire one good technique. Then you apply them in the concepts and technique in your life, and you do a regular practice. If you can, daily practice, I recommend at least 10 minutes a day.

Of course, it can be much longer. And then periodic retreat practice, I recommend four hour, at least a four hour mini retreat per month. So those four things plus time, not necessarily a lot of time, I'm just saying time itself, constitutes sort of the practice. And so the mindfulness practice elevates the base level of mindful awareness. And that leads to something that I've been calling extraordinary happiness for yourself, a happiness independent of conditions, an experience of body and mind that no longer limits you in identity to the body and mind, and external behaviors that improve with time. It's an interesting thing, a paradox, a deep mystery, how the experience of going beyond the body-mind identity, which is an experience of dissolving into the source, which is an impermanent dynamic but vacuous doing, and quite impersonal, how contact with the impersonal, how when a human, a human who has feelings and behaviors, feelings being pleasant and unpleasant, behaviors being good and bad, a human who has feelings and behaviors contacts that which has no feeling, no pleasant or unpleasant, no good or bad, that as the result of that, that human becomes more and more deeply nurtured in terms of their fulfillment and refined in terms of their behaviors. That's the central mystery of the mystical path, how that happens.

Because it sort of is strange, you wouldn't expect it. Why should contact with that which is not good or bad and isn't human and doesn't have feelings so nurture us at the level of feeling and refine us at the level of skillful and unskillful in our behaviors? It sounds paradoxical, but that's what happens. And that's what I'm talking about as extraordinary happiness for yourself. It's also interesting that contrary to what you might think, the more you transcend conditions, the better it is to improve conditions. You might think, well, you transcend conditions so you become indifferent to conditions and therefore things fall apart, but actually as you become extraordinarily happy, a happiness that's beyond this world, so to speak, that's outside of time and space, your experience inside of time and space, your ordinary happiness for yourself statistically tends to improve, not inevitably. It isn't true for everyone always, but as a general principle that is true. And then from this transcendence comes a contact with the womb of consciousness, and from that womb is where self and others arise. So there is this concern for the well-being of others, both that they have ordinary happiness, so that sort of ordinary service, and also that they have extraordinary happiness as you have begun to experience, which is teaching and supporting teaching of this path. So that's sort of the big picture as I see it.

The Dark Night by St. John of the Cross (recited in Spanish & English) ~ Shinzen Young

I'm going to recite La Noche Oscura, The Dark Night, by San Juan de la Cruz, St. John of the Cross.

St. John is considered to be one of the greatest poets in the Spanish language, but he was also one of the greatest mystics in the history of Christianity. So that brings together two extraordinary worlds, greatness in poetry and depth of spirituality. When we hear this poem, at the end it leaves us with two tastes simultaneously, which is the greatness of it. It's able to convey in a poetic way, as opposed to a prosaic way, the essential character of mystical experience, which is paradoxical. Mystical experience is experience that is simultaneously deeply sensorially rich, and at the same time utterly vacuous and benighted. He's able to give us the taste of two things simultaneously.

On the surface, it seems to be talking about a young girl sneaking out secretly at night for a romantic adventure. But of course, it's really a direct description of his own experience of oneness with the spiritual source in a state so deep that self and world as a thing have disappeared. But yet, their richness has reached its fullest form at exactly the same time, in exactly the same experience. So we can taste, at the end of the poem, if you sort of close your eyes, you'll see you're left with the paradoxical taste of mystical experience, a sense of great richness and fulfillment and a sense of utter vacuity, timeless, spaceless transparency, both at exactly the same time, coming from exactly the same source. In una noche oscura, on a dark night, con ansias en amores inflamada, on fire with longing for love, oh, dichosa ventura, oh, happy venture. Salí, I left, sin ser notada, unseen, estando ya mi casa solcedada, my house being still at last. Oscuras, in darkness, y segura and safe, por la secreta escala, by the secret stairway, disfrazada, disguised, oh, dichosa ventura, oh, happy venture. Oscuras, in darkness, y encelada and concealed, estando ya mi casa solcedada, my house being still at last. En la noche dichosa, into the happy night, en secreto, in secret, que nadie me veía, for no one saw me. Ni yo miraba cosa, and neither did I see anything, sin otra luz iguía, without light or guide, sino la que en el corazón ardía.

Other than that which burned in my heart. Aquesta me guiaba, this guided me, más certo que la luz del mediodía, more certain than the light of noon. Adonde me esperaba, to where he awaited, quien yo bien me sabía, one well known to me, en parte donde nadie parecía, in a place where no one could find us.

Oh noche que guiaste, oh night that guides, oh noche amable más que la alborada, oh night more lovely than the light of dawn, oh noche que juntaste, oh night that unites, amado con amada, the lover with the beloved, amada en el amado, transformada, and transforms the lover into the beloved. En mi pecho florido, on my flowering breast, que entero para el suelo se guardaba, which I reserved for him alone, ahí quedo, there he dwelt. Yo le regalaba, and I caressed him, y el ventallo de cedros aire daba, while the cedars fanned us with their breeze. El aire de la amena, the breeze came over the castle wall, cuando yo sus cabellos esparcía, as I ran my fingers through his hair. Con su mano serena, with his gentle hand, en mi cuello hería, he wounded my neck, y todos mis sentidos suspendía, and suspended all my senses. Quedéme, thus I dwelt, y olvidéme, and forgot myself. El rostro recliné sobre el amado, my face resting directly upon the beloved. Proceso todo, everything stopped, y dejéme, and I was set free, dejando mi cuidado, abandoning my cares, entre las cenas olvidado, forgotten among the lilies.

The Dharma Name "Shinzen" ~ Shinzen Young

Okay, so that's how you write my name in Japanese, which is Chinese. Chinese read in the Japanese pronunciation. The Sino-Japanese readings are Xin Zhen, but in standard Mandarin Chinese, the characters are pronounced Zhen Shan. In Sino-Korean, it would be Chin Sun, and in Sino-Vietnamese, it would be Zhen Tian. Written the same, means the same, but pronounced differently depending on the region of East Asia. What happens is when you become a Buddhist monk, they give you a Dharma name, just like if you become a Christian monk or a nun, you get like a religious name.

So my teacher, before he made me a Buddhist monk in 1970, just before the ceremony, he came up to me with this slip of paper and he said, this is the Dharma name I'm going to give you, and I want you to use it, keep it, make it your name that you'll use for the rest of your life, but I want to know, are you okay with this name? So I look at the piece of paper and I pretty much freak out. See, written Chinese jumps off the page if you can read it, because it's iconic and it's graphic. So it's like Chin means authentic or true, and Zhen means good or goodness. It's like authenticity, truth and goodness. As I'm looking at it, I say, truth and goodness? I could never live up to that name. So I said, I'm afraid I'll namae make, namae make in Japanese means I won't be able to live up to the name. And he said, never mind that, is it okay? Are you willing to take this name? I said, well, I guess so. So hence the name. What he meant to convey to me was many levels of meaning simultaneously, as is possible with the Chinese characters.

On one hand, he was saying, I'm sort of giving you the whole lineage to take back to the United States, because the Zhen, by the way, this is not the Zen of Zen Buddhism. There's a good example. See, it's a completely different character. I'll show you the Zen of Zen Buddhism in a minute. The Zhen is part of his name. His name was Zen Kyo, meaning good teaching. The Shin was the name of the prince, imperial prince, who founded the temple where I lived, or where we lived, on Mount Koya. It was a thousand years old. And Prince Shin-yo, written with this, was a son of an emperor who started this particular site on Mount Koya about a thousand years ago. So he's giving me the name of the guy that started the temple a thousand years ago, the first character of that. And he's giving me the first character of his own name, sort of saying, OK, here's a thousand years of lineage to carry back to the United States.

Now in addition to the intrinsic meaning, there's all this other level of responsibility and et cetera. Prince Shin-yo, S-H-I-N-N-Y-O, you can look it up in the Wikipedia. Very interesting person. He was the first Japanese.

We're talking ninth century AD, so over a thousand years ago. He was the first Japanese to attempt to leave Japan and visit the Western world. Many, many Japanese for centuries had gone to Korea and China itself to study. But because the lineage of practice is Shingon, and that is an Indic lineage, the lineage I was originally ordained in, that's Vajrayana actually, Prince Shin-yo in essence wanted to go back to the source itself. He wanted to go to India to study directly with Indic masters rather than secondhand with Chinese or Koreans.

India is the West from the East Asian point of view. He never made it though. You have to realize in the ninth century, even to travel to China from Japan was to take your life in your hands because the seas are very rough and it's just dangerous. So it was actually a pretty outrageous notion to be able to travel, given the primitive and dangerous conditions and the unknown conditions, to be able to travel from Japan to India. Indeed, it was not feasible. He was killed in the Singapore area, Malaysia area, never got any further.

Anyway, just a little bit of history. But then there's another whole level of meaning, which is this represents the twin pillars of the universal spiritual path around the world because the

truth or the authenticity piece, that stands in the Buddhist tradition for the wisdom. In the Taoist tradition, somebody who had realized the Tao, who had transcended the somethingness of self and the materiality of the world, such a person was referred to as a zhenren. That's the Taoist term for an enlightened master.

Very simple, authentic person. This implies sort of get over yourself in the world. The shan is ordinary goodness in the sense of a mensch, a good person. It's improvement, both in terms of improving your shila, your personal character, and in terms of improving the world through bodhisattva service is implied by this character. So an ordinary good person, what we might colloquially call in North American English a mensch from the Yiddish, is called a zhenren. So what he was basically saying is like, I give you a name that exemplifies the essence of the path.

The Five Ways - A Contemporary Toolkit for Classical

Enlightenment ~ Shinzen Young

I like to organize the meditation techniques that I teach to people into what I call the five ways. Five ways are five contrasting approaches to the development of concentration, sensory clarity, and equanimity. Each of the five ways is derived from one or several traditions that have existed previously, but what I've done is I've modernized the vocabulary and I have completely eliminated anything that is explicitly religious from it so that the five ways can be looked upon as a, shall we say, a way to bring about a secular paradigm for classical enlightenment. The five ways are focus in, focus out, focus on rest, focus on change, and focus on positive.

Focus in, the in in this case refers to one's innermost experience of thought and emotion. This is derived from the classic discovery of the Buddha that if you divide the experience of self into its atomic components, the sense of self as thing and the sense of being trapped in self as thing disappears. So there are many ways in the Buddhist literature for sort of doing this divide and conquer on one's I am-ness.

I use one that is actually somewhat based on a more Vajrayana point of view, but in any event, I take as the fundamental elements the somatic component of emotional type body sensation, the visual component of mental imagery, visual thinking in other words, and the auditory component of internal talk or conversations. So I have people tease apart the sense of I as controller or I as observer or I as experiencer. I teach you how to break it down into these atoms and then this reduces and eventually eliminates self as prism, thoughts and emotions as a place you can't escape from but are constrained to. So that's the focus in approach. As I say, it's essentially based on one of the core innovations of the Buddha, which is this untangle and be free paradigm. Focus out is based on the Zen way of working. Now there's a lot of aspects to Zen, but one of the aspects is that they would have to do their practice as they worked.

There was a work ethic from Confucianism that infiltrated into the Zen temples. So how are you going to have a deep practice while you're doing physical labor? One way to do that is you anchor yourself in the external sights, external sounds, and physical sensations. So by way of contrast to the feel-image-talk of the subjective world, you could let go of feel-image-talk, let go of the subjective self and anchor yourself in the power of now as exemplified by touch, sight, sound.

So I call that focus out. That's really useful for practicing life. It was developed, as I say, as part of the Zen curriculum exactly because they were called upon to do so much practice in daily life activities. So you've got focus in, work with the subjective world, feel-image-talk. You've got focus out, by way of contrast, work with the objective world of touch, sight, sound. Then you have focus on rest, which I've described in some detail in another talk, which is basically my reworking of the whole tranquilizing side of contemplative practice. Tranquilizing side of contemplative practice is found all over the world. It's found in the absorption practices of early Buddhism, but it's also found in the contemplative practices of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and so forth. Traditionally speaking, the word contemplation within the Christian context has two meanings. It is a synonym for meditation, but it's also a special term for deep states of tranquility that they call the prayer of quiet, but at its extreme end, they called infused contemplation. So I've drawn from the whole world's contemplative traditions, and specifically the absorption practices of early Buddhism, reformulated that in a completely secular vocabulary, call it focus on rest, and that's sort of the tranquil side of the practice.

So that's focus in, focus out, focus on rest. In ordinary subjective experience, field image talk, ordinary objective experience, touch sight sound, and these more special, pleasant, restful flavors, all of these experiences are experiences, and therefore they are of the nature of empty energy. Empty energy doesn't sound very appealing, but it's incredibly empowering and fulfilling once you start to experience them that way.

I teach people how to notice how any and all sensory experience changes, and also along with that, to be aware of the underlying forces that are responsible for that change. Well, by observing change, both continuous change in the sense of flowing energy and discontinuous change in the sense of vanishings, that gets us in contact with the energy aspect and the emptiness, which is the essence of that energy. So that whole approach to things, which involves impermanence and what the Christians called kenosis, the emptying out into the source, I call that focus on change.

So that's a fourth way. And that will tend to deconstruct the somethingness of self and the materiality of the external world into a kind of transparent energy. So you could call that a kind of dying into the source. But if you die, you have to be reborn. And the whole idea of being reborn is to be reborn better, not just to be reborn. So then there's something called focus on positive, where you actively generate positive content in mental image, internal talk, emotional feel. And that creates a new self. That new self arises from the nothingness as a better somethingness. And that's focus on positive. And so that taken together gives a very complete toolkit for classical enlightenment.

The Happy Wanderer ~ Shinzen Young & Har-Prakash Khalsa

OK, maybe we have time for one or more other questions. Harpakai? Something I've noticed around the wandering mind is very much related often to focus on positive. It's just that it's an unconscious focus on positive. So when a person's mind is wandering in meditation and it's a problem for them, often if they're able to detect the pleasure component or the interest component at that point, they make it conscious. And it's become like a positive focus technique if they're able to actually do that. So in sharing this with students, what has become very interesting is where before the wandering mind for them drove them crazy, now it's like, can I catch the wandering mind when it's actually kind of an unconscious positive focus and make it into a conscious positive focus? And then they can stay with that and play with it or not. They can go back to their technique. And so anyways, it's just become like another window of opportunity for them.

That's cool. And that involves detecting the pleasant interest flavor? Absolutely. Yes.

That's pivotal. Tear, fear, tear. Yeah, the three R's. My theory of what drives human attention, the three R's. Tear, cheer, fear. In other words, sadness, interest, and fear, I find, are the basic flavors that control where our attention goes.

And whereas at the beginning, the wandering mind is a source of suffering, they can reframe it so that the wandering mind turns into freedom from suffering. That's really clever. Can I use that? No, no, no, no. It can also be used if you're working with the do nothing technique.

And what often, of course, prevents people from having the do nothing technique be a, quote, positive. Good experience. Good experience is, in fact, the wandering mind.

So there's a way to do the do nothing technique where you alternate between the do nothing technique and the making wandering mind into a positive focus. You can kind of play with that. Go ahead. You can use that too. So we need a quick term for this thing that you're doing with the wandering mind. And I think I've come up with the name of the technique.

Do I know? No. We'll call it the happy wanderer. OK. Good.

The Hockey Stick Metaphor and Exponential Growth on the

Spiritual Path ~ Shinzen Young

How does a person's growth on the path of liberation differ from that of a person's liberation? Not true for everyone, but often a person's growth on the path of liberation will follow what is colloquially called a hockey stick curve. The proper name for this is an exponential curve, and exponential curves have the characteristic that the more you grow, the faster you grow. Snowball is an example of an exponential curve. The growth rate of the snowball is proportional to the surface area of the snowball. So the bigger the snowball gets, the faster the snowball adds snow. So the rate of growth is proportional to how much it has grown. And if you have any background in calculus or analysis, you know the math behind this.

It's quite fundamental actually in those fields. So in any event, when you start your practice, if you follow this common pattern, you do grow. But it seems like you're growing linear, and there's growth there, but it's not stunning. It's sort of like, well, at this rate, it's going to really, really take a long time to get anywhere. But hopefully you persevere, and at some point, you start to notice it's really taking off. And some people call this the break point in the curve. As I say, it is by no means the case that everyone that follows a spiritual path goes through this kind of situation.

But an awful lot of people do. Now of course, the natural question is, at what point does this dramatic upsurge take place? And we can't say exactly. For some people, it happens fairly early on in their practice. For other people, it might take, in the most extreme case, maybe 10 or 15 years. What happens at this point that makes the difference? Well, there can be a lot of factors. But one of them is certainly when one reaches the point where one starts to get what I call the flavor of purification. In other words, you start to actually detect, have a tangible experience that when you bring mindful awareness to an unpleasant experience, you're purifying consciousness. You can actually taste the purification happening within you. It's really hard to put into words, but it's a kind of knowing that because of the way I'm experiencing this moment, every moment of my future is going to have more fulfillment and less suffering. Another way to put it is, it's a tangible awareness that because of the way I'm experiencing this moment, I'm clearing up the stored poison and pain from all my previous moments.

You actually sense that happening. Once that taste is there, you've got a positive feedback loop going. And what characterizes hockey stick growth is it's a positive feedback loop. In other words, the bigger it gets, the faster it grows. So once there's the positive feedback that bringing equanimity, concentration, clarity, but especially equanimity to a present experience, that you can actually taste it building a better future for you and cleaning out the past for you. Once that happens, now you've got a positive feedback loop, and that's one of the causes of this dramatic runaway growth.

There can be other causes also. So I give people this hockey stick metaphor by way of encouragement when they're in this seeming linear phase here, and it just doesn't seem like anything. It seems like, yeah, growth is happening, but if the journey is a million miles and in the first year I go 10 miles, that doesn't bode well. But what people don't realize is that, well, maybe in the next year you'll go 100, in the next year you'll go 1,000, et cetera, et cetera. And at some point it becomes evident to you, you reach this sort of, oh my God, place right about here where you realize that little old me can feasibly hope to experience the classic results that I've read about in these ancient books.

The Native American Sweat Lodge - Part 2 of 2 ~ Shinzen Young

Yes, a stone axe is in some sense more primitive than a steel axe.

So I guess the assumption among the Europeans when they came to the Americas was, well, their axes are more primitive than ours, therefore their consciousness must be more primitive than ours. And once you've participated in their ceremony, you don't know whether to laugh or cry at that notion, because it is so deep and so subtle. On the surface, it's a prayer ceremony. It's also a physical cleansing.

It's also a shared group's sort of group therapy, because people talk and their defenses are down. It is a shamanic journey into the power realms, because of the altered states that you may enter. At a deeper level, it is purification of consciousness through having equanimity with strong sensations, both physical and emotional sensations come up. And within the context of the ceremony, the ceremony induces a mindful state, and therefore consciousness is purified. Purification equals sensation multiplied by equanimity fits in my model perfectly. So that's at a very deep level.

And at the deepest level, it's an experience of the flow of nature in terms of the fundamental forces of expansion and contraction. They may use different words. They use father sky, mother earth, or they talk about the bowl of the pipe versus the stem of the pipe, the earth versus the tree.

But everything is built on an interplay of a flow of affirmation and negation. I've even heard native people talk about yin and yang, actually use those words in the ceremonies because of their education, that they've learned of concepts from East Asia and so forth and see how they map on. In fact, the word inipi in the Lakota language, I said it means a tool for life, but the stem ni in Lakota, Lakota, if you're not familiar with the term, is the Western Sioux. Ni means life, but it also means breath, and it also means the sort of flowing energy of spirit that would be vibrating, expanding, contracting, and so forth. So the whole ceremony is built around merging with the fundamental flow of the expansive sky and the contractive earth and the vibrating energy that's born in between them. So it's the essence of mindfulness practice as I understand it. And on top of that, it's fun.

It's colorful. It's shared with a group. Buddhist practice is sort of, well, I mean, there's the subtle sharing that happens on a silent retreat, but it's sort of like silent, you're with yourself.

This is not a subtle sharing. You're singing. You're like really singing, okay? And people are crying and people are saying things because their defenses are down, and then everybody is affirming them. They're saying, that's good.

Yeah, that brother, good. It's like this shared support structure that you have. It's very communal. So it makes the perfect complement to the Buddhist practice. The Buddhist practice gives you systematic techniques for doing things.

They don't have those systematic techniques because they don't need those systematic techniques. They just do these ceremonies. They don't have the concepts of purification equals plain plus equanimity, multiplied by clarity, et cetera. They just do the ceremonies, okay? They don't need the terminology. They don't have to have a philosophical system about the fundamental oneness of things. They just say, all my relations, okay? And that sums it all up, okay? We're all related. It's like, oh, so this is what they mean by primitive religion, okay? In other words, this so-called primitive religion is really subtle, multi-layered, goes down to the deepest, from the most surface to the deepest in a single integrated ceremony. It's like so impressive as a spiritual vehicle. So I knew this is for me.

It was 27 years ago, and it's been true. I've been doing these ceremonies with native people wherever I can, wherever I run a retreat, when there is someone that can do it in the traditional way, I make it available for our retreatants. My metaphor is that for me, the Buddhist practice will always be the cake, sort of the substance, but I like a little frosting on my cake. And the Native American ceremonies in general, specifically the sweat lodge, represents that frosting on the cake for me.

The Native American Sweat Lodge Ceremony - Part 1 of 2 ~

Shinzen Young

So, I'm wearing this rather striking shirt that was given to me by a Cree medicine man, friend of mine, Vern Harper, who I've known for many years.

He's a rather well-known spiritual leader among the Cree people in the Toronto area. I'm up in Canada now, running a retreat in Niagara Falls, and I'll be seeing him in just a week when the retreat's over, because we offer, as a feature of our retreats here in Canada, the opportunity for our retreatants to participate in a traditional Native American sweat lodge ceremony. It's not a required piece of the retreat, but if they want to stay on after the retreat ends, we go to some property that he owns, and he does a sweat lodge for us.

The same thing happens when I run retreats in Arizona. I have a Tohono O'odham medicine man named Rupert Encinas, who I've known for 27 years. He does the same thing for my retreats in Tucson, Arizona.

In fact, I just saw Rupert just one week ago. I just completed running a retreat in Arizona, and indeed, we had a sweat lodge ceremony there too. It was with Rupert in Arizona that I had my first experience of the Native American sweat lodge, which pretty much convinced me that this is something for me. I would say that the sweat lodge ceremony, which the Lakota people call inipi, I-N-I-P-I, literally in their language meaning a tool for life. I would say that the sweat lodge ceremony is the representative spiritual practice of the Americas. It's done all the way from Canada down into Mexico, if not further into South America.

I don't know about the southernmost part of the Americas, but it's certainly for Mexico and North America absolutely representative. In fact, in Los Angeles, where I come from, there is a canyon in Southern California called Temezcal Canyon, which is from the Mexican Spanish temezcal. Temezcal is the Spanish word, at least in Latin America, for the sweat lodge.

That's an Aztec word from the Aztec tamascali, meaning a hothouse, literally. How I got involved in this was that 27 years ago, I was running retreats in Arizona. I was using the ranch of a man named Doug Boyd, who has written some books about Native American spiritual leaders. Doug had this idea that Buddhist leaders should be getting together with Native American leaders. He said, after your retreat, if you want, I can have a local Tohono O'odham Indian, I can have a local medicine man run a sweat lodge for your retreatants. I didn't know what a sweat lodge was.

I said, well, what is it? He described it to me. It's in some ways like a sauna, in that there are hot rocks and water is poured. Whereas the sauna is a secular event, the sweat lodge is a deeply transformative spiritual event with prayers, songs, and a kind of shared energy. So he explained to me the sweat lodge and the mechanics of it, and it sounded interesting.

He said, you're very fortunate. I know this local spiritual leader here in Arizona, Rupert Encinas. He is a veteran sun dancer, in addition to being a sweat lodge leader.

I said, what's a sun dance? He described to me this almost inconceivable shamanic ordeal that Plains Indians do called the sun dance. He said, Rupert has done this many years. Actually at this point, Rupert's done it 18 years. He's done 18 sun dances. Each one of which involves four days in the blazing sun without food or liquid and with pierces through you that have to be torn out. According to the Lakota tribe, anyway, you have to do four years of sun dancing before you're qualified to lead a sweat lodge.

I say Rupert has now done 18 years, which is, by the way, the difference between doing sweat lodges with native people and doing sweat lodges with incompetent non-native people. There's absolutely no danger whatsoever. I've been sweating for 27 years, starting with Rupert, and I've never, ever heard of any even minor physical problems developing as the result of a traditional sweat run by competently trained native people. But you see, the kind of training you have to go through before they'll give you the responsibility of running a sweat lodge is pretty amazing. Doug described the sweat lodge. He described Rupert, described Rupert's qualifications. It sounded interesting.

It seemed to make sense to me. We had our vipassana retreat, and then Rupert came over and they had a sweat lodge at Doug's ranch, the physical structure. It's sort of dome-shaped, and it's got a dug-out area in the middle where the grandfathers, grandfathers are the hot rocks. They're looked upon as the oldest people on the planet. They're addressed as people when they're brought in. They're sort of given, they're taken back to their original condition of being hot, the way they were at the beginning of the earth. They're heated in a fire, and then they're brought in. This water is poured on them. That gives off an intense steam that is called the breath of the grandfathers. So these ancient ones breathe on you, and that purifies you physically and psychospiritually.

That's sort of the model, how they look upon it. We took the group into the lodge, and he did that ceremony. I remember coming out of the lodge, the first thought that occurred to me in talk space was this joking thought, this irony thought, oh, so this is what they call primitive religion. Because I can remember when I was young reading about the religion of tribal peoples under the title primitive religion. I saw that word primitive in quotes, and the joke was that it was one of the most sophisticated and subtle and advanced spiritual modalities I'd ever encountered.

The Reptilean Brain, Skinnerian Training & the Experience of God

~ Shinzen Young

There are various ways to reach the subconscious. The surface of the subconscious can be reached through mental talk. A little deeper level cannot be reached by mental talk, but it can be reached by mental images. The deepest level of the subconscious cannot even be reached by mental images, but it can be reached by body sensations. The way mindfulness deals with the subconscious is by setting up a feedback loop, which I've described in other segments, whereby at the level of body sensation, when the reptilian brain, which is essentially a body brain, a touch-feel brain, when the reptilian brain notices that when it interferes with the flow of body sensation, its own product of course, that there is suffering, and when it stops interfering, that there is the absence of suffering or fulfillment, the reptilian brain notices that, and it is changed in the classical Skinnerian mode. You train the animal the way you train an animal, with reward and punishment at the level of body sensation. By putting yourself in an environment where not much is going on for a period of time, either the micro retreat of a daily sit or the macro retreat of taking a weekend or a week or ten days or longer and going off and doing nothing but meditation, within that simplified environment, the deepest mind can unlearn its habit of fighting with itself.

Essentially, what B.F. Skinner and the others in the Behaviorist School proved was that if you want to train an animal, that animal has to be given rewards and punishments, and those rewards and punishments have to be immediate upon the behavior, and they have to be absolutely predictable. If they're random, then you won't get strong learning, and if there's a gap between the behavior and the reinforcing stimulus, then also there won't be strong learning. So in the simplified environment of a sit or a retreat, a situation is set up where the animal within us, the reptilian brain, can consistently and immediately be aware when it fights with itself, there is suffering, so that's the punishment. When it stops fighting with itself, there is fulfillment, that's the reward.

The simplified environment of formal practice creates the situation where there is consistent and immediate reinforcing feedback. In the classical Skinnerian mode, I know Skinner is sort of a dirty word in a sense, because the behaviorist influence at a certain period in the academic world led to ridiculous notions about the nature of humanity. However, they did have some good points going for them, and it turns out somewhat ironically, I think, that the most subtle and powerful spiritual path that I'm aware of, something that the Skinnerians would have been horrified by, which is the Buddhist experience, turns out that large parts of it are best explained by Skinnerian model. But in this case, the behavior is not that the lizard is being trained to, or the mouse is being trained to press a bar or turn this way or that way in a maze. The lizard level of the human is being trained as a lizard is trained, but by a human who has intentionally set up that situation for themselves to train their lizard brain. The lizard brain is being trained into something incredibly subtle. The new behavior is not interfering with its own activity, which is to say that it's being trained into equanimity. The result, and this is where the Skinnerians would freak, which is sort of poetic justice, the result of that Skinnerian conditioning of the lizard brain is that ordinary experience becomes utterly spiritualized and becomes indeed a direct contact with one's spiritual self or one's spiritual source. So that whereas the Skinnerians would have, in their extreme form, denied that there even is a thing called subjective experience, it turns out that their model can be used to explain the deepest of all subjective experiences, which some people would say is the experience of God.

The Science of Enlightenment Audio Series and Book ~ Shinzen

Young

Sounds True Studios likes to have a style with their presentations that is exemplified by the name of the studio, Sounds True. In other words, they don't like their authors to read materials.

That doesn't sound true. They want the author to extemporize the material. So that's how we made the Science of Enlightenment. It was really cool. We did it in Colorado, where their studios are located. And what they did is they got about a dozen or so of my students to come every day for, gee, I think about a week, actually, and just listen to me talk all day. In other words, we sent out a mailing to my students in Colorado who would like to do this. You've got to come to the studio every day, and there'll be chairs, and I'm going to talk to you and just give you a brain dump of my understanding of the meditative path so that it will have that quality of being spontaneous and spoken.

So that's how we did it. I did have a general outline of what I was going to talk about on cards, but nothing specific, certainly not any text or anything. But it's like, okay, there's this topic, this topic, this topic. So I had those cards, and I had the audience, and I just blabbered all day into the microphone for about a week. And they came every single day, the same people came, and they listened to it so that there was that sense of presence that I was really talking to somebody.

So it had that sound of truth to it that Tammy, who created Sounds True, so much values in her products. So that's how we did it. In the end, we had twice the length of material that appeared in the actual end product. So that had to be edited, and it took months for Michael Taft, who is this very, very sharp, intelligent guy, to edit it down, to cut it in half of what we had dumped. And that became that classic that so many people have found useful. I should say that Michael and I are now working on a text version of it. Tammy hired him to do that. We thought we would just transcribe it and do a little touch-up, vetting and whatever, but it turns out we're going to need a radical makeover. So it's taken a lot more time than any of us thought. But there will be a book based on the science of enlightenment that should come out sometime in the next Kalpa.

The Theme of Expansive and Contractive Flow ~ Shinzen Young

What is the relationship between change and force? It can happen in our sensory experience that we could be aware of change and the forces and energy that produce change. I call that aspect, that theme, the dynamic aspect of experience. If the change has the form of an abrupt diminishing, then I call that a vanishing, even if it doesn't completely vanish. And all the other aspects of change I call flow. Now, there's lots of different flavors of flow. Flow can be sort of like bubbly or it could be wavy and so forth. But in the formulation that I like to use, behind all the different flavors of flow are two oppositely directed flavors of flow that we'll refer to abstractly as expansion and contraction. Sasaki Roshi has a list of several dozen synonyms for this contrast. Many of the synonyms are confusing, don't seem to have anything to do with the other synonyms, and sort of wig people out.

But what he's trying to do is point out that many things that superficially appear to be unrelated, in fact at a deep level, reflect these two sides of nature. He'll sometimes call them *purasu*, *purasu* to *mainasu*. Can you understand *purasu*? *Purasu*. *Mainasu*.

Yes, to means and, so *purasu* to *mainasu*. Interestingly, very seldom will he ever say *yo* to *yin*. *Yin* to *yo*. *Yin* is *yin* and *yo* is *yang*. Although clearly these are related to the Taoist *yin* and *yang*. But very seldom does he say *yin* *yo*.

He prefers to use the English *mainasu* *purasu*. But behind it is obviously the Taoist background of East Asian thought. Mixed with the Indic element of the notion that there's a cancellation of *yin* and *yang* called zero. Expansion is the principle of increase. Contraction is the principle of decrease. Expansion is the principle of outward movement, outward force.

Contraction is the principle of inward movement, inward force. So that means that as you're paying attention to sensory experience, if anything increases, that's expansion. So expansion isn't this mysterious thing that someday if you finally grow up you'll be able to experience. If you have a pain and it's getting bigger, that's expansion. If you're listening to a sound and it's getting smaller and smaller and smaller as the airplane goes away, that's contraction. Don't tell me you never experienced expansion or contraction. Any increase, any decrease represents these underlying principles. So what can increase? Well, intensity level can increase. Of what? Anything. The talk in your head, pain in your body, hot, cold, light. So expansion, contraction.

No more mysterious than that. One thing that it can increase and decrease is intensity level. What else can increase and decrease? Well, vibrations can speed up and slow down. The talk in your head can get louder and softer but it can also get faster or slower. The spiking pain in your knee can spike at a certain level, then it can speed up a whole lot, then it can slow down a little bit.

So the sort of frequency of something can increase or decrease. In your body you may be aware of pressures. If you take any pressure, you can analyze it, ask yourself is it outward, inward or both at the same time.

Frequently it's both at the same time and frequently they're clashing, producing a sense of discomfort. But that's okay, those are still forces, expansion, contraction forces. Have you noticed that your mind can be scattered in many directions? And that it can obsess on one thing? That can be looked upon as a problem or that can simply be looked upon as a manifestation of expansion and contraction.

And not a problem, just part of the flow of nature. What happens if the attention is scattered in many directions at once? If the attention is scattered in many directions at once and you're focused on the fact that it's scattered, then you have high concentration on

expansion. And yes, you let that happen with this technique. And you give up the need to have order and you just let yourself be sort of always at once kind of thing. But there is concentration and clarity. You're clear that you're scattered and you're focused on how you're blown in all directions at once. So yes, with this technique, let that happen.

And if you can't get off something and you're like nailed to it, you can parse that as the contractive force and not fight with it. Most importantly, the spatial scope of a sensory phenomenon can increase or decrease. As I have set up these categories, touch, sight, sound, feel, image, talk, every one of them has depth, width and height. Now the depth, width and height, I've set up in the first category, has depth, width and height. Now the depth, width and height might not be well defined.

It might be sort of cloud-like and nebulous. But there's a right-left measure, there's a front-back measure, there's an up-down measure, roughly for any of the spaces. Even the mind has a front and a back. There's a visual part that tends to appear in front and an auditory part that tends to be more posterior, relative to that. Talk space, not very well defined spatially, but image space, you've got the images in the center of image space, the images around you, the images of your own body. That's space. The space occupied by a sensory event may increase or decrease.

Usually it does one or the other. Very seldom do all three dimensions of a sensory volume remain completely fixed. So if it gets a little wider, expansion. If it gets a little narrower, contraction. If it gets a little larger in the front-back dimension, deeper, depth increases, expansion.

Depth decreases, contraction. Lengthens, expansion. Shortens, contraction. Lengthens and at the same time pulls in to the sides in the front and back? Both. It's expanding in one dimension, contracting along the other. If you take spaghetti dough or something and you pull it, it will expand and contract at the same time. Any change in spatial volume along one, two or all three of the axes counts as expansion and contraction.

For anything. Touch, sight, sound, feel, image, talk or the corresponding restful states for that matter. The increase and decrease in intensities, the increase and decrease in frequencies, the inwards and outwards pressures in the body, the scattering and gripping forces in the mind, in the end all present themselves, if you look carefully, as stretchings and or squeezings of the spatial volume of experience. A spatial volume of sensory experience.

If you have a pain, you can measure it, its width, its depth, its height. Take that all together, that's its spatial volume. So things squinch in along one dimension, they pull out along another dimension. And sometimes the whole spatial volume can increase, the whole spatial volume can decrease.

All three axes at once spreading, collapsing. When you become very sensitive to the moment of arising of a sensory event, you see that as that sensory event transitions from non-existence into existence, it occupies, it creates a volume of space. And when that sensory event disappears completely, that volume of space disappears, that it occupies. If you totally, 100% affirm a sensory event at the moment of arising, if you're just like instantly with it and instantly giving the big yes, then you'll see that as soon as it's arising, it's not just a moment of arising, but that as soon as it's arising, it's already passing. Already passing. It's arising and its beginning is its end, as T.S.

Eliot said. As it's arising, it's already passing. That means there's a simultaneous growth of spatial volume and a shrinkage of spatial volume right behind that in time.

So that it's both moving out and in at the same time. I just give this to you as a heads up. There is nothing in the world that you can do to make that experience available. But you now have a vocabulary and a languaging, just in case you should ever notice that as soon as something is arising, it's also passing. Temporally, its space is expanding and its space is

contracting right behind that at the same time, producing a bidirectional flux. At a local level, that will often take the form of biflow and then a complete disappearance, a vanishing.

So both gone, both gone, both gone. At a local level. That sums at a global level to an experience of everything is simultaneously born in between expanding, contracting spirit flow. And that expanding, contracting spirit flow is peppered with trillions of vanishings that give it a profound tranquility at the same time. So it literally goes everywhere. Everywhere meaning as far out as out and as far in as in can be and goes nowhere at exactly the same time. That's the theme of expansive, contractive flow. Thousands and thousands of human beings over the centuries have become completely enlightened without ever once using the word expansion and contraction. So don't make a big deal out of this. It's just a theme that can be explored.

The Three-Dimensional "Shape" of Simultaneous Expansion and Contraction ~ Shinzen Young

If we want to say that you're looking for a shape, the shape you're looking for is concentric spheres spreading out and concentric spheres coming back.

That would be the shape of simultaneous expansion and contraction. Or a fountain gushing and gathering, but not just upwards, up and down. It's gushing up and gathering down at the same time and it's doing that this way, this way, this way, that way, that way, and that way.

So it's like a three-dimensional fountain that gushes from the center and gathers to the center. If I had to give a shape to it, it is intriguing to look at the large-scale anatomy of the human brain. I'm not sure that this has anything to do with what I'm describing at all, but there is a general pattern to what your brain does. Sensory input goes up the back of your spinal cord into something called the corona radiata. It sort of looks like this, it's right in the center of your brain.

That means the radiating crown. And then it goes from there, it's processed in the cortex, and then in the sensory cortex, then it moves over the surface of the brain to the motor cortex. Then the motor cortex sends messages down, once again, down through the corona radiata and down the front of the spinal cord and controls the body, roughly speaking. So roughly speaking, you have movement up and down the spinal cord simultaneously, and from the center of the brain out and then from the periphery of the brain in, you have the sensory input and the motor output. And whether this fountain that I'm describing has anything to do with that or not, I don't know. But if you look at a picture of it, it sure looks like a picture of a gushing and gathering simultaneously.

The Trickle-Down Paradigm of Transformation ~ Shinzen Young

How do you deal with the fact that you forget things? Sometimes while you're practicing meditation or as the result of practicing meditation, you remember things from the past that you completely forgot. And sometimes those are emotionally charged.

So when they come up in the present, you greet them with equanimity, and there's a sense of what in therapy is called catharsis or releasing. You've heard of economizing. Well, let's start talking about equanimizing. Equanimizing means bringing equanimity, which is non-self-interference, to a sensory event.

So something may percolate up from your biography. You greet it with equanimity, you equanimize it, and you get a sense that it's being released. This is sort of in a sense in the classic mode of psychotherapy. Specific biographical material has been uncovered and has been accepted and integrated, and that's catharsis. However, I would say that the bulk of the catharsis, the bulk of the integration, the bulk of the purification in the depths of our consciousness that comes about through mindfulness practice, does not take the classic form of specific memories or other material percolating up.

Most of it happens without us knowing that it's happening. The classic example in my case is I did a ten-day retreat in the U Ba Khin tradition, which involves sweeping the awareness through the body. About halfway through the retreat, I noticed that there was a little bit of congestion in my lung area and so forth.

Nothing all that big a deal, just some slight discomfort. And I remember briefly thinking, oh, that must be the effect of all the smoke that I've put in my lungs from the last ten years of smoking marijuana every day. There was no thought of, oh my God, I've hurt my lungs, or gee, I should stop smoking marijuana.

Nothing like that at all, just this awareness. And then the retreat went on. But when I got back, a day passed, I didn't smoke any grass, another day passed, I didn't smoke any grass.

Finally, many days passed and I realized I just wasn't going to do it anymore. And there was no conscious decision, there was no weighing of cause and effect, there was no on the wagon, off the wagon, there was no struggle, there was no nothing. The part of my body that was enjoying getting high and the part of my body that was not enjoying being damaged apparently were allowed to talk to each other without my knowing it and come to a conclusion that radically, effortlessly, unexpectedly changed a deep-seated behavior pattern. So something happened and the subconscious rewired itself. Sometimes there can be changes that you don't even get a hint of.

At least I had a hint in this case. A lot of times you do a retreat and mostly what you're aware of at the retreat is you're physically uncomfortable, you can't concentrate, you are in emotional turmoil, you're judging yourself, you're judging others, and all that goes away only because you get sleepy. And that's mostly what your experience was, but then you leave the retreat and you discover that something in your fundamental alienation, your separation of inside and outside is gone forever, your neighbor's been blasting the stereo half the day, you realize it used to drive you crazy and it doesn't and it's not going to.

And changes take place. While you were doing the practice, you might not have had any hint at all that anything productive was going on. It's just you were uncomfortable, your mind was wandering, but in that environment you created a situation where those circuits could communicate with each other and rewire themselves. I make the claim that the bulk of the transformation of the subconscious or depths of our being typically takes place unconsciously. I call it the trickle-down paradigm for working with the subconscious. We shine the flashlight of mindfulness on the surface of sensory experience and a certain

number of photons go down to the very bottom of the lake and give the circuits down there what they need to rewire themselves with the surface either knowing very little or often knowing nothing of the rewiring process. Now, a person might well challenge this point of view, saying, well, how do you know that's happening? You're saying something happens but we're not consciously aware of it.

I can say there are pink kangaroos in this room but only I can see them. Could you disprove that? Well, it's non-falsifiable, so it's a meaningless statement. A person might say, well, that the subconscious rewires itself when you're doing meditation is a meaningless statement because how do you know that's happening if you're not aware of it? Well, you're not aware of it at the time. You don't know what's going on necessarily. But you are aware of significant permanent positive changes in perception and behavior after you have left the retreat, and therefore you can hypothesize that something like this is going on. We can't see electromagnetic fields, but we look at behavior on the surface and we hypothesize, okay, something like the Maxwell field equations describe what's going on. Even though we don't see it, we can hypothesize that from the effect. So we can hypothesize reasonably, I would claim, from the changes in perception and behavior that people experience from the retreat environment that something like this rewiring is occurring.

The True Beauty of Your "Soul" ~ Shinzen Young

What is the meaning of the word soul? I will sometimes use the word soul. When I do, I am referring to essentially one's subjective world, the world of feel, image and talk, considered in terms of its deepest layers. In other words, when you work with your subjective experience, a practice that I call focus in, you can track the surface of your subjective experience in terms of explicit mental pictures which tend to center in front of or behind your eyes, internal talk which tends to center in your ears or in your head somewhere, maybe symmetrical, maybe asymmetrical, and then emotional type body sensations. So the emotional type body sensations, if they're present, I say that feel is active, so you have feel, image, talk.

So you can track your subjective world of thought, emotion, reaction, desire, and so forth, will, in terms of on the surface feel, image, talk. As the surface feel, image, talk sort of plays itself out, you become aware that underneath that explicit feel, image, talk are subtler and subtler and subtler levels of similar stuff, but it's finer and more widespread. So there's layers of subtle image activity underneath the surface image activity, likewise with talk, likewise with feel. In fact, even when there doesn't seem to be any explicit talk going on, you can sort of hear a rumbling of subtle activity in talk space. Same with sort of like snow on your mental screen, a rumbling deep down in image space.

And in your emotional centers in your body, it's like the circuits there are idling, like the wheels are turning but the clutch is not engaged, so you're not emotionally going anywhere. So there are these subtle levels of association and processing that are fine but broad. I will sometimes loosely, in a sort of colloquial way, refer to those more subtle, deep levels of feel, image, talk activity as soul. For example, when you get a sense that material is being released, that the blockages within the depths of fit space are working their way out, I'll sometimes poetically say that the thorns are being sort of plucked out of your soul or the lumps in your soul are being worked through. Here I'm just using soul poetically, not in any theological or well-defined psychological sense, to refer to the deeper, more subliminal levels of feel, image, talk activity. One of the reasons that it's so challenging to untangle the feel, image, talk is that it's not a one-scale system.

On the other hand, it is definitely not an infinite mathematical fractal where you can drill down endlessly into subtlety. How many layers down are there? I have no idea. Some have postulated up to four layers in terms of the Yogacara school.

For example, in India, but who knows, maybe there's more. This awaits a true neuron-based, neuroanatomy-based science model for these systems. I don't know how many layers there are down there, but it's maybe a half dozen, this is a guess. Certainly not infinite, literally, although it seems to us infinite, because each one is exponentially both bigger and finer than its predecessors. So it seems to point to infinity, but that's just an optical illusion.

It's finite as far as I can tell, and when you get to the base of the iceberg, so to speak, you'll find that it is floating in the ocean of pure spirit. So don't have to worry. One of the things that makes it so challenging to untangle the fit system is that the tangling is at all those levels. But eventually it all sort of unwinds, the skein unwinds, and things become very, very simple. And when that happens, we could say that the true beauty of your soul has been manifested.

The "Final Stage" and Service ~ Shinzen Young

All the spiritual traditions of the world have a mystical core. In the mystical core of these traditions, there is the final stage, if you want to talk about stages, which is very dangerous. But the final stage is described as a sense, as you go about ordinary life, that you and the world are one, and that together, you, the world, and the source of you and the world are one, or not fundamentally separate.

And this is just there in ordinary life. So if you consider prayer, as T.S. Eliot would have defined it as an experience of oneness, d'vakut, d'vakut in Hebrew, then St. Paul's exhortation to pray without ceasing can be realized. You can pray without ceasing. Literally, every sense experience has now become a prayer. In the yogic tradition, that's called sahaja samadhi, samadhi on the natch.

That's what sahaja means, natural. In certain Hindu traditions, it's called non-dual awareness, advaita, meaning not two-ness. There's not a two-ness between the source and the world. As an actual experience, not as a philosophy, as a philosophy, that's a waste of time. As an actual sensory experience, this is a wonderful way to live your life. So sahaja samadhi, non-dual awareness, advaita. If I properly understand Ken Wilber, that's what he's talking about when he's talking about non-dual awareness. He's talking not about a philosophy or even an experience of enlightenment, but an experience of moment by moment, self and world as you look here, look there, scratch your nose, button your shirt.

There's not a separation between that and the source. In the Christian tradition, it was sometimes called the practice of the presence of God. Once that has happened, you can't go to church anymore, strictly speaking, logically, because you can't leave church. So there's no church to go to.

You're in church all the time. In the Jewish tradition, it's called bri'ayesh me'ayin, participation in the arising of things from the divine nothing. In the Sufi tradition, it's called baka, which means this abiding contact. In the Christian tradition, if you read the Cloud of Unknowing, it's a very amazing book, very short, written by an anonymous Augustinian monk in the 15th century in English. He compares that experience to Aaron, Aharon, who was Aaron in the Old Testament. He was the brother of someone. Moses. Yeah, Moses, Moses' brother. So Moses saw God a couple times, the burning bush kind of thing, but he was up on a mountain and he wasn't really quite sure what he saw and it was just sporadic. On the other hand, Aaron was in charge of the Ark of the Covenant, the tabernacle, where the shekhinah, the presence of God, actually resided, according to their belief. So basically, he could look anytime he wanted and experience God directly, anytime.

He didn't have to be up on a mountain, didn't have to be a burning bush, didn't have to have his senses suspended or altered, in any way, it's just anytime you want to pee, here I am. Tomorrow, we're going to do a sweat lodge. There's a song that's often sung at the beginning of a sweat lodge.

Maybe we'll sing it. But it's called the Four Direction Song, but actually it's the Six Direction Song, because you know there's six sacred directions, right? North, south, east, west, up and down. Actually seven.

The seventh is, those are the expansive directions, the seventh is the center. Contraction. It's all there. It's all there in their ceremonies. The whole paradigm of expansion and contraction, symbolically, completely informs the Native American ceremonies.

It's natural. Anyway, what the song says, it goes through each of the directions. Look to the east. Your grandfather is there, looking back at you.

Pray to him, pray to him. He's right over there looking at you, and then it goes, say, east, north, south, west, up, down. No matter what direction you look, the source is there. In the way that I was taught, the way you come to that experience is by locally, with regards to touch, sight, sound, feel, image, talk, and globally, with regards to the whole picture at once, developing a sensitivity to this, in the very beginnings, already the end is there. As soon as the time-space volume of that experience is arising, it's already passing.

That molds that moment of sensory experience. Then the expansion and contraction flatlines. Where that flatline is, enfolded the entire richness of all of creation.

Hence, nihil par excellentiam, the nothing par excellence of the source. Remember the line from T.S. Eliot, I can only say there we have been. He didn't say there I have been. He said, I can only say there we have been. I cannot say where.

Or for how long. For to do so would be to place it in time. Time-space. He weaves time-space together. Like Einstein.

Einstein did it mathematically. T.S. Eliot does it poetically. There we have been. There is zero.

Absolute time. Because we have been there, when past and future come apart again, one looks out and has a sense of caring for one's larger identity. Brother or sister, in Greek, a delphos, is from a, which means share. And delphos is womb, the one you have shared the womb with. If you actually experience sharing the zero womb, then from that comes a sense of wanting to serve, be of service to the larger identity. So there is a link in this way between the themes of going beyond the world and the themes of improving the world. There is an intimate link in this way.

The "Focus on Positive" Theme ~ Shinzen Young

Instead of just observing the subjective system of field image talk, we've been intentionally finding, creating, holding, and even radiating what I call positive states. So sometimes in the process of just observing, it might happen to you that you get a mental picture that has a deep positive significance for you.

It might happen. Native people value this very much and actually go through various physical ordeals of fasting and other ceremonies in order to get those deep sort of directional images. And anthropologists call it a vision quest, although native people just call it fasting.

If an Indian says, I've been fasting, they probably mean I just spent four days without any food or any water alone on a hill crying for a vision. So it could happen as you're just in the course of practice that a particularly powerful image comes up, or you could intentionally create it. So if it comes up spontaneously, you can just note it if you're doing focus in and not treat it in any way special. Or you can decide, hey, this is significant.

I'm going to try to hold it, intentionally go with it. And that becomes a focus on a positive image. Analogously, it could happen just spontaneously that a wisdom word or phrase, something that encapsulates a certain good direction, psychologically, behaviorally, or spiritually for you, something comes up in the talk space. And you might want to just observe it, or you might want to hold on to it. So then you could shift to a focus on positive.

But it's also possible to intentionally create those kinds of words, phrases, and sentences if you wish. Positive feel is a special case, I would say, of feel in general. And it's feel that typically is pleasant, although you can have compassion type feels that are sort of sad but in a compassionate way, et cetera.

Quite how one would classify that, I'm not sure. But usually, the positive feels are pleasant. They're associated with a positive direction in your behavior or positive aspirations for others. But I also count positive feel as pleasant sensations associated with being in highly concentrated states, pleasant sensations associated with the presence of flow, restful states, or just an intrinsic joy for no reason whatsoever. Ahe Tukananda in Sanskrit is joy that's just our birthright and doesn't have to have a reason.

This would be a range of things that we could call positive feel. And they could come up, once again, spontaneously as we're just observing things. Or we can sort of look for it, create it, attempt to hold it. And when you look for it, when you decide to hold it, if it's come up spontaneously, or you intentionally look for it, create it, and then hold it, that's an approach called focus on positive. When you have things that fall under the category of positive come up spontaneously, then you sort of have a choice of whether to deal with the matter of factly, whether to go for a focus on positive, which is sort of a formal structure where you hold, repeat, and so forth, or whether to go into just discursive thinking. And like, okay, I'm going to explore this and think about this in the normal way that I think about things, because this seems like nature is opening an insight door or some window, and I would like to pursue it discursively.

So essentially, if something unusually positive comes up visually, auditorially, or somatically in the subjective domain as you're practicing, I would say you have three choices. And sorry to give you so many choices, but they're all good. The basic thing about not being freaked out by choices is to realize all the choices are good. You're not going to miss out no matter which one you take.

So one choice is you're just going to deconstruct it. There's a famous story about the Zen monk is meditating, and the gods are so impressed by his practice that they come and give

flowers every day. This goes on for a couple weeks, and finally, one day, he just takes out the kesaku and beats the crap out of all the gods and says, get the hell out of here. Well, it's a metaphor for being matter of fact no matter what comes up, even if the gods give you flowers and bathe you and whatever, seemingly, that's just field image talk. So even if very impactful things come up, you might decide to simply, that's just field image talk. That's one decision, and then you would be penetrating them, but in the same way that you would penetrate any sensory event. Alternatively, okay, let's go to hold positive.

It's a formal technique. I'm going to repeat that talk as a mantra. I'm going to try to maintain that image. I'm going to try to maintain that field or some combination of those three, a pair or all three at once. So then you go to focus on positive.

Third possibility, oh, nature seems to be presenting me with an insight window here. I need to think about this, and you start thinking. Notice that I go nowhere without a notepad. When insights come, I will often go into discursive thought, and I will write things down, et cetera, et cetera. Now, I know I'm suspending the formal practice in order to think in the normal way because I have to think in the normal way to pursue that insight, and it's certainly okay to do that on occasion. What we want to avoid is a meditation that is only discursive thought because that's not really meditation, but it's certainly okay to do that when it seems appropriate.

The "One True Love" of Touch, Sight, & Sound ~ Shinzen Young

One day, no work. One day, no eat. So that was the rule in the Chan monasteries.

You had to work. So how are you going to meditate while you work? They also brought in the Taoist notion of oneness. The oneness of the Tao, the oneness of inside and outside, the oneness of humans with nature.

So you bring in the... The Buddha never talked about oneness. The Buddha talked about freedom from suffering, freedom from limited existence. Never talked about oneness, but oneness is certainly a facet of the practice. Taoism talked about that a lot. So how does that come together? Well, if you were to do Zen with my teacher, Joshu Sasaki Roshi, one of the first koans or questions he'd give you is, when you see the flower, how do you become free? How do you experience one true love? When you hear the temple bell, how do you experience one true love? When you chop vegetables, how do you experience one true love? Notice these are touch, sight, sound things.

So while you're working, what do you need to work? You need touches, sights, sounds. What you don't need a whole lot of is memory plan fantasy. And memory plan fantasy is in feel image talk. It's in your mental pictures, your internal conversations, and your emotions around that. So the idea would be that when you just see or just hear or just touch, as you're working, going about the labors of the day, you could be having experiences of merging, of oneness with inside and outside. One dualness, because the feel image talk reactive self contracts as the touch, sight, sound impact of the world expands. So you can have this sort of more Taoist experience of the oneness with nature as you're going about working.

So it's perfect. It brings together the Taoist philosophical perspective with the Confucian work ethic. Part of the focus on ordinary that I give you, where we have touch, sight, sound, that's to allow you to sort of do that Rinzai Zen thing. As you're driving the car, you can still be in a deep state of meditation. How do you experience one true love when you are driving in smog in Los Angeles? Well, just drive.

The "Secret" of Archetypal Deity Yoga ~ Shinzen Young

By the time Mahayana evolved into Vajrayana, the religious stuff was really intense. So now the Buddha is a deity. And to become a Buddha means to become a deity.

So how is that feasible? Well, what they did is they did something very, very clever. They showed people how they could become a deity, a god. It's called deity yoga. Yoga in the sense of merging, by the way.

Hlei Nenjor in the Tibetan language. Now you've probably heard that Tibetan Buddhism is secret Buddhism. They're the secret initiations. So now I'm going to give away the secret to all of you.

Yes, that's right. Here's the secret of secret Buddhism. How do you become a deity? In a way that is not insanity or possession, by the way. How do you become a deity in a way that brings about the same insight and liberation as the deconstructive process of early Buddhism? Very clever.

Here's how you do it. You replace your internal talk with the mantra of the deity. You replace your self image with the image of the deity. And you replace your normal human feelings with the feel of the deity. And you form the touch of the deity by making hand gestures, mudras. So touch, feel, image, talk of a myth, you become the myth. As I say, not to be insane and not to be possessed, but to gain insight into what? Insight into the arbitrary nature of self-identification. Because you created this alternate identity from scratch. And you know it's a myth. But you become it.

Very clever. It was a way of meeting the people where they were at. They were worshipping these archetypes. Buddhism had really moved from its early sort of Buddha is a spiritual scientist, just another guy, but an extraordinary guy, to, okay, Buddha is an archetype, so now become the archetype and you'll get the same insight into how the sense of self arises. So once again, we're working with feel, image, talk, aren't we? Broadly, it's another way to do focus on positive, as I define focus on positive. So in Tibetan Buddhism, in the core of these, if you look at the surface, it looks like they're doing these rituals. But inside they're doing deity yoga, where they're becoming this deity, then becoming this other deity, then becoming this other deity. In order to see that when you work with those elements, those are the elements that create the illusion of self. If it can create the illusion of a mythical self, then it certainly can create the illusion of your ordinary self, and you gain the same insights. So one of the reasons that I define focus on positive so broadly is to allow some students who wish to, to do deity yoga. Some of my students that relate to that, I would never encourage a person to do this, but some of them want to do it, and it can be very insightful. Well, the focus on positive technique that I give you is so broadly defined that it includes within it not only early Buddhist loving kindness, but deity yoga, because you're working with those elements in a very systematic way. A lot of times, Westerners, if they want to do this, will not choose the deities of India and Tibet.

They'll choose Western archetypes. That's certainly my case. When I do this, I typically use La Virgen de Guadalupe, the Virgin of Guadalupe, because I grew up seeing that in LA. And that's very natural for me. And I use Ave Maria.

Yeah, so you got the little Jewish boy from LA does the Catholic tantric practice. Well, that's the world we live in. But it works. You can do it with any archetype. And in fact, traditional way that you're supposed to be taught to do the rosary is you visualize the mystery, you have the certain prayer and talk space, and you're supposed to experience the emotions, and you're touch-wise engaged with the rosary. It's the same elements. It's right there.

Three Reasons Why Shinzen Young "is a Lousy Teacher"

Here are the things that people tell me they don't like about the way I teach. It's complex and subtle. I give a lot of precise definitions of things and I have a lot of categories and relationships between categories. So some people find this tedious.

Of course I would say by way of defense that I'm trying to create an all-encompassing framework within which the world's contemplative slash mystical traditions can be understood. Einstein said, Alles sollte so einfach wie möglich gemacht werden, aber nicht einfacher. Which means in good science everything should be as simple as possible, but no simpler. Meaning that sometimes a certain degree of complexity is simply unavoidable if you are looking for wide applicability. But a lot of people that are on a spiritual path get impatient with going back into elementary school or middle school or high school and memorizing definitions and terminology and so forth. So I understand that that complexity and subtlety might be off-putting to some people. Some people say I'm sort of cold and intellectual.

Well it's a personality trait. T.S. Eliot talked about the sharp compassion of the healer's art. I think I'm in the sharp compassion side, which he compared to a scalpel. The wounded surgeon applies the steel that questions the distempered part.

Beneath the bleeding hands we feel the sharp compassion of the healer's art. So I think I might be a little bit on the cold and sharp form of compassion as opposed to the more warm and heartfelt side, but that's a personality trait. Some people find my irreverence to be off-putting. I am quite comfortable criticizing my own roots in Buddhism, and sometimes I do that in a pretty irreverent form that some people find off-putting. And I can have a perhaps a little bit over-the-top sense of humor sometimes about making fun of the Buddhist tradition. And some people say that's too much. So there's three reasons why people say I'm a lousy teacher. I'm complicated, I'm cold, and I'm irreverent. But I think there's some good stuff there too. Check it out for yourself.

Three Ways to Set Up Your Basic Mindfulness Session ~ Shinzen

Young

How can I use this system? You can use this system in one of three ways.

You can either say, well, I don't want to deal with choices at all, and you pick one technique, and that's what you do. And so the basic mindfulness system was a catalog of techniques, and you decided to buy one and take it home, and that's it. Another thing you can do is make a little workout sequence for yourself. Think of each one of the five ways as a piece of nautilus equipment, and you're going to go through this psychospiritual workout cycle every morning, something like that. The metaphor with physical exercise is actually rather extraordinary.

Once you start to make the comparisons, there's at least a dozen places where the metaphor just works absolutely perfectly, including ending with focus on positive being analogous to going into the jacuzzi. I mean, it's like perfectly analogous, because not only is it a pleasant balm after what might be a harsh deconstruction, but if you think about how exercise works, exercise doesn't make you strong. Exercise destroys muscle. Exercise is destructive, but it's destructive in a way that helps nature improve. And the observing practices that we do in mindfulness, they deconstruct self and world, but in a way that helps nature reconstruct better. One of the things that helps the muscles rebuild in a good direction at the end is to go into the whirlpool.

So one of the things that... I mean, the deconstruction we do would automatically move you in positive directions anyway, but you can help it along by ending with this jacuzzi of focus on positive, which tends to then foster that direction. So it's actually a very nice metaphor. So you can just, by one technique, keep things simple. Okay, I like to do noting restful states, body-mind version. Relaxation, peace, blank, quiet, that's it, that's my practice. Or you can make a little workout sequence for yourself. The natural sequence that I tend to follow is focus in, focus out, note restful states, focus on change, and then do nothing, and then end with focus on positive. But you can work out any sequence you want. And then the most complicated way to use it is you sit down and you decide which of these themes you'd like to pursue, and you start to do it, and then you either stay with it and that's it, or interest, opportunity, necessity comes up, and you decide, okay, I think I'd like to switch to one of the other approaches, and that's a looping and branching algorithm. It gives you a lot of flexibility but at the price of complexity. So simplest thing you can do, just choose one, and that's fine. Any one of these ways at one time historically was an entire path to enlightenment.

So it's not like you're going to miss out on something. If you do any one of them assiduously, you should be able to get the classic results. Or you want to be a little more elaborate, you just hit all the psychospiritual muscle groups and you have this little workout routine. You want to be really elaborate, then we come into the 21st century, the age of the algorithm. So now it's a flowchart and you're looping and branching to keep your interest up and to optimize the efficacy. When I interactively guide you, we go to the algorithm, we loop and branch. Part of the reason that I set up the system this way is to optimize interactive guidance.

Total Happiness - 1 of 5 - May Happiness Be ~ Shinzen Young

You know what mindful awareness is, at least as I say, one person's paradigm. You also know that mindful awareness, concentration, sensory clarity, equanimity are cultivatable skills. That's an enormous discovery.

So that these skills exist is a huge discovery that any human being who wants to, who's willing to allocate a reasonable amount of time and energy can cultivate these skills. And yes, the cultivatability of these things is utterly extraordinary. And this is the great contribution of Asia to have discovered systematic ways to cultivate these things. And specifically India, give credit where credit's due. Indian culture developed this like no other culture ever did. Science arose in the West.

It's a real Western thing. It now belongs to the whole world. The systematic ways to cultivate concentration, power, sensory clarity, and equanimity arose in India.

Now they belong to the world. That this is cultivatable and cultivatable to whatever extent you need it. This would be the gospel, I would say, of Buddhism. It is gospel meaning the good news. While there's the Christian version of what the good news is, the Buddhist version of the good news is anybody who really wants concentration, clarity, and equanimity can have as much of it as they need. If I had to put it in a phrase, if somebody said, why practice mindfulness, I would say for total happiness.

That phrase, total happiness. Which for me is a technical term. It's a technical term.

Highly technical term. Now to call it happiness, some people might object that that sounds frivolous. However, in point of fact, the Buddhist greeting in the Pali language, the language that is closest to the Buddha himself is Sukhahito, which is usually translated, may you be happy. But actually, if you look at it grammatically, it's not may you be happy, it's may happiness be.

It's a third person singular imperative. May happiness be. Of course, implying to you, but to everyone. It's universal happiness. Enlightenment in the sense of nirvana or nirvana was referred to by the Buddha as Diptadhamma Sukhavihara. Diptadhamma means in the here and now. Sukha means, in this case, we could translate happy. And vihara means abiding. Abiding in happiness in the here and now was the Buddha's reason to do this practice.

What he promised that people were going to have. So it's not ridiculous to define happiness as a technical term and then sort of look at that. So if you ask the average person, what makes you happy? What do you mean by happiness? The first answer you'll probably get is something like this. I'm happy when I get what I want. What they're thinking of primarily is, I'll be happy when I get the conditions that I want.

Objective conditions. Ordinary people, what are the things that they would want to get that would make them happy? Security. Security. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex. Sex.

Good sex. Relationships. Health. Health. Good weather.

Good weather. Good job. A job. Some people want money. Money. Recognition. Reputation. Recognition. Fame.

Power. Good family life. Personal freedom.

Freedom of expression. Food to eat. Good food. Good food. Good food. Good food. Good food. Good food. Good food. Good food. Food to eat. Water to drink. Air to breathe. Vitality. Strength. We covered it.

Probe a little deeper. Well, people are thinking, get objective conditions that I want. Well, I use the word objective conditions.

Circumstances. It's not just that we want to get certain things, we also want to avoid certain things. We want to get a good reputation, but we want to avoid being shamed. We want to avoid all the opposites of the good conditions. If you had certain good conditions but couldn't avoid certain other bad conditions, then you wouldn't be happy. So there's also the notion of get conditions I want and avoid conditions I don't want.

For example, I'll be happy when I have a good job and my sister doesn't bug me anymore. If we analyze a little bit more deeply and ask the question, well, how do we even know what our conditions are? The only way that we can know what our objective conditions are is through sensory experience. The parts of sensory experience that ordinary people call self are their body experience, their physical and emotional sensations, and their mind experience, their visual thoughts and internal conversations, internal talk. Most people would say that I am my body, I am my mind. When we talk about the sensory experience part of happiness, what we get is I'm happy when I get sensory experiences I want and avoid sensory experiences I don't want in body, in mind. I have a certain control over my image and talk.

There is what might be called a motor component. Thought is something you do, it's an action, it's a form of karma. But from another perspective, thought can be looked upon as a sensory experience because thought comes to you through a visual means, which is mental pictures, and an auditory means, which is internal talk. In the West, mental experiences are not ordinarily thought of as a sensory experience. But I think it's very important to be able to conceptualize thinking as a tangible sensory experience. Because what's tangible is trackable, and what's trackable is tractable.

Total Happiness - 2 of 5 - Ordinary & Extraordinary ~ Shinzen

Young

The sensory nature of thought seems to go very, very deep into the unconscious thinking. Audio-video.

And as far as I can see, underneath that audio-video is subtler audio and subtler video, and underneath that is subtler subliminal audio and subtler subliminal video. And underneath that, well, who knows? An ordinary concept of happiness for the body is you get pleasant sensations in the body. And the body is happy if it can avoid unpleasant sensations. Well, the mind is happy if it can get answers to things, and the mind is happy if it can avoid confusion, if it can avoid muddle. And muddle can be very intense. The aging process can muddle our minds very severely.

Strong emotions can do the same. Losing our mental capacities is not going to happen to every person, but it's certainly going to happen to some people. So not only do we start to get discomforts in the body and lose bodily abilities, but we start to get confusion in the mind as we get senile, we get older. Then if we're old and we have illness, on top of that, we can be in very confused states. Even people that were very smart, very together in the ordinary sense in their lives can end up very muddled mentally.

And of course, the extreme cases are dementing diseases like Alzheimer's and so forth. It's going to happen to some of us, okay? The job of the mind is to know stuff, to get answers. And when it can't get answers, or worse still, its very ability to get answers is compromised and perhaps permanently compromised, then the mind's not very happy.

So two things, gets answers, avoids the don't know and the muddle for the mind. Body is happy, gets pleasant sensations, physical, emotional, avoids unpleasant sensations, physical, emotional. So that gives us a way to think about ordinary happiness. Mindfulness, skills, increase all these dimensions of ordinary happiness.

In contradiction to the pole called ordinary happiness, there's another pole that contrasts to that, which could be called extraordinary happiness. Let's start with body experience. What we think we want is to avoid unpleasant sensations, but what we really want is to avoid the perception of suffering that comes with unpleasant sensations. Perceived suffering equals intensity of discomfort in the body divided by mindfulness. As concentration, clarity and equanimity get bigger, even though the intensity of the discomfort remains the same, the perceived suffering will diminish. And if mindfulness becomes big enough, the perceived suffering due to physical or emotional discomfort in the body can be dropped to effectively zero.

That's liberation from suffering of that sort. Mindfulness is directly related to a dimension of extraordinary happiness, where our concern in the extraordinary happiness domain is not get rid of uncomfortable touch or feel in the body. Our concern is get rid of uncomfortable touch and feel if it's appropriate or if you can, but when you can't or when you should be experiencing those things because they motivate and direct you, under those circumstances, experience them mindfully so that they become more poignant and less problematic, although that seems somewhat contradictory. They're experienced more deeply, but the suffering, the perceived suffering due to discomfort drops. So mindfulness pays off both ways. It allows the discomforts in the body to fulfill their function because you're having a complete experience of them. You're bringing concentration, sensory clarity and equanimity to them.

That's called a complete experience. That's not called getting rid of them. Get rid of them if it's appropriate or you can, and it's appropriate, but when it's not appropriate to get rid of them or you can't, it would be appropriate but you just can't, then the mindfulness will allow you to experience that discomfort with diminished suffering and in the most extreme case, no suffering. In the dimension of extraordinary happiness, our goal is essentially not to avoid discomfort in the body but to avoid suffering in the body by having a complete experience of discomfort in the body. Likewise, in the domain of extraordinary happiness, our goal is not merely to have pleasure but to have fulfillment. Now it turns out that fulfillment equals pleasure multiplied by mindfulness. Small pleasure, a lot of mindfulness, a lot of satisfaction. Bad news, big pleasure, not very much mindfulness, I can't get no satisfaction.

The Imelda Marcos phenomenon. How many pairs of shoes will satisfy you if you don't know how to derive fulfillment from pleasure? 100 times 0 is still 0. 1000 times 0 is still 0.

2000, I think that's what she eventually got up to. But it couldn't deliver the goods. I can't get no satisfaction. The dimension of extraordinary happiness, our concern becomes not merely getting pleasure but deriving fulfillment and eventually enormous fulfillment from whatever pleasure is there. The preoccupation with avoiding discomfort is replaced with the noble quest for freedom from suffering. And the preoccupation with getting pleasure is replaced by the noble quest of achieving total fulfillment, which of course implies no more drivenness. But does not imply for a moment a lack of dynamic motivation. You can have conditions that are producing pain in the body and there's no pleasure in the body, still happy.

Extraordinary happiness is happiness independent of conditions, external object of conditions. What it mainly depends on is your base level of mindfulness. And that's good news because we can elevate our mindfulness as far as we want. So that we can be in the realm of extraordinary happiness, there's no limit as to how happy we can be. What about the mind? In the world of extraordinary happiness, the mind's not preoccupied, not in this or that question.

It is interested in the question. And extraordinary happiness comes about when the mind gets the answer to the question. And what is the question? The question is, what am I? When the mind's got an answer to that, it knows its source. I would call that salvation, to know your source directly. And I would call that wisdom. The preoccupation with this or that question is in the realm of extraordinary happiness replaced with the preoccupation with the question.

Total Happiness - 3 of 5 - Don't Know Mind ~ Shinzen Young

How can we avoid the mind's confusion? Now, you remember in the realm of ordinary happiness, the mind also needed to avoid something. It needed to avoid not knowing. It needed to avoid confused, muddled states in order to be happy.

But in the dimension of extraordinary happiness, the mind can be completely confused and that not be a problem. Now, when I say that the body can be in pain and that not be a problem, maybe you think, I'm cracked. But maybe you think, well, that could happen because I've had some experience where I was once in pain and I stopped fighting it and it didn't bother me so much. A lot of people have had that kind of experience once or twice in their life. But if I say the statement the body can be in pain and that not be a problem, maybe I just sound a little cracked. I don't sound cracked to everybody. But if I say that the mind can be in confusion, even senility, even Alzheimer's, and that not be a problem, then people think maybe he's already seen a happening.

To be saying something like that. However, equanimity with don't know is the basis of an extraordinary new kind of knowing. This fact has been discovered independently by three cultures.

And that indicates to me that it's universal. Totally independent without any contact with each other. Well, there might have been some minimal historical contact. It was discovered by the ancient Greeks. The meaning that you could suspend the need to know, that you could train the mind away from its desperate need to have answers. And when you did, that it would start to have answers in new ways. That was discovered in ancient Greece by skeptical philosophers who were called skeptics because instead of trying to find answers, they just observed.

Skeptikos. They watched. Sort of like what we do. They didn't ask questions like the other philosophers. They didn't debate. They let go of the need to have answers. And they discovered that if you do this in a consistent way as a discipline, a disciplined suspension of the need to know, a disciplined confusion, a sustained confusion for a goal, leads to a revolution in consciousness. They called it *epiche*, E-P-O-C-H-E, which means to suspend, in this case specifically suspend the need to know. It was rediscovered in the Middle Ages by Christian monks and nuns who called it *docta ignorantia*. Now we're going from Greek to Latin.

And it means cultivated don't know, *docta*, learned literally, cultivated don't know. We're in a Catholic center here, Carmelite retreat center. Venerable tradition. So who is the highest authority in the area of philosophy in the Roman Catholic Church? Was it Aquinas? Yes, Thomas Aquinas. Who said, *Deum tamquam per ignorantiam cognis limos*, in the language of the time, Latin.

If I were to paraphrase into fully modern English, would be if you want to know God directly, you have to know through a special kind of not knowing. And then it was discovered in Tang Dynasty China, where it was called don't know mind, and other things. Bodhidharma, when he visited Emperor Liang, Liang Wu Di, Emperor Wu Di of the Liang Dynasty, this master here visited the emperor.

And they had a dialogue. The emperor was a great patron of Buddhism. And the emperor asked Bodhidharma, I fed many monks and nuns, built many temples, how much merit have I made? To which Bodhidharma said, none whatsoever. Which sort of surprised the emperor. And the emperor asked him, well, what's the highest principle of holiness? To which he said, wide open and nothing holy.

Which also surprised him very much. And finally he said, who are you? To which Bodhidharma said, I don't know. So that's the Zen don't know mind. Three independent cultures have discovered that you can have equanimity with muddle and confusion. Now you might say, well, okay, I can see that as a practice, but come on, senility and Alzheimer. However, I have had the privilege of being with senile masters.

I've had the privilege of being with masters who had advanced Alzheimer's. So I can report to you what it's like. It's not like what it's usually like. It manifests in a very different way because of the practice. In the realm of unconditional happiness, the issue is not getting answers to this or that for the mind, the mind's experience. And the issue is not actually avoiding confusion for the mind.

The issue is in getting the answer and the issue is avoiding confusion as a problem. To have a meaningful experience of the meaningless. So in the realm of extraordinary happiness, even if you were confused, there would be a positive to that. And even if you were clinically confused due to a medical condition, there would still be an okayness in that. That's why we say that the realm of extraordinary happiness is independent of conditions. It's even independent of having a functioning brain. That's an extraordinary claim, independent of what condition the body and mind are in. If you are able to have a complete experience, sensory experience of that touch, feel, image, talk state, then you will be happy in this realm, this dimension of extraordinary happiness.

Total Happiness - 4 of 5 - Self and Others ~ Shinzen Young

What is the difference between the world of unconditional happiness and the world of objective happiness? You'll remember that in the world of conditional happiness, we talked about having this or that objective condition. There is something analogous to that in the world of unconditional happiness. There is something objective, not simply sensory, in the world of unconditional happiness. What's objective is our objective behavior. If we are optimal in our objective behavior, then whatever the outcome, we will be happy, even if we fail. If we did our best, if we gave our A game, if we were to our best possibility acting in good character and ethics, even if things don't work out, we still have the right to be happy.

And in fact, we won't be happy unless that dimension is also there. If extraordinary happiness or happiness independent of conditions were merely okay to transcend the mind and body, well, there are some pathological ways that people transcend the mind and body. But when people transcend the mind and body in those pathological ways, the pathology leaks over into their behavior, and that's how you know. But when people transcend the mind and body in a healthy way, the health must eventually seep into the behavior.

And if it doesn't, then they weren't taking feedback or there's some other problem. I take two dimensions in behavior. One might be called character. We talked a little bit about that at the beginning of the talk, character.

Sila in the Pali language, shila in the Sanskrit language. We can think of it in terms of positive behavior change. Everybody needs positive behavior change in their life. Well, it turns out that concentration power, sensory clarity, and equanimity are very related to changing our behavior because objective behavior is driven by body-mind experience. As you start to get a handle on your thoughts, and particularly your emotional body sensations, but also physical body sensations that might drive eating behaviors and so forth, touch, feel, image, talk are there what drive our behavior. So if we want to change external behaviors, avoid doing certain things that we should be avoiding, start doing certain things that we are procrastinating on, those are sort of the two sides to behavior change. Getting a handle on body-mind states that are controlling those behaviors will certainly be relevant to controlling the behaviors themselves, changing the behaviors themselves.

So character could also be called positive behavior change. What I have found, however, is that although concentration, clarity, and equanimity are very powerful tools to potentiate behavior change, they may not be sufficient. I myself, I won't go into details, but most of you have heard my own personal stories of struggles with behavior changes over the years, and the fact that I not so many years ago spent 18 months with a psychiatrist working on a certain behavior issue, I needed something from the outside, some external behaviorally oriented force on me. Now, I'll still say a large part of whatever success I've had with that behavior change has come from the practice, but I needed that external support.

I needed it from a mental health professional. Improvements in behavior, improvements in character over the years is an important dimension in unconditional or extraordinary happiness. Another behavior dimension besides the character piece is performance. We have sports performance, we have job performance, there's academic performance. There are things where we want to be able to do the very best, to be the very best that we could possibly be, professionally, intellectually, or academically, what have you, the best that one could possibly do in terms of task performance.

That, to me, leads to extraordinary happiness, because as I say, if you know you did your best, even if it doesn't work out, you'll still be happy. I put under behavior a character improvement and a performance improvement. Those are something that are objective,

although they're related to sensory experience. To sum it up, in the realm of extraordinary happiness, you're happy if your objective behaviors are the best they can be, and you're happy if you avoid suffering and find fulfillment, avoid confusion as a problem, and find the answer. Those taken together represent extraordinary happiness or happiness independent of conditions. Mindfulness skills impact all facets of ordinary happiness and all facets of extraordinary happiness. But there's another dimension to happiness.

We're not alone in this world. What I just described is happiness for a person. So if I had a lot of ordinary happiness and a lot of extraordinary happiness, I wouldn't yet be totally happy. I wouldn't be happy unless I did something to contribute to the happiness of others, for many reasons.

At the ordinary plane, because I'm an ordinary human. And with regards to extraordinary happiness, one of the facets of extraordinary happiness, as you'll remember, is to have the wisdom that knows your source. And if you know your source, you know who you are, means you know where you come from.

Where you come from is where everyone comes from. And an automatic consequence of that is you cannot help but seeing everyone as sort of yourself. Automatically, the issue of the happiness of others becomes relevant to you. If we want to speak of contributing to the happiness of others, it makes sense to consider that that service, that contributing, can be done both towards the ordinary happiness of others and towards the extraordinary happiness of others.

So when you contribute to the ordinary happiness of others, that's what people ordinarily mean by service. You support good causes. You give to charity.

You philanthropize. Volunteering, hospice, part or all of your job can be seen, your work can be seen as service. And some people are fortunate that they have jobs with a large service component. If they're a mental health professional or a health professional or in any of the helping professions, there's a large service component right in what you're being paid to do.

People find that very fulfilling. Certainly, what you give to your family, the creation and raising of children, getting them up to have conditions, have pleasure in their body, have knowledge in their mind, the main one for most people will be the family. The raising of the family is the service to others. That contributes to the ordinary happiness of the world.

Total Happiness - 5 of 5 - The Activity of Teaching ~ Shinzen

Young

The activity of fostering extraordinary happiness in others I call teaching. Just by the fact that you do this practice, you are already a teacher in my very broad formulation. Because I distinguish three levels of teaching.

The first level of teaching I call subtle teaching. As the result of doing this practice, we change. Particularly people who have known us notice it. But as it gets stronger and stronger as the months, years, and decades go on, everybody notices it. If only at some subtle subliminal level, just where you're coming from has this impact on people.

That's a huge sermon to the world. So everyone that practices from the absolute beginner to the master who can look at you and put you in a trance, teaches at the subtle level. Then the next level of teaching I call the explanatory level. Somebody asks you a question about what you do and you can give a coherent description of what you do.

Sandiptiko dhammo. That means that the dharma is crystal clear. Somebody hearing a clear description, a model of this practice may think, ooh, that sounds desirable.

Even if you're not trying to convince them it is desirable. Just you being able in words to coherently describe what you do, I call that the descriptive level of teaching. The explicit level of teaching, you're saying, hey, I'm going to teach you techniques, I'm going to teach you concepts, I'm going to show you how to apply this in your life in specific if you have questions or you need encouragement, come see me and we're going to have a sequence of lessons or I'm going to be giving a sitting group that you can join and you can talk to me about your practice.

I'm running retreats. You're explicitly now a teacher. I like to distinguish within the explicit teachers certain special subcategories of explicit teachers. First there's the paraprofessional. A number of you are paraprofessionals.

At a retreat you can do all the explicit teaching that I just mentioned. You put out your name to be a facilitator. So that would be a paraprofessional. Professional means you're a full-time. You live perhaps by alms, Dana in other words.

The Christian term is alms. Or you have a different fee structure but you're a professional. That's what you do. There's a certain subclass of professionals that are capable of confidently and competently dealing with the issue of classical enlightenment. Particularly can deal with that issue if a person happens to have a sudden enlightenment experience.

You have to know what to say in those cases. Not every professional teacher can or for that matter is required to be able to deal with that issue. At least not in the Vipassana tradition. Zen is maybe a little different story.

There is a watershed between teachers that can lead you to enlightenment by teaching you and teachers that can really deal with the issue of what happens if somebody does get enlightenment. That's a whole other, from my perspective, that's a special skill. Also to deal with what very occasionally happens. Doesn't happen often. It's only happened a few times in my many decades career. But there can sometimes be a thing where people get a sort of enlightenment experience that has a mixture of pathology with it.

It's straddles enlightenment and a condition called DPDR, derealization depersonalization disorder. This special class of teachers can deal with that issue too if it should come up. So let's just call them masters for now for lack of any other term. Among masters there is a very, very, very special class of master. That's a Buddha. Because it was asked, well what's the difference between a Buddha and an arhat? Arhat's fully enlightened, fully purified.

What makes a certain arhat a Buddha? The answer is where there was no path, he discovered a path and made it available to the world. That's the traditional formulation. I'd modify that a little bit. I would say a single Buddha is a master who discovers something new and important about enlightenment. As a result of that, there is widespread and profound positive change in the direction of human history.

Not just change the course of a few lives in a good way. That's a Buddha. I'm not at all sure that the next Buddha will be one person. The next Buddha may be a team, a team of enlightened scientists, for example.

If we think of Buddha as meaning discover something that has not been known in the past and that is deep enough and powerful enough to change the course of human history, that might turn out to be a team effort. Might, who can say? This then gives us a map of total happiness. This is where we started. Ordinary happiness for yourself. Then we talked about extraordinary happiness for yourself. Then we talked about how these lead to service to others, ordinary happiness for others, and extraordinary happiness for others. Under extraordinary happiness for others, I mentioned teaching. There's one other category and that is supporting teaching. That's Dana, right? The Dana, the teacher Dana.

When you support teachers, you support their efforts to bring extraordinary happiness to others. So that then gives us, I don't know if you can see this from where you are, but this is the details filled in. So, now we know at least two things. One, we know that mindfulness is cultivatable to any degree. We also now have an idea of a lot of very wonderful things that can result from mindful awareness. Things that mindful awareness fosters, looked upon under the simple concept of total happiness.

Towards a Balanced Enlightenment ~ Shinzen Young

Deep, deep practice is no guarantee against bad decisions. It's not a guarantee that people won't make seriously bad decisions. But there's a tendency to think if a person is really deep and is obviously really deep, that they won't make horribly bad decisions or have opinions that are horribly wrong. Right, because they're close to something like perfection.

Yeah. See, what we want to think is that there's this thing called enlightenment, and when you get there, everything's perfect as far as your life goes, and everything you do is perfect. Wouldn't that be nice? Yeah, but we want it to be that way. Something in us as humans says, that's the way it's got to be.

It's like if you find this thing, you've now found the panacea, and both in terms of your experience and in terms of what you do, it's like perfection. I can tell you that it does not work that way, in my experience. It is so not that way.

First of all, it's both better than and worse than, not nearly as good as everybody thinks it is. And secondly, you can definitely be empty of moment-by-moment ego, truly loving of each thing that appears in front of you, unswerving in your service 24-7, never-ending service. You can have all of these characteristics and still make horribly bad judgments that have horrible consequences.

And then, just because you have all of the three characteristics I just said, doesn't mean that you're necessarily the best person to set up some sort of social structure. The West is just growing up now. It's like, okay, it's like when you grow up, at some point you realize mommy and daddy aren't quite as good as you thought they were, or something.

That's sort of part of the maturing process. They're not the face of God. Yeah. How do you deal with the fact that you're not the face of God? Making a lot out of the teacher, making, you know, imputing a lot to the teacher, making the teacher in some ways central, is a temptation, a tendency.

Yeah. And I think it's good to try to resist that tendency so that it's more like, what is teacher? Teacher is just an old student, basically, and there's more of a peer communication kind of thing. So when we see the diametric opposite of that, those are the situations where the scandals have arisen, those are the situations where the problems have arisen. So making a big thing about the teacher, imputing more to a teacher than any human teacher has, I think is one lesson we learn, okay, let's not do that. My point is that you can be a master's master with regards to certain components and be like hugely imbalanced in other areas. So it's a proof of principle, a principle that I've always held, that the components are independent, that there's not one package called enlightenment. It's a vector, it's not a scalar, it's not one thing.

It's got these components, and what we want is what I call classical enlightenment. Now that's, of course, my private language. That's an idiolect, my own way of talking. There's no official definition of classical enlightenment. But classical enlightenment in my private language for myself, it means balanced enlightenment.

It means all the components are balanced. The way the Buddha was described was vidya-cārāṇa-sampanno. It means, sampanno means it's all there in Pali. Vidya means the knowledge, cārāṇa means the behavior. It's all there, the knowledge, the behavior.

Classical enlightenment is this balanced enlightenment. Okay, you have guidelines. We know that that's called the shila, you have the fourfold, fivefold shila and so forth. You've got these guidelines, these precepts. Then you have techniques for deconstructing the negatives, the negative urges. That's my focus and technique. You've got techniques for

constructing positive directions. That's the nurture positive. Then you set up your life so that you get feedback from everyone.

From everyone, not just your peers or your teachers, but from everyone. You make sure that that's always there. If need be, you don't hesitate to use structures that are outside of Buddhist practice. Psychotherapy, 12-step program, these behaviorally oriented accountability and support structures. If this stuff doesn't work, the things that I just mentioned, if that's not enough, then that's not enough. The Buddhist practice isn't enough, and you need this other stuff. Even I myself had 18 months of therapy once over a behavior issue, not some sexual problem, but it was a behavior issue that was very problematic for me. I remember. It sounds trivial, but it was highly non-trivial in terms of the effect in my life, which is habitual procrastination. The practice wasn't cutting it, and it was showing in irresponsible acts.

I just knew I needed something else. Actually, that's one thing that I found very helpful and moving in your teaching, is that you were actually willing to share that in public. I have that on YouTube, you talking about what your issue was and going through it and all that. I don't know that many teachers that would share that kind of, from a vulnerable place like that, an issue that they were working on or had worked on like that. I actually don't hear very many examples like that.

Did you ever hear something like that from Sasaki Roshi? Yeah, see, there's the answer, your expression. Are you kidding? I know one teacher, a Zen teacher, that went through a 12-step program. He was intervened on, went through the 12-step program, and I guess that it worked. There's an example of having to outsource it outside of Buddhism.

Here's a bona fide Zen master, and he was willing to go through that, but there was a huge intervention done on him to make that happen. What are these meetings where we have, quote, the Western teachers? Western teachers means the people teaching in the West. It doesn't mean you're of Western origin. In this case, Buddhist Western teachers. Yeah, we call them Western teachers, Buddhist Western teachers. So we have these professional meetings where we get together, but there are a lot of people that never come to those meetings. They are just conspicuously absent.

Right, right. They tend to be the real high-level Asian teachers like Sasaki Roshi. It's like a lot of them. They just don't come. They don't socially interact with their peers. Are they invited to come, first of all? You know, that is a really interesting question because there's just the assumption they won't, but, you know, that is a great question, and I'm going to put that to the committee that is organizing our next meeting in 2015. I don't know that they're invited. I suspect that at least their students are invited. Maybe they're invited, but I'm going to make sure they're invited. That's a great point. But the point is they don't even send their students.

Right. I never remember anyone from Edo Roshi's group or Sasaki Roshi's group or, you know, I mean, there's no scandal, but even Mr. Goenka, his people don't show up. I know they're invited.

He's never going to show up. Once they become high-tier, they're just independent kings that don't want to be with their peers in a social way, and they don't want to be with their near peers in a social way. Maybe that plus, you know, because then you're in a normal situation. I mean— Where there's more accountability if you're held accountable. And there's more confraternity, you know, where you're just like— you're not just an isolated king that has all this power, and you're so extraordinary that none of your peers can criticize you or comment, well, maybe you could teach a little different way. So one thing that no one seems to be talking about is the fact that many of the top-tier teachers just don't interact either with their tier or with us lesser, you know, teachers and so forth.

And so there's this isolation. I'd always known sort of what to look for, okay, in terms of how gurus fall. I used to think in my head there's this book that's called *The Guru's Guide to Survival*. I mean, there isn't, but I imagined this book. And this book has three chapters. One chapter is called Sex, one chapter is called Power, and one chapter is called Finances.

Because if you look around, this is where—these are the areas. Some people add the fourth, Addictions, but that can be covered in the first three, depending on how you think about it. Addictions on the part of the guru. This is the guru being addicted. Yes.

Okay. Like there's been some pretty famous examples of— You mean alcoholic? Yes. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, actually, that is a separate category. I think that chapter has to be in there.

Those are my four favorites. As far as talking about it. The four horsemen of the guru apocalypse.

Well, everything kind of fits if you think about all the teachers who have gone through what they've gone through. That's good, that addiction thing. Yeah. There's this *Guru's Guide to Survival*, and I think you're right. The fourth one is addiction, so there's these four chapters.

I sort of read that book, and I said, okay, it looks like I'm going to be a meditation teacher, so I better just be constantly watching for this stuff. Because I've seen, okay—the Chinese have an expression, if you see the chariot in front of you crash because of a pothole, then you're going to know, watch out for that pothole. So, okay, let's say there's these four potholes. So I'm watching for all of this, but there's some minor chapters that weren't in the book. Things that I now see in retrospect also can become a source of a teacher's downfall. Right. But that weren't in the book that I had read. And one of them is codependent relationships. Right.

You get in a coda relationship with someone who is not a teacher but wants to have the authority and the cachet of a teacher, and you're in some sort of relationship with this person where they think that they can call the shots as far as how you run your community and so forth. We're talking about you now. I'm talking about me. Yeah, just to be clear. Yeah, that's right.

But I'm talking about a general situation. Now, after it happened to me, I started to look around, and I started to see that I see now other scenes where this is happening. I see it in a Hindu-type thing. I saw it in a Native American thing. I saw it in a Zen thing. Okay, so then I realized, okay, maybe that's a minor chapter, but I do see that this is a pattern. And I wasn't watching for that.

Right. I just got sucked in. I just got sucked into a fully shared insanity.

I mean, it wasn't like literally psychotic, but, you know. When was this, roughly speaking? It's on dates, but I'm guessing maybe 20 years ago, something like that. Ballpark, yeah.

Yeah, that's ballpark. Okay, so I have a sort of characteristic style, right? And my students expect a certain characteristic style from me. And I was not doing that. It was like I was being high-handed and manipulative, okay, but this was being driven by something else, a strong connection that I had with someone. So, like, students started to get really pissed off.

It's like, what's wrong? They sort of expect you to be a certain way, and, you know, you're just not that way, and it's inappropriate. And so it got around in the Buddhist community. And so I don't want to name specific names in all of this, but I'll just say two very, very well-known mindfulness teachers who are friends of mine and who I respect asked me to come visit them and sort of like, hey, what's going on kind of thing. That plus the feedback I was getting from my students, eventually it sort of shook me back into reality.

But even that took a while, okay? It took months of just this constant feedback, constantly getting feedback from students, you're off base, this is not who you are, this is not what we signed up for. And then having, like, two really, really well-known people in the community say, like, more or less, you know, dude, what's going on? And sort of with that tone, right, because this is very collegial. It's like, oh, my God, I'm really off here. And I just essentially exited that connection with that person. I know for myself that it can be needed, but I was so fortunate that it was done in that way, you might say.

It didn't have to take the form of this horrific scandal kind of thing. So, you know, and I know how hard it is. Even for me, it was like my style basically is to be that way. But it still took months for me to really realize what was going on. Do you feel like you have kind of all the effective feedback mechanisms up for you? I mean, you went through this and had this fortunate intervention way back when. Do you feel like you have people around you that actively give you that feedback? Seems to be, because other than this problem, I am not aware of any problems in all the years, and other than that problem that I alluded to.

Yeah. This kind of sharing and dialogue is important. We need to be able to talk about things. We do. That's what we humans need. We can't just, you know, make it an untouchable thing. We have to, even though it can be really painful, to bring it out. And I think it's a wonderful contribution towards, I'm hoping, some open dialogue, some open sharing, some more transparency amongst senior teachers, all so that a deeper healing can take place for everybody who needs healing and a clearer understanding can come through to help prevent this kind of stuff from happening in the future. So thank you for that.

Tri-Modal Rest & Flow: Thinning Out into Nirvana ~ Shinzen

Young

How can we make the world a more peaceful place? Rest states flowing is a huge window of opportunity because you've got the best of both worlds.

You've got the restful and the dynamic together. And that is in fact very roughly speaking the description of enlightenment in the early Buddhist scriptures as you enter these attenuated, restful, tranquil states of shamatha and then essentially they flow and go into nirvana. And so they represent an intermediate between the intensified, solidified world of touch, touch, sight, sound, feel, image, talk, and the absolute rest of nirvana. The in-between is these tranquil states. So if you can have a continuity with tranquil states, particularly if you can easily access something restful that's somatic, something restful that's visual, and something restful that's auditory. So you've got trimodal rest.

And then you get flow in all of those. Now you've thinned out self and world. And now you're melting self and world. And it's not that far a step, just 10, 20, 30 years, to the vaporization of the self and world. And classical nirvana is yours. Ha ha ha ha ha! Alternatively, you could get sick and die over the next six months and you get in six months. So...

Turn Towards Difficult Emotion and Challenging Feel-Image-Talk

Eruptions - 1 of 2 ~ Shinzen Young

The questions are always formulated in terms of specific emotions. How do I deal with this kind of emotion? How do I deal with that kind of emotion? Fear, rage, shame, impatience, grief, bereavement, etc. But really, you deal with it all in exactly the same way. In terms of the have a complete experience of it, the answer to all of these questions is the same answer. If we're going to do a focus on it, if we're taking that strategy, the it meaning now you name it, anger, fear, sadness, embarrassment, impatience, disgust, confusion, any of the emotional challenges, same basic principles apply.

Untangle and be free. That's one really basic principle. And then work with the parts, work with the whole, work with elements, work with systems. In other words, work at small scale of organization, work at large scale. Alternate the wide scope and the narrow scope so that you sort of do pointed work in the small scope. And if you get quality work in all the different small scales, then you'll discover that that carries over into the large scale and the overall constellation loses, ceases to become a prison. So these are the basic themes and you just do it over and over and over again.

You set up the apparatus, the situation, and you let time pass. When you have an intense emotional arising, there's good news and there's bad news. The good news is feel and image and talk, all three elements are probably pretty strongly activated. When you get subtle emotional arisings, mid-scale or micro-scale emotions that come up in daily life, they may not noticeably activate all three.

You might only be aware of the talk part, for example. So there is, in a sense, something good about having a big emotional Vesuvius. I know there's also something bad about it because it's miserable, right? The opportunity is you probably have strong eruptions, not just in talk space, but in image space and feel space. You remember the situation, you relive the situation, you rehearse about the situation that's going to involve image space. And then you've got the eruptions in feel space that are definitely not subliminal.

There's the ache in your heart, there's the butterflies in your stomach, there's the cold fear up your spine, there's the general shake over your whole body, there's the tightness in the jaw, there's the, I want to hit someone in the arms, etc., etc., etc. All the components are active, they're not subtly active, it's all there. So work with the parts, work with the whole.

Focus for a little. What's the weakest link? Often the weakest link is image space, not inevitably, of course, depending. Some people get some very strong things, archetypal things, weird things in image space. But I find for myself, among the three, if I have an emotional upheaval, typically the image is the weakest link.

And the next weakest is actually for me, talk. The most challenging is the feel in the body. Physical discomfort, you can, you know, your body has a natural tendency to go into equanimity with physical discomfort. Physical discomfort is just part of being an animal.

And it happens to animals, so the body sort of knows what to do. Uncomfortable feel, actually any, all the feel, not just uncomfortable feel. Feel, the somatic component of emotional experience.

When you're dealing with feel, okay, I'm being poetic here, I hope you'll understand. You're fighting with Darwin. You're dealing with something that has been honed over millions of years to control you. It's been honed by evolution to control us, to control our behavior. It's

been honed to be hard to have equanimity with, okay? Honed by evolutionary forces. I don't know if you've ever had the experience of strong feel arising and getting the sense that this isn't just me, that this is like, this thing that's happening in my body is the tip of an iceberg and it goes down and out and it's like everyone that ever had this happen to them in their life, you know, all of, millions and millions of sentient beings.

This is not just me. I mean, this is like the whole evolutionary development of the limbic brain, which goes back at least to advanced reptiles, okay? This is the monitor lizard. It's like these sensations have been fine-tuned by the greatest engineering force known to us, which is evolution.

The sensations, anger, fear, sadness, embarrassment, impatience, disgust, interest. Interest you can't ignore either. If you wonder why you're running all those entertaining fantasies, okay, just look for the interest flavor. It's controlling you.

You think the mind's controlling, but the reason you're running those entertaining fantasies is the interest flavor is saying, fantasize, entertain yourself, and you'll get more of me. They're designed to be, that we can't ignore them and it's hard to have equanimity with them. Them meaning the different flavors of feel. It's hard to be matter of fact about them, much harder than it is with regards to physical discomfort. However, they are just body sensations. When a person is eight years old, they're controlled by rage, terror, grief, and shame.

Hopefully, by the time they're 80 years old, they will have learned something, but usually they haven't. Why haven't they? Because every time those sensations came up, they could not be ignored and they could not be viewed matter of fact. That person never attempted to untangle or just observe, etc., etc.

No growth in skill took place over that lifetime. So when it comes time to die and those things come up very strongly perhaps, freak out city. But good news, we're in this situation where we can train ourselves. This retreat environment is, it's vaccination against future suffering.

That's coming up and we're retraining our deep circuits. So untangle. What part is feel? What part is image? What part is talk? You can free float among them all or you can just tease out just the image for a while, just the talk for a while, just the feel for a while. Tease them apart so that instead of multiplying together, they merely add. And then try to the best of your ability to totally open and affirm that, to not press it down, but also to not hold on. And it just takes time, time, practice, practice, practice. And if that doesn't work, untangle in more detail.

Turn Towards Difficult Emotion and Challenging Feel-Image-Talk

Eruptions - 2 of 2 ~ Shinzen Young

I find that I typically don't have just one flavor of challenging feel. I may say to myself, I'm angry, and like I say, I'm not sure this is true of other people or whether it's a stage in practice or just idiosyncratic to me, but I may say to myself, I'm angry, but when I do a flavor analysis of what's going on, it seems to me that it's like wine. It's got a full nose and it's got some tannins and there's hints of raspberry and apple with a long syrupy finish. They give you this description, it's like, did somebody just make this up? Does somebody actually experience that when they drink this wine? If you're not a wine connoisseur, it's like, what are they talking about? Well, there's all of these nuances in wines if you're into such things. Well, I guess I'm not much of a wine connoisseur for a number of reasons actually.

Probably that's a good thing. But I have sort of become an affective somesthesia connoisseur. Affective is the fancy Latin word meaning related to emotion. Soma is body, asthesia is sensation.

So affective somesthesia is the long Latin, Greek way of saying feel. Now I detect all these subtle nuances. It's like, yeah, it's anger, but there's that hint of sadness there.

And oh yeah, there's this fear up my back. And subtle is significant. Subtle flavors that may be very mild relative to the main flavor, if they multiply in, have a huge effect. If you've got 10 units of anger, but you've got two units of fear and two units of sadness, and you don't notice the fear and sadness, they're there, then instead of having 10 plus 2 plus 2, you're going to have 10 times 2 times 2. They're going to weigh in multiplicatively rather than additively. That's part of what I mean when I say subtle is significant. So divide and conquer, that's another way of saying untangle and be free.

So and if that doesn't work, subdivide until you do conquer. You're noting feel, image, talk. Okay, well maybe we need to divide the feel into flavors. And then I'd work just with the anger, and then just with the fear flavor, and just with the sadness flavor. Work with them individually until there's clarity, there's a little more equanimity. Then when I generically note feel, I'm aware of all of them, but they've been individually clarified and equanimized. So now as an aggregate, they're clarified and equanimized. If that doesn't work, subdivide until you do conquer. After you've broken it into flavors, what's next? Break the flavors into locations.

I'll work just with the sadness. And I do what I call radial sweeping. So okay, so I got the ache in the heart, so go to the core of that. Now how far does it extend to the right? I sort of sweep the awareness out like a cone going to the right until I come to the end of sensation.

Maybe it's in the body, maybe it's at the skin, maybe it's between the skin and the wall, maybe it's beyond the wall. I move out here, I get that whole sector. And it's like, okay, that's just the sadness, just in that sector on the right. Come back in, now the sector on the left. Just that flavor, how far does it go? Now in front, behind, above, below. So I do flavor by flavor, sector by sector.

Until I get it to manageable pieces. It's a time-space volume of one flavor of sensation. And that's untangled enough so that I can penetrate that.

Penetrate means get a sense that my awareness is soaking into it and my being is opening up to it. And then you integrate it. So I work with all the flavors in all the six sectors. And I

worked with the image, and I worked with the talk.

Now let's go back to generic, to broad. Just note, feel, image, talk. But now individually, I've sort of worked with them individually, so now collectively they're clearer and more quantized, getting closer to complete experience. You have to let go of the agenda to get answers. And you have to let go of the agenda to get comfortable. The normal reward is I get answers, I get comfortable. If you let go of the agenda to get answers and get comfortable, you still get a reward at some point.

You get the taste of purification. And even if you don't have answers and you're not comfortable, that's enough of a reward. Easy place to learn it? In pain. Much more challenging place to learn it? In rage, terror, grief, shame, embarrassment, humiliation.

Is it learnable by me or you or actually any other human being? Absolutely. You just have to want it. You have to want it a lot. You have to realize it's important. If you're willing to do that, then you start to see that yes, there's light at the end of the tunnel. Sasaki Roshi talks about becoming a human being of complete feeling. So that's an awesome attainment, to be a human being of complete feeling. Can you do it? Yeah.

Yeah. You can do it. There's no person in this room that can't do this if they want to and if they take measures.

So the measures are implement the technique, do it on a consistent basis. Here you have nothing to do but it. It's wonderful in that sense. Now of course, because we're dealing with, in a sense, the ultimate evolutionary challenge, it's the robot trying to gain control of itself, trying to be free. The robot was designed by evolution to be a robot.

So it's the ultimate challenge, really. When those sensations come up, they were designed by evolution to give immediate, approximate, and intense responses for the animal in the wild. But immediate, approximate, and intense responses are not necessarily called for in human society. But because they were honed by evolution to do this, instead of motivating and directing, which they're meant to do, and that's fine, they often end up driving and distorting.

The they is feel, the feel flavors. Instead of motivating and directing, which they do do many times, and that's fine, we're not trying, certainly not trying to get rid of feel or deny it in any way whatsoever. We're trying to love it to death, to completeness. When you have complete feel, it only motivates and directs. It does its job.

It loses its power to drive and distort. But it's a long, long task. Yes, I just described a tough job, but somebody's got to do it. And guess who those somebodies are.

Turn Towards Flow (Change) Using the Labeling "Gears" &

Options - 2 of 4 ~ Shinzen Young Interactive

Let's begin by turning your attention towards the itchy sensations wherever they may be in the body. And I'd like you to focus in on the sort of prickly change, the fact that it's sort of like popping and bubbling kind of thing. Just focus on that, how there's these sort of constant little sparks or scintillations. And get interested in that for a moment. And I'd like you to label that with the word flow. And I'd like you to say flow out loud every four, five, six seconds to acknowledge that you're focusing on how the itch is changing continuously. Does that make sense? So we'll call this noting the flow with spoken labels.

And I'd like you to do that now for a couple minutes. By listening to the pace of your labels and the tone of voice, that will give me an idea of how you're working with this experience. Flow. Flow. Flow. Flow. Flow.

Good. The pacing of your labels is excellent. I'd like you to change the tone, though, a little bit, more to a kind of gentle, matter-of-fact, impersonal quality in the voice.

It may seem artificial, but it can influence consciousness. Something more like this. Flow. Flow.

That kind of quality. And then in between the labels, you're intently focusing on that flow. And then you re-acknowledge with the label. And you use the gentle, matter-of-fact quality in the voice to remind you to be gentle and matter-of-fact with the sensation. That's using the voice to induce equanimity. Does that make sense? Yes. Excellent.

Let's try to do it that way. Flow. Flow.

Flow. That's perfect. Now, shift to mental labels. Think those words. Or that word. But as you think that word, let your mental voice also have that gentle, matter-of-fact tone to it. And that will constantly be reminding you to have equanimity.

The tone of the labeling voice induces equanimity. The even pacing, not too fast, not too slow, guarantees concentration. And then the precision of the words that you use to label the phenomena, that guarantees the sensory clarity. So can you see how the labeling process sort of guarantees each of the three components of mindful awareness? Yes. Does that concept make sense to you? Yes. Excellent. So now I'd like you to continue to note the flow using mental labels.

How's that coming, Lorraine? It's coming. It's really slowed down. Is there more of a wavy quality to it? When you say it's slowed down.

Yeah. I think the prickliness is sort of softened and it's turning more wavy. Would you say that the wavy sensations are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral? I guess I'd have to say neutral. Okay, good. I'd like you to focus in on that. And that means to the extent that you focus on that neutrality, you don't have the sense of discomfort.

Is that correct? Right. So keep focusing on the sort of massage of that wavy flow. Keep noting it as flow. Open up to it and sort of think of it as a kind of massage that at worst is neutral. And could potentially at some point actually become pleasant.

But as long as it's at least neutral, you're focusing on that movement and you're less caught up in the sense of having a physical discomfort. Does that notion make sense? Yes. Excellent. So keep doing just what you're doing.

You're doing great. Is that wavy flow still present? It is. It's being sort of challenged by this pulsing that's starting to assert itself. And is the pulsing literally the pulse from the circulation of blood? I don't know. I feel it more close to my elbow, which is not generally a place where you feel a pulse. And the pulsing is a painful sensation? It's neutral too, I'd have to say.

But it's a little distracting. Could you interpret the pulsing as a kind of flow? Yes. It's just changing the pace. So you could add the pulsing as a part of the neutral flow.

Yeah. And is there anything pleasant in any of the flow at this time, or is it still more or less a neutral thing? I think there is a degree of pleasantness to it. Is it possible to describe in what sense the flow is pleasant? It's just because it's really slow and almost calming.

Good. And if you need to, use your concentration power to focus on how the flow is pleasant. And let that sort of massage you, nurture you, take you deeper and deeper, comfort you. But also sort of energize you.

So it's a kind of positive energy for you. Just keep noting flow. If you wish, you can drop the mental label and just do it moment by moment with direct awareness. Or you can reinstate the mental label if you get a little spaced out. And if you get really spaced out, I'd like you to start speaking the labels out loud again. Does that make sense? Yes.

So that's sort of like a quality control. If you go up a hill, go into first gear, speak the labels and use the voice the way we did, the pacing, the tone, and so forth. If you're just sort of driving along, you can go into the mental labels. And if you really get on a momentum, you can drop the labels, go into cruise control, and just do it with direct awareness. Does that make sense? Yes.

Turn Towards Physical Discomfort Sequence & The Taste of

Purification ~ Shinzen Young

Now we know what the it is in the case of physical discomfort. It's the local uncomfortable touch, possibly the global spread, and possibly feel-image-talk reactions.

That's the it. However, I'm giving you general principle that you can apply to any sensory challenge. Now there's a tendency to think that, oh, if I'm going to turn towards it, I have to turn towards the most horrible, intense, solidified part of it.

However, that is, although there's nothing wrong with that, that is certainly not necessarily the case. Where I like to start is I look at the sensory challenge and I ask myself, what's the weakest link? Which component in the sensory challenge is least intense? I'm going to go for that first. Typically for me, I find that at least at the beginning of the discomfort, the least intense components are actually the feel-image-talk reactions. They're not too strong yet. They're just a subtle hint. So often I'll start with that. I won't even go to the uncomfortable touch. I'll go to, OK, what's going on in feel-image-talk reactive to this, or in general, what's going on? Because I know if at some point I lose it and freak out, the freak out is not in touch space. The freak out is in fit space. So I want to get some momentum going in. And if at some point I become unwilling to practice, like to hell with this, et cetera, et cetera, that's going to happen in fit space.

Not in the physical body. Touch space can take a lot. Feel-image-talk space is pretty vulnerable. So I start in feel-image-talk.

Then when I go to touch, I try to detect the subtle global spread, if I can. And after many, many years of practice, usually I can. And I work with that.

It's widespread, but it's not that intense relative to what's happening locally. So I sort of work with that. I note that touch, touch, sort of zoom into those things. Sometimes zoom out to try to get the whole spread at once, which does help with the dissipating. Zoom in means work with a small part.

Zoom out means sort of spread the attention over the whole thing. Then I go into the local intensities, which is, that's the strongest link. So when you work with the sensory challenge, you can focus away, or you can focus on it. When you focus on it, you want to get a very clear classification of the sensory challenge, all its components. And then decide, well, do I want to go to this, which component do I want to go to? Do I want to work with them all at once, et cetera, et cetera? So like I say, I typically work with the weakest link, and then I sort of work my way up. And then I work with it all at once.

But usually by that time, it's breaking up into flow, meaning that it's not so solid anymore. It's beginning to show waviness, bubbiness, that kind of stuff. So now I'm noting touch, feel, image, talk. But it gets very flowy. So at some point, I'm just zooming out, and I'm covering touch, feel, image, talk, all four simultaneously as a flow field.

They integrate into a single body-mind arabesque of energy. And if it works right, I just get this flavor of purification. I get this sense that because of the way that I'm experiencing this moment, every moment of my life in the future is going to involve less suffering and more fulfillment. And furthermore, the poison and pain that has been stored from the past is getting worked out. So the present is reaching into the future, making a brighter future for me. And the present is reaching back into the past and cleaning that up for me. I call that experience the flavor of purification. Probably the most important watershed in a person's

practice is when they start to develop an awareness of that flavor.

Because after that, it takes off like a hockey stick. It's exponential, because now you're getting a reward, an actual reward for your mindfulness. You're actually tasting not when the retreat's over or when the sit's over, but like right now in this instant, you're tasting that this is doing something significant and productive for you.

So there's a reward there. I personally have seen people sit for three days without moving. And I can tell you how it's done. It's done with a smile on the face. So it's like, what? Somebody's genetically engineered to do this? A human can do this? No, a human can train themselves along the lines of what I just said, so that the sense of, this is meaningful and purgatorial, as opposed to meaningless and hellish, that sense is present moment by moment.

And so there's a smile on the face, even though the pain is hour after hour, right on the cusp of fainting intensity. And this is the easy thing. Now you want to know what the hard thing is? This isn't that easy, I know.

But relative to something else, this is relatively easy. When the uncomfortable touch breaks up, you're beginning to have a complete experience of uncomfortable touch. When the uncomfortable touch turns into purification flavor, you're well on your way to complete experience. And you remember I talked last night about the two things, getting over the self and the world and improving the self and the world. And you get over the self and the world by having what I call a complete experience of yourself and the world. The relatively easy thing is to have a complete experience of uncomfortable touch. The harder thing is to have a complete experience of uncomfortable feel.

Turn Towards the Soothing Flow of Poison Ivy, See Flow in Rest ~

Shinzen Young Interactive - 3 of 4

How's that coming, Lorraine? It really slowed, so it was almost stopped, but then I noticed it was moving again. When it stopped, was there a deep tranquility within you? Or it just stopped? Was there a sort of afterglow, or not? No, it was more like the pulsing, although the pulsing is still a flow, but it was not the gentle flow.

It kind of took over for a bit, and then I was looking for that gentle flow, and then it sort of showed up again. Excellent. Very clear report. And you're continuing to be able to experience the flow as a pleasant, kind of soothing thing? Yes. So, you're essentially experiencing widespread poison ivy as a soothing flow of energy. Is that true? I have to say, yes it is. And yet we did nothing other than focus on just what is. So, that's pretty weird, huh? Okay. I'm assuming it's mostly in your arms that you've been focusing, is that correct? Or have you been focusing wherever the poison ivy itches are? I was focusing on the flow, and I have to say that it sort of went into my abdomen as well. It sort of involved my torso and my arms. It tends to spread, in other words. That is a characteristic of the flow experience. I'd like you to see how widespread within your body you can find phenomena that could come under the category of flow. It could be tingling or waving in your legs, your arms, your torso, your face, expansion, contraction, inward pressures, outward pressures. See how widespread through your body you can find things that might come under that category. Just sort of take an inventory through the body.

Now that I've sort of opened up my search, it is all over. It's fairly global in the body? Yes. I'd like you to zoom out and cover your whole body with awareness and focus in on the flow as encompassing your whole body. That's excellent. Sometimes this is the way it happens. It's fun, isn't it? Who ever knew that severe poison ivy could be so much fun? Who would have ever thunk it? You're particularly sensitive to poison ivy, is that correct? It seems I cannot deny that I am very sensitive to it.

You're doing great work. Are you able to get that sense that your whole body is sort of flowing? Yes. Now we're going to up the challenge level considerably. I'd like you to keep your awareness in the body and if possible on the flow. But I'd like you to open your eyes, but sort of defocus your eyes. Try to just sort of soft focus so you're not too drawn into external sights. And see if it's possible to maintain some contact with that flow with your eyes open.

The opening of the eyes could intensify the flow, it could cause the flow to become less, or it might have no effect at all. But does this instruction make sense? Good. I'd like you to try that. Able to maintain some sense of that with your eyes open? Some sense of it. The pulse kind of asserted itself again. But there's still a bit of a presence of the flow as well.

Even with your eyes open? Yes. That's fantastic. So this shows you that you can maintain this in life. It doesn't have to be just when your eyes are closed necessarily. You could maintain it as you're going about daily life. You might be able to maintain some sense of an awareness of that flow throughout the day.

Does that make sense? At least as a theoretical possibility. I'd like you to close your eyes again. And I'd like you to bring your attention to your mind for a moment.

We're going to go out of the body. Bring your attention to the area in front of, behind your closed eyes, sort of your mental screen. Does that make sense? If we were to ignore mental images and colors that might be there, we'd be left with dark, bright, or gray. Is it mostly

dark for you, mostly bright, or mostly gray? Mostly dark. I'd like you to focus on how the pattern of dark and bright is changing there. Constantly changing.

Does that make sense? It is moving, right? The dark brightness? Is that correct? By moving I mean like shifting perhaps in very small ways, or that's not the case? It's moving in the sense that some of those bright spots are fading and then coming back. That's what I mean. We'll consider that to be flow inside that blank. I'd like you to note that as flow. And if there is any vibration inside the blank, the dark, for example, if there's any light, bubbly or whatever, note that as flow also.

Does that make sense? Actually, no. Could you say that again? Well, when you look at the darkness, brightness, behind your closed eyes, it could be perfectly stable or it could be moving in some way. Would you say it's perfectly stable or there's movement of some sort there? There's movement of some sort. We'll call that movement flow. Does that make sense? And I'd like you to just focus on how the visual phenomena there flow. And if you happen to have any mental pictures of things, if they move or change or melt or morph, we'll consider that flow also. So we're going to look at flow inside either your mental blank screen or any mental pictures that might be present. Now, of course, there might be times when there is no flow. Everything might be perfectly stable. So only note flow if something changes. If it doesn't change, then just stay there and let things be stable.

Turn Towards, Turn Away, Focus on Flow w Physical Discomfort ~

Shinzen Young Interactive - 1 of 4

I like to think of challenges as coming in two types. There are behavioral challenges like, you know, I'm procrastinating or I'm smoking cigarettes and I want to change the behavior.

So I call those behavioral challenges. Then there are what I call sensory challenges, which are because of some condition, some sensory experiences arising in the body, in the mind, in sight, sound, and so forth. And that's an uncomfortable sensory experience.

So it's a challenge in that sense. So in my general formulation, I would say you're experiencing a sensory challenge and that challenge is uncomfortable touch, defining touch as physical type body sensation. Essentially when a person has a sensory challenge, they have three broad categories of strategies that can be applied. You can either turn your attention towards the sensory challenge and bring concentration, clarity, and equanimity to it. That would be a sort of turn towards and you're sort of perfusing the sensory challenge with mindful awareness. A second strategy could be called turn away, your concentration to focus elsewhere onto something that's pleasant.

For example, you can focus on restful states or focus on the sound of music or positive emotions and so forth. And I call that a turning away strategy. A third strategy is that you can pay attention to how things change. And it's sort of not this too shall pass, but if you look carefully enough, this is passing moment by moment. And the passingness of it, both in terms of the sense that it's moving and flowing and in terms of the sense that each piece of it sort of falls away moment by moment, you can become so absorbed in the change that pretty soon you're just aware of change and you're not aware of it. I call that strategy focus on change. So you can turn towards or you can turn away or you can turn towards, you can focus on change.

The tendency is to think, well, if I turn towards it, I'll just make it worse. So I don't want to do that. And then, well, if I turn away from it, I'm just avoiding and denying and suppressing. So I don't want to do that.

And I know it's not going to change because it's rock solid. So what's the point of that? So then the person has set themselves up for failure. Although it is true that it may temporarily get worse if you turn towards it, if you really give it what it needs, in other words, experience it fully, because that's what mindful awareness is, is a full experience of something. If you experience it fully, it may get worse, but then it will break up. And then people say, well, if I turn away, I'm denying. But to turn away, you have to develop concentration, right? Because it takes a discipline to focus on something other than the sensory challenge. And you're not suppressing the sensory challenge. You're giving it permission to be there. You're just not intentionally focusing on it. So you are bringing equanimity to it, even though you're not paying attention to it. And you're also developing sensory clarity to learn how to detect a pleasant, restful state while you have a huge pain and emotion state.

You're learning how to detect subtle, pleasant things that may always be there that you might not have noticed. The turn away strategy is valid. And as you're turning away, it may cause the thing to sort of cool out, the sensory challenge to cool out a bit. Then when you use those same skills that you've developed by turning away, you then can apply the concentration, clarity, equanimity, turn towards.

The more cooled out version of it, it may be more penetratable. So the focus away is absolutely as legitimate as focus on. And as far as, well, I know nothing changes as solid as the rock. Well, how carefully have you looked? If you look microscopically, you might start to notice, oh yeah, well, it's changing, but it's trivially changing. So what? But then as you pay more and more attention to that, it's like, oh, well, actually, come to think of it. And then that theme of flow and vanishing starts to dominate awareness. I have noticed, actually, I've noticed change. It is constantly changing. That's the physical discomfort? The physical discomfort, yeah. Is it possible to describe the type of change? By that I mean, my general word for continuous change is flow.

And then if something disappears, I say it's gone or has vanished. Some of the flavors of flow that people experience are sort of like a waviness. Some people get like a bubbly vibration kind of thing.

Some people get a sort of expansion or contraction or sort of both at the same time, like something sort of like pushing out and pulling in at the same time. Is it possible to characterize the flavor of flow experience inside the itchiness? It's like there's needles sticking in my arm, like millions of them, all at different times and all in different places, but roughly in the same area. But just instantaneous little pricks of a needle. And so it's kind of like little bubbles, almost sounds pleasant.

It's not pleasant because it's pricks, but it's like that in the sense of little pops. Yes. That's a strategy that we might take. We might choose to focus on change based on what you're reporting. Do you understand the three basic strategies? Turn towards, turn away, or focus on change? Those three sort of basic options.

Now if we choose to turn away from the discomfort, we could either focus on restful states like relaxation, physical relaxation or mental blank, mental quiet, that kind of stuff. That would be one turn away strategy. A second turn away strategy would be to focus on positive thoughts or positive emotions, like sort of hold a positive image or positive feel in the body or have some sort of positive talk in your head. So we could focus away from what you're doing, the uncomfortable touch, on either pleasant feel-image-talk states, or we could focus on restful states.

So that would be a focus away. If we did a turn towards, we would pay attention to the touch itself, but we might also look for feel-image-talk reactions that might be subtly present. And if we do a focus on change, we're going to explore ways that your sensory experience is constantly changing, not only the sensory challenge, but like other places. Because when one part of the sensory system starts to flow, other parts will often flow. So even if your pain is solid, if we find flow in some other part of your sensory experience, on that sometimes it spreads and breaks up the solidity in the painful areas. These strategies all make sense and the sort of techniques that we would use for each one are clear to you? Yes.

That's good. Now, as you can see, they all sort of work, but you may have a curiosity or a preference as to where you'd like to start. If we do turn towards, we can either work just with the touch of the pain itself, or we can work just with your feel-image-talk reactions to it. Those would be the two turn towards strategies. The two turn away strategies would be focus on pleasant restful states or actively create positive thoughts and feeling. And then the focus on change will be we'll find change wherever we find it, emphasize that and then see how widely that spreads.

Does one of these particularly appeal to you? I think the focus on change. Let's explore that then. That could be very interesting. Okay, good. Are you comfortably seated? Yes. Okay, good. So I'm just going to do my own practice as you do yours. So I'd like you to take a moment to lengthen your spine and let your whole body settle.

Turn Towards, Turn Away: Working with the Agitation Flavor in

Meditation ~ Shinzen Young

Meditation Practice Sometimes when we do meditation practice, we experience calm and tranquil states. But sometimes when we do meditation practice, we experience agitation, impatience, restlessness, and so forth. There's a tendency to think when that kind of thing arises that I'm doing something wrong, that it's not okay.

I would say that not only is it okay, but actually it's quite natural. An experience of restlessness in the body is a certain flavor of emotional experience in the body. I use the word feel to refer to body sensations that seem to a person at a given time to be emotional in nature.

And I have a sort of list of common flavors of feel that come up for people. The biggest uncomfortable ones are anger, fear, sadness, shame, slash embarrassment. But right after the big four comes what I call agitation or impatience. Now it may not be dramatic like anger, fear, sadness, and shame, but the don't want to sit still, antsy kind of feel is very significant because it informs the day-to-day life of everyone. Most people are hopefully not living on a day-to-day basis with rage, terror, grief, and shame flavors in their body. But almost everyone experiences, usually below the threshold of awareness, a kind of subtle agitation, impatience quality in day-to-day life.

That's what gives that sense of being driven and frenetic, that inability to stop on a dime. It's primarily due to agitation flavors that sort of drive you. Now, therefore, is the goal to get rid of those agitation flavors? Well, no, I wouldn't really say quite that.

The goal is to be able to have a complete experience of those agitation flavors. What do I mean by a complete experience? I mean that you experience it with an extraordinary degree of concentration, sensory clarity, and equanimity. These are technical terms within the basic mindfulness system that I teach, and I've defined them elsewhere. When you bring enough concentration, clarity, and equanimity to any ordinary experience, it becomes utterly extraordinary. And that includes negative experiences, uncomfortable experiences, like agitation flavor in your body.

It's desirable to be able to have a complete experience of the agitation flavor. That doesn't mean, however, that you necessarily have to work with it when it comes up. You may choose to focus away from it. So you're practicing, everything is sort of calm and whatever. You're focusing, I don't know, you're focusing on your breath, for example, your breath sensations.

And all this agitation comes up. So what should I do? Well, one possibility is to just let it be there, but in the background, and you keep bringing your attention back to the breath. But you don't think it's a bad thing that it's there, you don't try to suppress it. You just don't intentionally focus on it.

You just keep coming back to your object. Now, I would say that you're not bringing concentration or sensory clarity to the agitation. But you are bringing equanimity to it, even though you're not focusing on it. You're letting it be in the background, you're coming back to the breath. So one strategy would be just let it be there, understand it's a natural thing. You let it be in the background, you keep focusing on what you were focusing on.

Another strategy is, okay, let's not turn away from it, let's turn towards it. Then you would be bringing three things to it. You would be accepting it as a flavor in your body, so that's

the equanimity piece. But you were doing that before, hopefully, that was already helping a little bit. But now you're bringing concentration and sensory clarity. You're intentionally focusing on it and ignoring other things. And you're trying to be aware of the locations, the changing intensities, and so forth. And as a result of that, that agitation flavor will cause you less and less suffering.

And as it causes you less and less suffering, it will less and less drive your behavior in day-to-day life. In general, when a challenge comes up, one has the option to either turn towards it and work with it as an object of focus, or one has the option to just let it be in the background and stay with what you were originally doing. You can learn something from both ways of working. And I usually encourage people to explore both possibilities. That gives you flexibility.

The price of flexibility, though, is complexity. I've mentioned that one of the weak points of my approach to meditation practice is that I give people a lot of options that also could be taken as a strong point, of course. So I give people ways of turning their attention away from challenges, onto restful states or positive states or the energy flow of the experience and so forth.

But I also give people ways of bringing their attention towards the challenge and accepting it as an object, perhaps solidified, uncomfortable, objectified, and then their opening to it, turning their attention towards the challenge. If, when you're practicing, the agitation flavor comes up, it's certainly not a problem. It's certainly okay. In fact, it's totally natural that that's going to happen from time to time. What to do about it? Well, there's a lot of things you could do, and they're all good. What should you do? Should you turn towards it? Should you turn away from it? Well, I would say it's desirable to have the ability to do either approach, because both are legitimate and both are productive.

Untangling Sensory Experience Leads to Flow, Unifications, and

Dynamic Doing ~ Shinzen Young

What is your view of the Buddha? I look upon the Buddha as a kind of spiritual scientist, a great innovative spiritual scientist. Shall we say the Isaac Newton of spirituality? After Newton appeared in the world, science really got going. Newton made some major innovations that set the course for science, or at least physical science as we now know it. The Buddha made a number of original discoveries that I think are as good as gold.

They will stand the test of time in terms of the issue of ultimate human happiness and human spirituality. One of those discoveries was the principle of untangle and be free, which I sometimes, in a somewhat more politically incorrect phraseology, like to describe as divide and conquer. Some people don't like that language, but divide and conquer means if you can break the complicated system into its natural components, you will conquer ignorance, suffering, and the screwed up behaviors that come from ignorance and suffering. Divide and conquer actually is a nice phrase, but if you prefer the more gentle untangle and be free, we can use that phraseology also. In traditional Buddhist scriptures, early Buddhist scriptures, the Pali Canon, there are actually a number of systems or schemes for dividing and conquering the suffering self. One of them is the five-aggregate scheme, another one is the four foundations of mindfulness, and another one is the four great elements—earth, water, air, and fire, or wind and fire.

These were looked upon in those days as basic components of the world. I think it's important not to get fixated on a particular traditional classification scheme, but rather to generalize the Buddha's discovery and realize that there are any number of ways of dividing the pie of self, so that you can apply this general or basic principle of untangle and be free. The untangle and be free discovery basically says that when the elements that produce the sense of self are not distinct in awareness, they create qualitative and quantitative illusions that magnify the sense of suffering, and that would be on the quantitative side. And on the qualitative side, even more important actually, produce an illusory quality within us. That illusory quality is the perception that there is a thing called a self inside us. When you untangle the strands, then the somethingness of self goes away, which, by the way, frees up the doingness of personality, so you don't have to worry that you're going to lose something by untangling and being free.

I use this classification system to apply the general principle of untangle and be free. I don't typically use the five aggregates of traditional Buddhism for a number of reasons. They're a little bit hard for beginning meditators to use practically. In fact, I don't think I know of a single teacher that actually has people make the deconstruction of the self the center of practice based on the five aggregates.

I can generalize the concept of untangling the aggregates to untangling other types of components that are pretty closely related. We could say that a core sense of subjective self arises in the feel-image-talk system. I sometimes refer to that as the subjective self or the feeling-thinking self.

The thinking part is in the image and talk. The feel part is here in the body. To the extent that you can track these in real time and keep them from tangling together, to that extent the subjective self will be a home, not a prison. A little broader formulation would be what I refer to as body-mind-self. In that formulation, anything that happens in the body is a part of self, and anything that happens in the mind is part of self. From that somewhat broader perspective, we have touch, feel, image, talk. This is body and this is mind. I have people learn how to track these four and separate them. When people work just with the core

subjective self, I call that technique focus-in, because you're working with the innermost components. This is my contemporary reworking of things like the four foundations of mindfulness or the five aggregates and so forth. After one separates out these elements, what's next? Well, there's more to the deconstruction than simply the untangling of the strands.

One then looks very carefully at each individual strand, and a unifying principle arises. Here we have distinction. We distinguish subjective versus objective. We distinguish somatic versus visual versus auditory. We distinguish ordinary versus restful. After you've teased out these sensory strands and look very carefully at them individually, you'll see that they're all made out of the same stuff. After productive kinds of discriminations are made, further careful observation brings us to a productive unification.

It turns out that all of these sensory experiences are, upon very close investigation, seen to be made out of the same stuff, except it's not stuff. It's a verb, not a noun. It's a doing, a doing that could be described as a vibrant vacuity. The vacuity is a kind of transparency or refreshing nothingness, and the vibrance is a kind of dynamic flow upon which we ride and live our life in a bouncy and enthusiastic way, having seen beyond life.

Using Turn Away and Background Equanimity w. Sensory

Challenges ~ Shinzen Young

At some point, you realize that, you know what, no matter what I do, I'm still going to be uncomfortable.

I can say that that will change with time, and it will change in two ways. First, your body will acclimatize to the posture. It'll just get used to it, your legs will stretch, your muscles get used to it and so forth, and it won't be as uncomfortable as it is in your first retreat or several retreats. So there is a change that takes place in the body. More importantly, a change takes place in consciousness. Your relationship to discomfort gets rewired, so that even when discomfort's there, it becomes less problematic.

It will improve with time due to these two causes. In general, when you deal with a challenge of any sort, the first thing you want to do is ask yourself, what is the sensory challenge involved here? So what's involved in the sensory challenge of physical discomfort in your body is certainly the physical discomfort. However, there may be a significant component of feel-image-talk-reaction to the discomfort, in addition to the discomfort itself.

The physical discomfort has typically local intensities, but it also tends to have a global, subtle spreading influence on your body, your whole body. However, that global spreading influence may be below the threshold of awareness. It may be subliminal, so you may not detect it. If you don't detect it, then you don't work with it.

Basic principle in mindfulness practice, you only work with tangible sensory experience. You don't sort of like, well, I know something's there. What's wrong with me? I can't get to it. I can't detect it, and so forth. I know there's this or that under there.

Why am I blocking it, et cetera, et cetera. That's not the thought pattern that goes with mindfulness practice. With mindfulness practice, it's whatever is available to the senses, that is what you work on, and whatever may be below it, well, that gets worked on by a trickle-down effect. Even though I say that there is often a global spread from the local intensities, it is also often the case that that is not detectable. If it's not detectable, don't worry about it.

Don't be concerned. However, if you happen to notice that, that when you get a sort of local splash here, there's a little something here, a little here, a little here, and those are touch, they're physical reactions to the local intensity. Well, then if it's come up to the surface of awareness, then that's something that can be worked with. Potentially, the sensory components of your physical discomfort are certainly an awareness of various local intensities, perhaps an awareness of a more global spread.

This is all uncomfortable touch. Then reactive to that, you may have mental pictures triggered by that. You may have, and those could be pictures of the body part where the discomfort is, or they could even, in the extreme case, be symbols that sort of represent what's going on, or they may be pictures of the energy flows that are there. I used to get images of knives stabbing, or hammers banging, or monsters biting, and things like that. Of course, I call that disconcerting imagery. Then you get the talk, and the talk is like, oh my God, oh my God, or it's like, oh, this sucks, or when's this going to go away? I know Shinzen's asleep, the bell should be rung. It doesn't bother him, he doesn't give a crap. What about the rest of us? The overall gestalt is local touch, perhaps an awareness of a global spread of the touch, and perhaps some subtle or not so subtle arisings in field image

talk.

These all come under the category of what I call ordinary sensory experiences. You formulate a strategy for working with this. One strategy is focus away from it, just ignore it all.

That is a valid strategy if you can do it. Focus on what? Restful states, if you can, positive field image talk, if you can. I used to try focusing, and actually I do this with pain patients, focus on sights and sounds that take you away from the body and the mind. It is valid to do that as long as you realize that it's a mindfulness practice.

In other words, as I define it, mindfulness is a threefold attentional skill set, concentration, clarity, equanimity. Those don't all have to be directed towards the same sensory event. You can direct your concentration and clarity towards, let's say, the sounds, while at the same time having equanimity with the body-mind eruptions. You're just not intentionally focusing on them. You're still having a cocoon of equanimity with the sensory challenge, and sort of surrounding the sensory challenge.

It's just you're deciding, I'm going to put my attention elsewhere. Just putting the attention elsewhere can really help with the equanimity and give a chance for the eruption to sort of cool down. So it is not the case that that represents suppression or denial, the focus away strategy. The way you know it's not suppression is that you are giving permission for that sensory challenge to arise. You're just not intentionally focusing on it. Your clarity and concentration is being directed to something else, which could actually help with the equanimity on that thing. So it's not suppression because you're giving it permission to be there. You don't have an agenda that somehow you're going to make it go away.

It's just you're selectively attending elsewhere. That is number one. And number two, on occasion, you're willing to turn towards it. If at least on occasion you're willing to turn towards it, and when you turn away from it, you equanimize it, but your concentration and clarity is simply directed elsewhere. So you're still developing basic mindfulness skills by a focus away strategy. If your focus away strategy is formulated that way, then you're not suppressing and you're not denying.

Because on another occasion, you're going to turn towards it. You're just developing the same basic mindfulness skill set in another way that is easier for you or more attractive for you. So it is OK to focus away from things if you have that very clear conceptual framework that I just gave you. You may or may not be able to focus away. Sometimes I can do it. I can just focus on restful states. And I can keep with the restful states to near-fainting levels of pain.

And it really creates huge equanimity and huge purification flavors. And I'm not focusing on the touch or the feel of the image. Just wherever I can find rest, I'm just relaxing and whatever I can do. Because pain can stimulate feel-image talk. But pain can also turn off feel-image talk, creating peace, blank, quiet. A lot of times when you're in physical pain, you don't want to relax the body. Why? Why don't you want to relax the body when you're in physical pain? Because if you relax the body, it's likely you'll become aware of the spread that I'm talking about. The muscle tension in the body covers over that spread.

But actually, it's pennywise and pound foolish. Because if you relax the body, then yes, now the uncomfortable touch is going to subtly take over your body. When you give it permission to spread volumetrically like that, the pressure dissipates from the local intensity. Once you discover that, then you're willing to relax the body and let it spread.

So sometimes I just focus on restful states and let the pain drive me into deeper and deeper states of relaxation, peace, blank, quiet. So if you can do that, great. But you may not be able to do that. In that case, no problem. Alternate strategy, turn towards it.

What are your specialties as a teacher? ~ Shinzen Young

Someone wrote in and asked, what are your specialties as a teacher? I think the first thing that comes to my mind is that I attempt to take the mist out of mysticism. All around the world we find people that have had deep experiences of meditation and perhaps gone beyond deep experiences of meditation to experiences of no self or enlightenment. And scholars of comparative religion who study such things say that they're studying comparative mysticism.

I think a more contemporary term would be contemplative studies, but it pretty much boils down to the same thing. Mysticism sometimes refers to what I call the realms of power. That's sort of like the new agey kind of stuff. That might be called mysticism with a small m. But mysticism with a capital M, as is used by trained scholars of world religion, has a very different meaning.

It means the path into deep states and then the path beyond deep states to experiences of enlightenment. If you look at the standard works on mysticism, most of the older ones, unfortunately, written by people that were not themselves mystics, which is a little bit like sex manuals written by perpetual virgins or books on the nature of music written by people that are tone deaf or maybe deaf. But if you look at some of the older books on mysticism, the first thing that always appears is this can't be described in words. That's almost the defining feature of mystical experience.

Now it is quite true within the core of mystical experience, the experience of direct contact with the source. There most assuredly are no words. No words in your head, no words coming out of your mouth, because there's no head. There's no body. There's no time. There's no space. So certainly no words. That is true. But can everything surrounding that be precisely put into words? I think so, actually.

That goes against a lot of established doctrine. But I think we can do this. We meaning the human species with enough time. So I would refer to that as taking the mist out of mysticism. Or another way to put it is developing a vocabulary around these really deep spiritual practices that has the same precision and rigor as the vocabulary that has developed within science and mathematics. It took a long time and centuries of contention and confusion for science to develop the precise vocabulary it now has.

This was not a quick thing and not an easy thing. We can speak about the natural world in a very powerful and precise way now, which we couldn't say 500 years ago, 1,000 years ago, and so forth. So I think something like that can occur with regards to the mystical or contemplative experiences that are universal to humans around the world.

So I call that taking the mist out of mysticism. That's sort of one of the things that I view as my specialty. Another thing that I view as a specialty is that the way that I work with people is interactive. In other words, my system is designed to be taught and deepened and sharpened by real-time interaction with a coach. So if you come to a residential retreat with me, you will have at least one or two times where you'll have 90 minutes where it's just you and me.

Well not exactly just you, it's effectively just you and me. That's a little complicated to explain how I do that, but I multi-process several people working on telephones, but each one is privately working with me. I give you a technique, you get set up, I go work with somebody else, five, ten minutes later I come back, okay, when you did that technique, this or this may have happened, tell me which one happened. Depending on what you tell me, we're going to either keep to the same guidance, slightly modify it, give you some new information, give you a choice of options, suggest that you do this, etc., etc.

It's an algorithm that loops and branches. Then I get you optimized, you're optimized now for the next five or ten minutes, I'm off processing somebody else, doing the same thing for them. They don't hear what you're going through because you're all on separate telephone lines. Then I come back to you, okay, what happened? Now if you call me up at home, if you're someone that comes to my retreats, I actually give you my own home telephone number and you can call me at home, then you have a one-on-one interactive session with me. Unlike traditional systems that are sort of like, okay, here's the cushion, here's the technique, now go off and do it, come back in a few hours, come back in a few days, come back in whatever and we'll see what's happening. I do micro-interactive coaching, like having a personal coach next to you while you're using pieces of exercise equipment.

My metaphor is that my five ways are exercise stations and if you have someone from the staff of the YMCA next to you while you're using the anomalous equipment, you're going to have an optimal experience of using it. Another specialty of mine is this interactive personal coaching way of teaching the practice. Another thing that may be unique, I don't know if it is unique, but it may be unique to my approach is that I didn't develop my approach alone. I developed my approach through taking feedback from students and taking suggestions from students. Maybe 50% of what's innovative in what I teach, I didn't discover, a student discovered. Sometimes a student with not a whole lot of experience, but in interacting with them, they had sort of seen something that was very significant. So for three decades, I've been intensely collaborating with my students, developing the five way system. It wasn't just like, okay, I'm alone and I'm going to figure out how to do this. So it's actually been a sort of distributed collaborative endeavor. And that may be, that certainly is unusual in the history of these things. I don't know if it's entirely unique, but it's probably another distinctive feature of what I do.

What is Enlightenment? ~ Shinzen Young

Can you tell me what enlightenment is? So moment by moment, you've probably noticed that you have thoughts, right? Is that correct? And moment by moment, you've probably noticed that you have body sensations. You've also probably noticed that as soon as a thought arises or a body sensation arises, there's a tendency to say, this thought is me, that this sensation is me.

Is that correct? Nothing mysterious so far. The next part, you have to sort of use your imagination. Imagine that you still had thoughts and you still had body sensations, but they no longer immediately trapped your identity. So your identity is free, free to be inside your mind and body like it was before, but also free to move outside of your mind and body, to inhabit briefly anyone's mind and body, to merge with them, or to embrace the entire universe, or to abide at the still point of the turning world beyond time and space, the nothingness that precedes the Big Bang, so to speak, metaphorically speaking. So after enlightenment, people's identity becomes elastic and the mind and body is no longer a place you're locked in. It's a home you comfortably can abide in, but you can leave anytime you want. And that's why we also call it liberation, being set free.

What to Expect and Do After a Mindfulness Retreat ~ Shinzen

Young

Upon leaving the retreat, some things that are good to keep in mind. Exactly one of four things will occur in the days subsequent to this retreat for all of us. Those of you that have heard this talk before know what those four are.

Can you remember? It's an exhaustive and exclusive classification of the basic effects of a retreat. You will either have afterglow only, or you will have aftershock only, or you will have both, or you will have neither. What do we mean by afterglow? Afterglow tends to occur more and more frequently as the months, years, and decades of practice progress.

It tends to be more and more a predictable result of periods of intensive practice, although not absolutely guaranteed. Afterglow means you're calm and peaceful. You've got all sorts of energy and vitality and cascading insights, maybe even epiphanies. As I always say, people have no difficulty processing afterglow.

What is aftershock? Aftershock is you're incredibly sensitive. Tiny little things rattle your cage. That's a great expression, rattle the cage, if you've ever thought about it. The cages are samskaras, right? Are the limiting forces deep within us. Things happen in the world, and it rattles that prison of the habit forces.

That's okay, because otherwise the bars of that prison will never be broken without them being rattled within the context of the practice. When it happens during a retreat, it's called yogi mind. Yogi in the Buddhist context means us, meditators, yogis. That's like hypersensitivity and things just causing ballistic reactions and so forth. That's a natural part of this path, a part of the deep insights and purification. When it happens during a retreat, we call it yogi mind. When it happens after a retreat, I call it, my own word for it is aftershock. You're really sensitive and vulnerable and there's no skin on you to shield you from the insanity of the 7-11.

Also this sense of stuff percolating up from the inside, like there's nothing holding it down. Your ordinary ordering principle seems to have been blown away. That's the price you pay for deciding that you want to have an extraordinary ordering principle. We have a way that we were stable. It works, but we can be destabilized. We want to have a deeper kind of stability. We may have to go through a temporary period of instability. Then we go to this new depth. It may seem that you've lost your ordinary ordering principle.

Don't worry about it. You're on the path to an extraordinary ordering principle. There can be, because of that, a sense of disorientation and so forth. These are the phenomena of aftershock. I'm not saying you will have aftershock, but some people do. If you do have aftershock, all you have to do is remember two things, why it's happening and what to do about it.

If you remember those two things, you'll be fine. This path is a path of learning a new coping mechanism for human existence. The normal coping mechanism for human existence could be characterized by the phrase, tighten up and turn away. The tighten up meaning don't have equanimity and the turn away meaning don't be clear, don't pay attention to things. If we're learning clarity and equanimity, then we're in a sense learning the opposite coping mechanism that most people use.

Since the two coping mechanisms are in some sense diametrically opposed, we can't avoid from time to time in our growth process what I call awkward intermediate stages where the

old coping mechanism has been somewhat shed. The mesh of the being is somewhat open, but it's not so fully open that things just pass through. It's not closed the way it used to be that relatively shields us, but not really. In that awkward intermediate zone, we get aftershock phenomena. That's why we feel vulnerable, disoriented, sensitive to the big three, anger, fear, sadness in various forms.

Our cage gets rattled and so forth. There's an old cliché about the only cure for the ills of democracy is yet more democracy. The only cure for the ills of these temporary side effects of the panacea and powerful radical medicine called mindfulness is more mindfulness.

That's why it's happening. What to do about it? Recycle the reactions. The practice caused reactions. The reactions come up in touch, feel, image, talk, typically feel, image, talk, typically feel. What to do? Well, you have techniques and you apply the techniques to those reactions.

That optimizes the growth process. What if you can't remember that to do that? Because I sometimes say that there's an inverse relationship between activation of feel space and IQ. Have you noticed? This is something that we humans, this is one of the great humility pieces of being human. At least it has been for me to acknowledge that as feel space gets activated, particularly with negative feel, my intelligence drops. Therein we have what is probably the fundamental engineering flaw in our species, which is that the feel is actually meant to motivate and direct rapid response to situations.

But unfortunately, it can also drive and distort. A situation comes up, it activates feel, and we need to act, but our intelligence is diminished. But still we are convinced we have to do something, and therefore what we do is sometimes less than optimal. How do you know that? Because five minutes later or five days later or five years later, you look back and say, why did I do that? During times in my life when I've had a lot of emotional stresses, and this phenomenon has been on the surface day after day after day, which is bad, but also good because you can get to know it because it's like, hey, it ain't going away.

So you learn things. One of the things I noticed was, oh yeah, I can see as the feel activates my ability to organize words, to respond coherently, to think coherently. I can see it just goes down. When I realize that, it's like, OK, I'm like room temperature IQ now, and I'm trying to respond to this complex situation. I realized, oh, I shouldn't be doing this. I just have to walk away and just meditate until I get a little smarter again. So in any event, you'd be amazed that you may not be able to remember what I just said when the doo-doo hits the fan. Then you're going to need to remember something simpler than this formulation. That thing you need to remember is the location of my telephone number or someone like me who can remind you of what you already know and then take you through step by step. When I get calls from people, so here's how it works.

I think you all know this, but let me just repeat it. So I turn off my phone when I close the Dharma store for the day, whenever that is. That makes it easy because there's people literally all over the world that may want to call me, and the rule is simple. Call. If the phone rings, the Dharma store is open. I don't care if it's 3 in the morning, Eastern time where I live, and you'll get me. If the Dharma store is closed, you'll get the voicemail, and if I'm away on retreat, that's the bad news.

It may be a while before I can get back to you. I try, you know, I've been answering calls during this retreat, but I can't necessarily get back immediately. You don't have to call me when it's a crisis, though.

You can call for tune-ups or what have you. When people call and it is a crisis, I'm happy and sad. I'm sad that the person's in a crisis.

I'm happy because I know there's a, based on years, decades actually of experience, that there's a very high probability that person, after we've worked together for an hour or two

hours or whatever it is, will experience what I call MMM, maximum meditation mileage, out of whatever they're going through. So that's how that works. So now you know about afterglow, aftershock. Both could happen at the same time. You can have the afterglow stuff and the aftershock stuff, or you might not get any of these effects.

Now the tendency is to think, if you don't get afterglow or aftershock, then, oh, well, you know, it wasn't a productive retreat, but that's not at all true. The gold standard for when people want me to evaluate, is their practice working? I never ask them about their subjective experiences while they're doing formal practice. I only ask one question, and look you around the room, and I know I've asked this question for about a half the people in this room. Touch base with your practice. It's only one question that I ask first, which is, does it seem that you're more fulfilled and suffering less, and your behaviors are improving in the real world, in daily life? If the answer is yes, then the practice is on track. So it doesn't have anything to do with, did you have aftershock, did you have afterglow, did you have flow, did you have this, did you have that? It's like, okay, what's the impact in daily life? So now you know the four things that could happen, and why they're happening, and what to do about them. Five things you need to be successful with this practice.

Keep them in mind upon leaving the retreat. You need to do a little bit of self-practice most days. I have a ludicrously small minimum, ten minutes, but that's ten minutes of real formal practice, not ten minutes of bubble bath meditation, or meditation while you're doing tai chi chuan. Not that there's anything wrong with tai chi chuan, or whatever, but I'm talking about sitting practice. If you only do ten minutes, then do it with spoken labels.

So if you don't have quantity, you've got to guarantee quality. So a little bit of self-practice each day, that's one thing. A lot of practice every once in a while, typically that's in a group, it's called a retreat, although you can do self-retreats. You can just go off by yourself and meditate, but the point is it's like a jam session, as opposed to daily practice. You're doing a lot of practice all at once.

That's what we came here, and we have achieved that. Little bit each day, a lot every once in a while. You have to make an attempt to bring it into daily life, try to pepper the day with, I call it practice in life, you know, thirty seconds here, a minute there, while you're walking to the washroom, while you're waiting in line, go to some technique of your choice, so that you're not going unconscious, unbroken all day.

Every day there's little, at least surgical strikes in the thrust of life. You've heard me say over and over again that it is pivotal that you develop the ability to start on a die. All rest, sight, sight, all rest, sound, touch, or if I wanted to go in, feel, feel, all rest, image. Ready to go anytime, just at the drop of that. As I said in the group process, why? Because when stuff comes up in daily life, you've got a magic window of opportunity of about two to three seconds to establish mindful awareness. After that, the terrorists are in the cockpit.

They're running the show, and they could well crash your karma. So there's just that little window, and you have to train yourself to instantly be on it with some technique in day-to-day life. Otherwise it goes from sensory experience into objective behavior. If the objective behavior is driven and distorted, that's called making karma.

Law of karma, what goes around comes around, meaning that there'll be a lot more uncomfortable feel-image-talk in the end than just that moment of feel-image-talk that you failed to be complete with. So it multiplies. So if possible, we want to avoid that happening. So a little bit each day, a lot every once in a while.

Pepper the day with micro hits. And have some sort of regular contact with teacher, coach. Doesn't have to be just one teacher, and it certainly does not have to be the perfect master.

Should be somebody competent to guide you. And typically you're guaranteed of that contact with coach or trainer when you come to retreats like this. Or if you do the home

practice program, which are telephone-based retreats. During the self-practice, there's an hour of self-practice in those four hours where you can call whoever is running the retreat. That way you can get, theoretically, monthly contact during that retreat situation.

So some sort of contact with somebody who can monitor the big picture of your practice. So that's four, isn't it? Little bit each day, a lot every once in a while. Pepper the day with micro hits at least. Every once in a while.

Certainly, once, certainly, you know, every six months or so, contact with somebody that's watching the big picture of your practice. What's number five? Number five is keep that up for the duration. We're in it for the long haul. Time is basically our ally. So you get results, some quicker, some not so quick, but you just keep it up.

So those are the five things you need to be successful on this path. You might say, I don't have much time, that last factor, because I'm old. And another factor enters in, which is the aging process is a natural enlightenment process. Now the fact that it doesn't turn into that often is not the fault of nature.

It's the fault of human culture. But if you have a practice, then it's much more likely to be that. And so it becomes an ally, it sort of takes you to the no self.

So you've got enough time. So let's see, four things that can happen after a retreat, five things you need to be successful with this practice. So oh, with regards to the periodic retreats, what I recommend is that when you complete any given retreat, you sign up for the next retreat as a habit. You mark it on your calendar in ink. You pay in advance, you put down a deposit. You tell everyone you're going to do this retreat.

It's a fait accompli. If every time you complete a retreat, you guarantee, you sign up for the next retreat and it's on the calendar, then each retreat generates its successor and you're guaranteed of a lifetime of retreats. So if you make that habitual, that's very good. That's a very good thing to do. I would strongly recommend that. The very first day I, let's see how our time is doing.

Okay, got a little bit more. The very first day I talked about what's the big picture. The big picture is this path is about transcending the self and the world, seeing beyond the self and the world, in a sense dissolving the self and the world as sensory experience on one hand and improving the self and the world, improving our individual lives, improving the situation of humanity.

It's about the complementary relationship of those two. So as we leave the retreat, it's good to keep that in mind. We've been mostly doing sadhana, work on ourselves for ourselves. Now we're going to go out into the world. I just talked about continuing your sadhana, but we move more towards a service position as soon as we leave a retreat.

Service in what sense? Well, at least in the subtle sense. You remember last night I was saying that the positive changes in our affect, which is more positive feel, and the tranquility and energy, which is the restful states and the flow that come about through doing this practice within us, people pick up on that, albeit perhaps subliminally. But just walking through the world, you purify the land.

They say the bodhisattva creates a pure land, land in the sense of environment, the whole environment, including the beings in the environment. So you will certainly take the effects of this practice with you. And just walking through the world, just interacting with people at the airport or people you pass on the street, that's a service that you're doing automatically and effortlessly. Then there's all the other forms of service, including the explicit service of helping the conditional happiness of people. When we go out into the world, we can be doing that. And then we can help the unconditional happiness of the world, first by that subtle energy that we put out of joy, tranquility, and the flow of nature flowing through us,

perceptible to others. And then by describing this practice to people, you can all do that, and some of you by teaching this practice in an explicit way. So on leaving a retreat, it's good to remember that all of us are teachers at at least one of these levels. So we're going out to teach.

Which teachers have influenced how you teach? ~ Shinzen Young

Someone wrote in wanting to know what teachers had influenced me and what sorts of things I had in my background that have informed the way that I teach meditation. There's an interesting story about Sir Isaac Newton. He in some ways could be looked upon as the key figure in the history of Western science. In a sense, although science of course had a long history before him, things really took off after he published his Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy, where he was able to link a new kind of mathematics calculus to a description of the natural world. This caused a revolution and it was recognized in his lifetime how extraordinary his contribution was, how this was a kind of quantum leap beyond anything that had occurred before.

And indeed, it did sort of create the soil, the fertile soil from which modern science has grown. So he was praised a lot in his lifetime and he would on occasion say, well, if I've seen further than other people, it's because I stood on the shoulders of giants. He was referring to people like Kepler, Galileo, Copernicus, and so forth. As a teacher, I don't know if I've seen further than any other teacher, but I can say for sure that I have been privileged to stand on the shoulders of giants. On one hand, I have the spiritual teachers that have influenced me. The strongest influences are from a man named Joshu Sasaki Roshi, who is at Mount Baldy's Zen Center. I've been associated with him for over two decades now, well over two decades.

You can find him very easily on the internet. He is arguably at this point, at the age of 102 and still going strong, the senior living Buddhist master in the world. That's been a big influence on me. Although I don't in any way think of myself as teaching within the Zen lineage, he was the senior teacher available to me when I was living in Los Angeles, when I'd come back from Asia. Even though I'd had many, many years of practice when I came back, I knew I still needed somebody with vastly more practice to kick me in the butt and inspire me and keep me on track. So I associated with him, even though that way of practice, Rinzai Zen, Koan practice, is not really to my personal proclivity.

But in any event, I needed the contact with somebody like that. So I don't teach in a Zen way, but I would say that his paradigm, his model for how consciousness works has had a profound influence on me. His paradigm is essentially a reworking of the notion of impermanence as it was formulated centrally in early Buddhism. He's reworked that into a vastly larger and more general model for the nature of consciousness.

The name of his channel is based on the name of his approach. It's all based on seeing impermanence in terms of expansion and contraction. So that's one huge influence. A second influence on me has been through the Vipassana tradition, the mindfulness tradition. In specific, I have been influenced by two lineages of Vipassana practice.

Both come from 20th century Burma. One is the Upa-Kin lineage, which puts an enormous emphasis on body sensation. And I also emphasize body sensation, not to the exclusion of other things, but just understanding how important body sensation is was something that I picked up from that tradition. So that's an influence.

Another influence is from the Mahasi Sayadaw lineage of Burmese Vipassana. I took from that the noting process. However, I have modified the concept of noting and the implementation of noting.

I've changed it somewhat from the way that it is done in the traditional Mahasi method. And I don't have time now to go into the details of that, but that has been an influence. Because most of the techniques that I teach involve noting sensory phenomena. I've also been influenced by my original school of ordination, Vajrayana, in the Japanese form, which

is called Shingon. In Vajrayana practice, they put a lot of emphasis on visual experience, auditory experience, and somatic experience. You'll sometimes see the expression, body, speech, mind.

All body is body. Speech is auditory. And mind refers to mental images, in this case.

The particular word that's used refers to the visualization process. That somatic visual auditory way of working, both with subject of experience and object of experience, that's something I picked up from the Vajrayana tradition. So I stand on the back of these various masters, stand on their shoulders. I also, further back, stand on the shoulders of the prehistoric shamanic explorers of consciousness, whose names we don't know, but whose rituals and ceremonies, ordeals, led to them entering states of concentration and equanimity, which eventually developed, when civilizations arose, into the meditation techniques of these various lineages. But I'm fortunate to stand also on the shoulders of Sir Isaac Newton, and Euclid, and Francis Bacon, and Richard Feynman, and Albert Einstein, and James Clerk Maxwell. The whole science tradition, the whole Western mathematical, empirical, rigorous, skeptical pragmatism has profoundly influenced me. The way that I teach is my best attempt at a fully contemporary, fully modern, and as close to science as can be at this point in history, version of what that other lineage of masters and prehistoric shamans had developed. So I get to stand on two sets of immense shoulders, and I am immensely, immensely grateful.

Why Meditate? ~ Shinzen Young

Meditation optimizes five fundamental dimensions of human happiness. The first dimension is reducing suffering, the ability to experience unavoidable pain with less problem.

The second is elevation of fulfillment, the ability to experience even small pleasures with enormous satisfaction. The third dimension where meditation impacts is self-understanding. It's actually helpful to understand yourself at a psychological level, but where meditation really shines is to understand who you are at the deepest level. The fourth dimension is meditation will help you make objective changes in behavior. So if there's something you're doing that you need to stop doing or something you should be doing that you're procrastinating or putting off, you can use meditation skills to behave more skillfully in the world. Reduce suffering, elevate fulfillment, understand yourself at all levels, including the deepest, improve behavior, and ultimately to find within yourself a spirit of serving or contributing to the happiness of others that comes from a spontaneous love. And actually, that spirit of love and service is a consequence of success in the other four dimensions. As you suffer less, are more fulfilled, as you understand who you are, and as you have a handle on changing how you carry yourself, all of that sums up ultimately in how you contribute to making this world a better place.

Working Through the Primal Feel Strata ~ Shinzen Young

As you know, I like to have people be sensitive to the fact that certain body sensations are emotional in origin. And I have a hypothesis that when people are noting those emotional feels, that in fact what's happening in the central nervous system is activation in what's called the limbic system and that there is a distinct neuronal apparatus that underlies the emotional type sensations in the body.

And emotional sensations in the body are hugely important in my way of thinking in terms of their influence on human perception and behavior. So as people work with this category of the emotional body or feel space, as I call it, you might think, well, as the result of meditating as the years go on, things get sort of mellowed out, cooled out, that kind of thing. But actually what happens typically is that you get strange changes that are sort of weird for people. And they take the form of things that would really, really, really bother anyone, like don't bother you or not much. But the flip side is that little things can cause these huge explosions of somatic emotionality. And you wonder, it's like, what's wrong with me? What's like sort of happening to me? So what I tell people is if you work with the emotional body, one thing that you can expect is that things will change. But you can't predict what direction that change will take in terms of are things going to be more mellow, more intense, are the flavors that come up going to be more appropriate or inappropriate? They seem to go through wild fluctuations.

And it's important not to freak out when this happens and wonder what in the world is going on. I would say there are some things that we can say are long-term trends. Absolutely, definitely long-term trend. Emotional sensations are going to become less problematic for you. And absolutely, long-term trend, pleasant emotional sensations are going to become more fulfilling for you. However, in terms of local fluctuations, don't be surprised if there's some really weird, chaotic kinds of things.

What to do if that happens is simply recycle the reactions. The model that I like to use is that we have within us this freaked out infant animal deep down within. As we meditate, we develop another self, which could be called the meditator self or the concentrated clear equanimous self or the witness. And at a certain extreme, we'll call that the no self or the higher self. So what happens is that this super adult part of us shines its attention on the freaked out infantile animal part that remains and integrates or we could say even metabolizes, or if we wanted to be a little more poetic, we can say eats up, literally nibbles away at the freaking animal infant within.

And as this higher self or no self or meditator self, as it's sort of like nibbling away at this freaked out infant animal, it's deriving nutrition from that. It's growing, which is good. And the freaked out animal infant is shrinking, which is also good. But as it shrinks, it drops to even more primitive levels. And that's why you get this weird sort of like, oh my God, what do I have inside of me kind of thing. So it's actually a sign of progress. The surface of the freaked out animal infant, it's like getting integrated. It's energy, what the energy bound up in it is going into the super adult.

That's good. But you sort of like nibble away a layer. So it shrinks, it's smaller. In a sense, its influence over you is diminished, but it exposes a more primitive stratum. And so it goes until you sort of work your way through this aspect, which might take a while. So as you get closer and closer and closer to becoming completely free, you're now exposing more and more and more chaotic, intense levels of pure body emotion.

So this model helps me to have a conceptual framework for why it sometimes seems that genius idiosyncrasies of a person are sins crying out to heaven for vengeance or why someone can insult me with all kinds of lies on the internet. And I don't even give it a

second thought. But if somebody cuts me off in traffic, it's like, that's huge. It's like, I'm going to kill them. It's like, it's like, so it's like weird. That seems to just be the way it works. I just wanted to share that for those of you that are wondering if you're on the way to the booby hatch.

No, you're on the way to the source. But as they say, membership has its price. So you're joining the club. Many, many, many human beings have taken this path. So welcome to the club. But membership has its price.

Working with Images and Image Space ~ Shinzen Young

The perception of sort of I am body doesn't just come about through body sensation, although body sensation is primary.

You often hear me say subtle is significant. There is typically a subtle mental picture of the outline of the body, and I think that's what you're alluding to. There's a subtle mental picture of the outline of the body.

And then there is the body's sensations that sort of fill that picture. You could think of the sensations, the touch, feel, you could think of them as being the honey, and then the body outline is the bear, the container. And the honey more or less conforms to the bear. But of course, sometimes honey is not inside that, but it can be a rounder pot, etc.

So the bear can sometimes become larger and spherical. So I think of the image of self, the visual image of the body, and also it's often your facial expression, the clothes you're wearing, all of that is part of it. That could be called image of body or image of self as opposed to sensations from the body.

Now the perception of the body as a thing comes about through nebulosity and viscosity in the body sensations and in the image of the body. So as you sort of love, if you hate the presence of that image thinking, oh, this is getting in the way of a no-self experience, then you're going to be in big trouble. But if you start to love that image to death, now you're bringing clarity and equanimity and perhaps even intentionally focusing on just that image for a while. Well, guess what? That's going to break up into flow, the image. And the sensations are going to break up into flow, and the image and the sensations will become one integrated flow.

And that will break down that subtle sense that I am the body. If at some point the image is not dealt with, let's put it that way, either dealt with consciously by being focused on or dealt with because it's just equanimized into fluidity, even though you didn't focus on it. I prefer to focus on it. So I like people to learn how to work with that image, have a complete experience of it, work with the sensations, have a complete experience of them, work with the two at the same time, and that tends to break down that subtle sense of self. Often there's a subtle picture of where we are, the ambience.

That can be worked with individually, concentrated on, clarified, equanimized until it flows. If your eyes are closed, how do you know where you are? Sound and the image of the source of the sound and the memory images of where you are. If all incoming sound and the image of the ambience are a single flow field, then you will not be limited to a certain time and place.

Your location in the universe will become unfixed. The first challenge is to do what you just reported, which is to detect that this is indeed the case. The second challenge is not to hate the presence of those subtle images because what you resist persists, as Werner Erhard said.

You work with them and you affirm them into oblivion. Counterintuitive, though, that phraseology is. When you get all three, basically, you've got the self image related to the body. You've got ambient imagery related to your memory or your idea about where you are and typically triggered by sounds or enhanced by sounds. Then you've got the memory plan fantasy imagery that tends to be in the center of image space, which is the portal into the imago mundi or the stored images of the world. It's the surface of this giant storehouse of visual information that at its deeper levels shades into the world of myth. But its surface is whatever comes up, quote on the mental screen, as memory, plan, fantasy, that kind of thing.

If you penetrate all three image locations, you take care of... You might say that... Does it work? Let me think.

I'm not sure what I'm going to say. In terms of image, I would say that the present is arising in those ambient images and the image of your body. Then particularly the past is in the center of image space.

At least that's the portal into the stored images. But as I say, future can also be there because you can fantasize about what could happen in the future. And myth is there. The archetypes are there at a deep level. It goes out from our world to mythological worlds, potentially.

So each one of those locations in image space is associated with very powerful work. When you do Vajrayana practice, the so-called visualizations, which are really touch, feel, image, talk exercises, you visualize yourself as the deity. So you replace the self image with an archetype. You visualize the deity in front of you facing you in the memory, plan, fantasy center of image space. And then you replace the ambient images with celestial palace or a mandala or a yantra or something.

So you deal with that and sure enough, they hit each one of those three. And replace the ordinary with the mythological. Not in order to be insane or possessed, but in order to gain insight into how consciousness works, how our perception of where we are and who we are arises. So it's an insight practice. Now, having said that, I made it sound like Vajrayana discovered my categories, but of course, it's the other way around.

I didn't figure this out. My original training was in Vajrayana and they had us do this. And then later on I realized, well, of course they have us do this because this is the way ordinary perception occurs. So obviously, if you're playing with consciousness like Tinker Toys, taking things apart and putting them back together, this would be the way to do it.

So I got the hint on it from my Vajrayana training. Apropos of trauma, when I have people that have traumatic memories come up, where it's a, what do they call that, a flashback? Where they think they actually, it's like happening now. Why that's happening is that the ambient imagery, which should reflect present reality, physical reality, that ambient imagery has disappeared and been replaced by the memory imagery. So once you train people to detect the ambient imagery, and they can see the interplay of how the present imagery starts to go away and the memory imagery occupies that location, that's hugely insightful and liberating for people.

Zen Ox-Herding Pics - Part 1 of 3 ~ Shinzen Young

The Chan or Zen school sometimes calls itself the school of consciousness. In other words, it teaches the nature of consciousness.

There is a famous set of drawings that show one paradigm or one possible model for the path of coming to understand the nature of your consciousness. And it's called the Ten Ox Herding Pictures, 十牛图 in Mandarin pronunciation, 十牛圖 in Sino-Japanese. 牛 means an ox, and the ox symbolizes the nature of consciousness. So they call it the 心牛, the ox of consciousness. The consciousness symbolized by the ox.

But to understand consciousness, in other words experience, our senses, is also enlightenment. So the Ten Ox Herding Pictures can be interpreted in two different ways. One is they show you stages on the path to enlightenment. The other is they show you the process of understanding or truly grasping what consciousness is.

But of course those are exactly the same thing. I would like to go through them. I don't know if you can all see this, but this is the first picture. And this is called Searching for the Ox. Notice that there is no ox to be found. The Chinese verse that goes with this says, the ox herding boy is completely lost. There's no trace of the ox. There's only the cicadas chirping.

Do you understand who the ox herding boy is and what the cicadas chirping? This is the situation of most people on this planet at this time, unfortunately. They know they want something, but what they think they want is not what they really want. Everyone's searching.

Like that song goes, everybody's looking for something. But what people think they want is happiness dependent on conditions. But what they really want is happiness independent of conditions, symbolized by the enlightenment ox or the consciousness, the nature of consciousness ox.

But there's no ox at all, not even any trace of the ox. He's just wandering around, searching for something, looking for something, and just hearing the twittering of the cicadas, which is unfortunately the situation for most people. Some people though, in their wanderings, get fortunate. They see the tracks of something. They haven't seen the nature of consciousness. They haven't seen the ox. They haven't experienced enlightenment. But something gives them an indication that there is this possibility. Maybe they heard a dharma talk. Maybe they had some experience when they were little that they never forgot, or when they were grown up. Maybe they had a friend that came to a retreat, etc., etc.

They get some indication that there's another possibility beyond the transient fulfillment of the twittering world. So this is called seeing the footprints. Every one of you has seen the footprints, or you wouldn't be here.

You might guess what the next step is. He sees the tail on the ox, the tush, and a few hairs of the tail. Hasn't really seen the whole ox yet. But can you see? There's the tush and the tail. And it's like, oh my god, it really exists. I haven't seen it all, but I have seen a little piece of it.

Most of you are at least in this category. You've gone beyond just seeing the footprints. You've actually gotten a little visage of who you really are.

Or you wouldn't have survived two weeks in silence. So you've seen the ox, but that's not the same at all as catching the ox. You see, he's got the whole ox, and he's got a hold of it. Now we could say that this would be perhaps one's first glimpse of no-self, stream entry, or Kensho-type experience. You've actually seen the whole ox, the nature of consciousness,

which is no-thingness. And you've got a handle on it, but it's still running wild. At least you've captured the ox. And it's in your ken. You can see it any time you want. But that's a far cry from...

Zen Ox-Herding Pics - Part 2 of 3 ~ Shinzen Young

Taming the ox. You internalize the enlightenment to the point where it can't slip away from you and doesn't run wild.

It follows you. And as wonderful as that is, that cannot be compared to getting on the ox, actually riding it. This is awesome. People are really afraid of this. It's one thing to see the ox, even to catch it, even to sort of get it to be manageable. This is the ox of consciousness.

The samgau. When it comes to riding on the ox, that's scary. Some of you are facing this stage. If you look carefully, you'll see the ox is going this way. See the boy? He's playing a flute, quite relaxed, but he's looking the other way.

He's riding the ox backwards. You understand? There's no informed consent to enlightenment. Enlightenment is better than you think it is and not nearly what it's cracked up to be.

Which one of those did you want to hear? Both or neither? Enlightenment is like continually falling off a cliff and being completely comfortable with that. A great and powerful beast carries you. You have to give up your investment with where it's going. It's the ultimate act of surrender, riding the ox backwards. The flow of impermanence. It's like falling down, but you don't fall down. You fall up into existence moment by moment, which is what pratyasamutpada means. It's a falling, but a falling up without any fixation, without needing to know what's going to happen next.

You simply fall into what needs to be done moment by moment. This might be called the act of true faith, as opposed to belief, which is holding onto something. Faith is letting go of the need to be oriented, the need to have answers. This is surrendering to the flow of expansion and contraction, riding, riding on the wave of the dynamic wave of nothing whatsoever, and letting it carry you.

So that's quite a profound act of faith. What comes next? The ox has now carried you home. He's home. And he's completely at rest. He's found final repose of the spirit in his home. And the ox is gone. Only who he really was remains. Just the person. That true, authentic human with no fixated position whatsoever.

And no more need for a mind as an object. He's home. He rode the ox home. Complete enlightenment.

Nirvana. But there's three more pictures. What could they possibly stand for? Well if you read the books, they give you various explanations. But I was privileged to discuss these pictures with a Japanese Zen master many years ago, who told me that there's an oral tradition about these ten pictures that has not been written down. That really it ends here. This is complete enlightenment, this is final repose.

Pictures eight, nine, and ten represent the substance, form, and purpose of enlightenment. Substance in Chinese is called Ti, which literally means body. The form is called Xiang, which means just that, the form or the appearance. And then what it's good for, what it's used for is Yong, and that's the application or the use. So Ti, Xiang, Yong.

According to this Roshi's oral tradition, the last three of these ox herding pictures tell us the substance, the appearance, and the ultimate use of enlightenment. So you can hardly wait, right? Substance is coming up first. What it's made out of, the matter. The matter itself. And here is the substance of enlightenment.

No substance whatsoever. Right? When the emperor asked Bodhidharma, what is the first principle of holiness? What did Bodhidharma say? Wide open and nothing holy. That's the form of enlightenment. The mountains and the cherry blossoms, the ordinary appearances of the world, every single thing is the appearance of enlightenment.

Zen Ox-Herding Pics - Part 3 of 3 ~ Shinzen Young

In the end, why do we do this? In the beginning, we might do it out of curiosity, out of desperation, out of wanting to get high in some way.

Who knows? Maybe relief of suffering, maybe find out who we really are. These all have their validity. So in the beginning, there could be many causes for us to take on this practice.

But the final cause, the arete, when you get right down to it, what is it going to be about? This is my favorite and the last. Essentially, the Chinese version of Santa Claus. Roly-poly guy, the bag full of goodies, going into the marketplace, handing them out to anyone who wants to take them.

Very ordinary, okay? The kind of person you wouldn't hesitate to talk to, the kind of person you might not think even was in any way special, unless you knew what to look for. This is actually a historical character, someone that existed in Chinese history. He was known as the cloth bag monk. That's essentially what he was, a bag man, a street person.

In the capital of China, during the Tang Dynasty in Chang'an, there was this well-known street person that was a kind of Buddhist monk. But all he did was play with children all day and just hang out in the marketplace and schmooze with people. Everybody knew him and he was just sort of this friendly guy, easy to get along with.

You'd never really think there was anything all that special. He was always just sort of around for people, particularly like to give out gifts to children, things like that. At night he used to sleep in the snow.

That should have been a giveaway right there, that there was something a little unusual about his physiology that may have been the result of something. He was known to the citizens of Chang'an. They called him the bu dai he shang.

Bu means cloth, dai means bag, and shang means a monk, the cloth bag monk, because he carried around these gifts to give to people. The emperor of China at that time was a Buddhist and a meditator who had his own imperial preceptor, his own sort of master, right, who would have been like the most authoritative monk in China at the time. They called that the guo shi, that's the teacher of the emperor. So one morning the guo shi said, your majesty, I don't know if you're aware or not, but the most enlightened subject in your kingdom died this morning. The emperor said, who? The imperial master said, the cloth bag monk. The emperor couldn't believe it, because it was like, that was the most enlightened person in my kingdom? Because everybody just took him for granted. So this becomes a sort of ideal for what an enlightened person should be like.

Very ordinary, very easily approachable, just they're there for you, nothing all that special. In the Indic formulation, an enlightened being is a god, is an archetype. But in the Chinese formulation the enlightened being is a sort of pudgy, easily approached guy hanging out in the streets, available to people, but with these gifts to give. So this is called, this last picture is called, entering the marketplace with hand outstretched. We may start this path for various reasons, but if we stay on it, in the end, this is where we end up. We end up with what's called the Dao Xin in Chinese, the Bodhicitta, the intense call to be of service to our fellow beings in one way or another. It's an automatic consequence of having understood the nature of consciousness, the nature of mind, which is the nature of nature, the nature of the source.

It's an automatic consequence of knowing that your source is everyone's source, but knowing that for real, not in a sort of feel-good belief kind of way, but in a very tangible

way, moment by moment, really inescapable in your moment by moment perceptions of things. We're going to be going into the marketplace when we leave here, metaphorically. We have a bag full of goodies, and we can go with hand outstretched. Not that we're going to lay any trips on anybody, but you have a gift to give, the gift of the effects of your practice. You may never speak about it explicitly, but your pores will.

The pores of your skin, that's teaching. That's going into the marketplace, giving a gift to people. If somebody asks you what you did, and you're capable of giving a reasonable, logical, coherent description of this practice, you're giving a gift to someone. Some of you already, and many of you eventually, will discover that you'll end up actually teaching maybe one or two people, or maybe more people. You may have heard the cliché, when the students ready the teacher appears. Well, I don't know about that, but I can definitely tell you that when the teacher's ready, the students appear. You may notice that happening to you. Do not be alarmed, and understand that in the end, this is the final goal of this practice.

Zen, Vipassana, & Becoming Impermanence ~ Shinzen Young

Impermanence is not just a characteristic of sensory experience. Impermanence is a kind of energy that is a vital energy that you can learn to ride on.

In other words, impermanence is chi. And so the idea in the Zen style of experiencing impermanence is, yes, it's the same deconstructive thing I described, but then you're also interested not just in form as emptiness, but you're very interested in how emptiness becomes form, moment by moment, *bre-ay yesh me-ayin*, to use the Hebrew Kabbalistic term, how there's a rising of something from nothing. Well, the nothing repolarizes into this kind of energy, and in Zen they want you to ride on that energy, not just to observe impermanence as an object, but to literally become impermanence. And there is a kind of bouncy, springy vitality to the experience of emptiness as it is encouraged in the Zen tradition.

And that was fostered by a certain rhythm of practice, if you've ever been to Zen retreats, where you're never allowed to fixate. In Vipassana we move so slow that you disappear. In Zen you move so fast that you disappear. And the idea is that you're, I would almost say, although this may sound a little bit inscrutable, that in mindfulness practice you first observe impermanence, and then down the line, hopefully, you'll learn to ride on impermanence and live it, have it animate you. But in Zen, the style of the monastery, the style of the training, with its spontaneity and its demand to perform without thinking, what that does is that causes you to ride on impermanence. And if you live impermanence in that lifestyle, then eventually you'll be able to see impermanence in your sensory experience.

It's almost like they approach the same issue from opposite directions. So Zen has a kind of bouncy vitality to it, and a kind of *éclat* or creativity that is characteristic of it. Sometimes the Hinayana form of Buddhism, the Vipassana, it's sort of like prosaic and sort of like, I don't know, low-key and dull and boring, but it's like a good, it gets the job done. It's like a carefully crafted essay. But Zen stylistically is like an energetic poem. So it's a whole different style of enlightenment, a whole different expression of enlightenment, yet it's the same enlightenment.

Zero and One - Part 1 of 4: Complete Experiences ~ Shinzen

Young

What is interesting about zero and one is that they are two of the main paradigms that have been used historically to describe the mystical path, the contemplative path, the path to enlightenment. In some traditions it's described in terms of a oneness experience, that's very common around the planet. And in some traditions it's described in terms of a kind of zero or emptiness. The word in Sanskrit for the number zero is shunyata, which is also the word in Buddhism for the emptiness, emptiness as the source, emptiness as the nature of sensory experience.

So the same words are used, the very same Sanskrit word. The bigger an experience is for us, the more overwhelming an experience is for us, is just a measure of how large the polarization, the splitting of the zero of the source, how far it has split, how much time-space volume and how much sensory intensity has been born in between that polarization. And if we can have a complete experience of such a large polarization, the zero that comes when there is a reuniting, which inevitably happens, for us will be a deeper purification, a deeper enlightenment than for a small challenge, you might say. The one could be looked upon as one is any size you want, is one. Alternatively, you could say that one is the combined effect of all canceling stretches and squeezes. Multiply by three and divide by three, that's one kind of polarization.

If you multiply by a thousand and divide by a thousand, that's another kind of expansive, contractive, stretch-squeeze polarization. So they play analogous roles. If we think of nature as being capable of creating distinction and wiping away distinction, if that's in some way a fundamental activity of nature, then that would be reflected in our consciousness, certainly. If we are able to fully give ourselves to the forces of division, the forces that pull to the right, pull to the left, that stretch this way, that squeeze this way, if we fully give ourselves to those forces, then there's nothing to get in the way of the neutralization, the coming back. And if you want to think of it as coming back to a oneness, you can, or if you want to think about it as coming back to a zeroness, you can also do it that way. So let's talk about the experience of oneness in the sense, in some of its guises. We might speak of the alienation of thought and feeling, and we could then speak of the healing of that alienation and a unification of thought and feeling.

Thought arises through either visual thinking, auditory thinking, or both at the same time. And emotionality arises through the limbic system in the brain, which causes affective somesthesia, a nice fancy way of saying body sensations that seem emotional. If you pay attention to what happens when you experience anger, fear, sadness, embarrassment, impatience, disgust, interest, joy, love, gratitude, humor, smile, etc., etc., these have flavors in the body.

They're initially maybe nebulous, but eventually they're just as distinct as hot or cold. The soma, the body, can be trained into emotional high-resolution screen. There's no official word for body sensations that seem emotional in nature, so I call it what? Feel. Feel, just to have a word. And notice I say feel, not feeling, because feeling has a gazillion connotations, so I sort of made an unusual noun by using feel as a noun to point out that it's a technical term within this system. So we have the body sensations that are emotional in nature to us. We have mental images and internal talk. Now when you have a complete experience of feel, image, talk, you are too busy experiencing it to fixate it.

A complete experience is an experience where there is an extraordinary degree of concentration, clarity, and equanimity, sort of all coming together. We can't always have all

three of these. In fact, sometimes we can't have any of these.

You may have noticed. We can't always have all three. When all three do come together at a certain critical mass, then ordinary experience becomes utterly extraordinary. And my word for ordinary experience that has become utterly extraordinary is a complete experience.

Now, it's a technical term, though. I don't mean complete in the sense it was intense. I don't mean complete in the sense that, I don't know, you stayed with it to the end.

That's part of it. By complete, I mean that there was a certain critical mass of concentration, clarity, and equanimity present from beginning to end in that experience. That constitutes what I technically call a complete or full experience. We can't always have complete experiences, but sometimes we can. With practice, we can have it more and more and more. When we have a complete experience of something that's ordinary, it's utterly extraordinary because it's utterly paradoxical.

I read the St. John of the Cross poem to you, *La Noche*, to give you a flavor of how something could be sensorially rich and yet also utterly transparent and vacuous at the same time as a single experience. Ordinary experience becomes extraordinary in that it becomes both deeply fulfilling and no longer there.

Therefore ordinary experience becomes extraordinary because it's paradoxical. I just said something that really doesn't make a whole lot of sense. I'm afraid many people would probably think it's irrelevant to anything.

Maybe they just think this is philosophical speculation or wordsmithery. I'm sorry, I have no choice. That's how you'll know when you start to have complete experiences. You end up having to say this stuff whether you want to or not. One could also say that when you bring a certain critical mass of concentration, clarity, and equanimity to an ordinary experience, it becomes utterly extraordinary. You could also say when you bring an extraordinary degree of concentration, clarity, and equanimity to an extraordinary experience like a god manifesting fully in front of you, that experience becomes utterly ordinary. That's the path of liberation as opposed to the path of powers.

Zero and One - Part 2 of 4: Complete Experiences Cont'd, Strong

Determination Sits ~ Shinzen Young

We can't always have enough concentration, clarity, and equanimity to have a complete experience of something. But maybe we can have a little bit of concentration, or a little bit of clarity, or a little bit of equanimity, and that's not too shabby. Maybe we can't have any concentration, clarity, and equanimity at all under certain circumstances, but we can have equanimity with that.

We can accept that that's the case, and we can continue to do formal practice despite the fact that we have essentially no concentration, no clarity, and no equanimity. However, we're still setting the stage for nature to do its job. We're catalyzing a natural process. We're giving nature what it needs. On the surface, it seems like we're wasting our time doing a formal practice because it's like total monkey mind, total confusion mind, total lost in emotional chaos, sleepy, aches and pains.

It seems like we're wasting our time. However, deep down, slowly, changes are taking place even under those circumstances because we're giving nature a chance. If you have a lot of concentration, clarity, and equanimity, great, you can explore the possibility of complete experience. If you can't have concentration or clarity, maybe you can have some equanimity.

If you see what I'm saying, there's always a way to look at it positively. If you can't have all three, try to have one or two. If you can't have any at all, keep doing the formal practice because that's still doing some good in the long term. You can always do what seems like going through the motions.

It's still better than just completely acquiescing to desperate and hopeless wretchedness of human condition. However, on occasion, and certainly with practice, given enough time, enough time might be a lot of time, folks. You'll start to get hints of an experience of sensory completeness. Where things get really extraordinary is when you can have a complete experience of feel-image-talk all at once that integrates the mind and the emotions into a single arabesque of empty energy. There's a oneness and a nothingness there. The world of concept and the world of emotion, which are often thought of as the head and the heart being separate. The head and the heart literally are integrated. That's the oneness theme. They're integrated by having a complete experience simultaneously of feel-image-talk so completely present in the moment that there's no time to fixate them. They manifest as a wave rather than as a particulate thing called a self or thing called thought and feeling.

That's quite an integration. That's quite a theme of oneness right there. But there can be a broader theme of oneness. That would be the theme of integrating not just the head and the heart, but the mind and the whole body, not just the emotional body, but the physicality of the body, touch space as I call it. If feel is the emotional sensations, all the other sensations, what are we going to call them? The itches and aches, the pressures and pains, the sleepiness sensations, ordinary physiology, the pulse, etc., etc., hot and cold, bladders full, stomachs empty, all that sort of stuff. I call them touches whether they're on the surface or on the inside. The body is touch feel space. Well, there's a tradition in mindfulness practice. It's not a requirement, but it's something that's done by some people sometimes. It's very interesting.

You can learn a lot from it. It's done in other traditions too, but in our tradition, it's called strong determination sitting. Aditana in the Pali language. It means you make a decision for

a certain period of time, I'm not going to make any voluntary movement. Typically it's a minimum of one hour, but I guess theoretically it could be anything, one hour, two hours, three hours, four, half a day, whatever you want to do. I did a retreat once in Australia. It was a two-month retreat, and it was great. I didn't have to run a retreat. I was taking a retreat for two months.

Didn't have to do anything but meditate. Of course, I wanted to make optimal use of that time. The way the schedule worked, there was this nice four-hour slot in the afternoon.

I decided the first day, okay, for the next two months, I'll do a four-hour strong determination sit during this slot. See what happens. You know what happens, right? And it ain't pretty. What happens is that after about an hour, you start to get some really significant pain. And then after about an hour and a half, you're gnashing your teeth and your hands are now a sweaty fist. And then your body starts to shake uncontrollably, and then you're flooded with huge emotions of fear and mental confusion and distorted thinking, ideation. And then you start to lose control of your body. Your eyes start to go up into your head and you can feel like it's horrible.

It's really, really bad. However, it is, after all, just a huge eruption of touch, feel, image, talk. The will, the freak out is in feel, image, talk. The pain is in the touch. It's just a dance of four strands of sensory experience.

Zero and One - Part 3: Strong Determination Challenges,

Benefits, and Tasting Purification ~ Shinzen

Divide and conquer, okay? Time-honored method, okay? Work with each one individually. Go to talk space. I mean, it's just like going crazy, right? It's just like, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, you're crazy. You know, you're going to hurt yourself.

You don't have to do this, you know? And so just talk, work with that. And images, you know, images of stabbing, okay? Burning, grinding, torture, you know? It's like really just... And those are just the rational images. Because then there's the hell realms, the archetypal images, where you start to look into the depths of hell and beings, you see beings tortured and tormented all over the planet and all sorts of archetypal, you know, it's like really weird and like former lives of having been tortured and, you know, it's just all come...

But it's just image, just image activity. And then there's fear and rage in feel space and sad poor me. That's still the hardest one for me to deal with.

I can sort of deal with the fear and the anger stuff. That sad poor me, that is so primitive. I remember that. Boy, that's the first feel I remember as a little baby, like poor me, sad, you know. So, you get like the fear and the sad and a kind of impatience, like an agitation, don't want to sit still kind of flavor, like an antsy, one in Yiddish is called spilkas, yes, that's an spilkas, yes. Those of you that know the language, it means pins and needles, like kind of thing. So, you've got like, you know, three, at least three uncomfortable feels and you got this crazy things going on in image and talk. And then you've got like the local and global pain, right? There's the local stab, burn, tear kind of stuff. And it's like being beaten, like it's being, you get hit, you get like hit a whole bunch of times, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. And then it just like, it ripples through the whole body, bang, bang, bang, bang. It's like bang, bang, bang, and then it goes bang, bang, bang, bang, local and global, right? Bang, bang, bang, and then it goes locally, like propagates through your body space and subtle is significant. Those little pings, they're not nearly as intense as the local punches, but actually that's where the bulk of the suffering is.

So work locally, work globally, okay? Work with the, in the touches, you know, zoom in, zoom out, sweep through it, just throw everything I have at it. And we're only to the three hour point. There's another hour. The first time I did it, towards the end of the four hours, things started to break up a little bit. That's a long, I know that's like, whoa, that's a long time. But doing it day after day after day after day, week after week after week after week, there was learning. See it's not about how much you can endure. It's about how much you can learn from what you do endure. So just to somehow endure something, if you don't learn from it, by learning I mean your cells don't learn. If you don't retrain the body, then you just endured it. So it's better to go through something mild and have a clear learning experience than it is to somehow, you know, soldier through in a macho vein and somehow, well, I endured it. But if you didn't learn very much, what's the point? If you learn though, it's worth it. So it's, if I tell this, telling this story, I'm realizing maybe it's not a good idea to tell stories like this because people will think, well, gee, if that's what you have to go through, I think I'll, you know, I'll take my enlightenment in a subsequent life. But the issue is not what, it's not like, okay, you're going to have to go through shit like this if you want to get anywhere on this path.

That's not what I'm implying. The issue is what can you learn? And by the time I was up for four hours sits, I mean, I'd already had 20 years of meditation practice. This isn't, well, although actually when they started me in Japan, I had to go through things comparable, but not for four hours, okay? Maybe a couple hours. So I already had a lot of experience

and had worked with these phenomena and so forth. So as I say, the important thing is what you learn.

Something is, some of it is intellectual, but primarily it's retraining your touch, feel, image, talk circuits so that they learn not to fight with themselves because it's the fighting with this, it's the fixation around this that causes the suffering, not the intensity of the touch, feel, image, talk eruption. So anyway, what started to happen on a pretty regular basis by, you know, a few, after a few weeks of doing this every single day is that it would sort of reach a certain intensity at the midpoint and then it would like really dramatically break up. It didn't just get worse and worse and worse and worse endlessly. You think it's going to get worse and worse, but it's sort of, it's an inverted parabolic thing, okay? It's a, it goes up and then it like goes down. And what goes down is not the intensity of sensation.

That just goes up. What goes down is the suffering. When you have an intensity of sensation and no suffering, you have a taste of purification. So there's actually a positive in that. It's not just an absence of the suffering, it's a presence of a kind of taste. I don't know how else to describe this. It's an awareness that because of how I'm experiencing this in this moment, every moment of my life to come will be different, more fulfilling.

And the holdings that I have from the past are being broken up. It's a kind of knowing, I can't put it into words, it's a kind of knowing that the way that I'm experiencing this moment is cleaning out the past and creating a brighter future. I call it the taste of purification. Once that taste of purification comes on, you actually are getting a reward in this. And that's, that's, becomes a huge motivation to explore the edges of experience.

So what eventually happened was that I came to know this territory so intimately that as soon as I would sit down, the pain would start, and at the same time, my thoughts would start and my emotions would start. They'd all start at the same time, the talk, image, and feel reacting to the growing touch. And as soon as they would start, they would just flow together.

They'd flow together into an integrated arabesque of energy. And as the pain got bigger and bigger, and the thoughts and emotions arose more and more, it just got more and more and more integrated. So there was not an I, not so much of, there was still something of a sense of an I experiencing an it called pain, but not so much. Not so much as would ordinarily be, anyway, let's put it that way. There was a oneness between my thoughts and emotions representing the I, and the pain representing the it. And they flowed together and gave this taste of purification.

Zero and One - Part 4 of 4: Complete Experiences, Unifications &

Integrations ~ Shinzen Young

I'm going to do a little bit of a demonstration of that. That came to represent for me a tangible experience of not just an integration of my thoughts and emotions, but the integration of my whole body, mind, self. So I still don't like discomfort, okay? But I know now that whenever I have to face discomfort, it will lead eventually to this same experience.

I've come to expect that to happen on a regular basis, eventually. And the experience is that the entire body, mind becomes unified. And it's a really delicious experience. Anyway, that's oneness at an even larger scale. So we can have the oneness of the thoughts and emotions, but we can also have the oneness of thoughts and emotions, and the emotionality and the physicality of the body. So most people would define themselves as a body-mind entity. When you get body-mind unified as flow, then that's an integration of yourself.

But how about the outside world? How about the world of sights and sounds? What I just described was a kind of other, the touch, and my feel-image-talk, which is sort of the perceiver, the it of the touch and the me of the fit, the feel-image-talk, becoming a single flow, united. When you have a complete experience of sight, external seeing, and at the same time you have a complete experience of your thoughts and emotions about what you see, then the exact same thing happens. Your eye never fixates on the external side of the flower, for example, here. So the flower is a flow of light, of colored light, and the eye looking at the flower is a flow of feel-image-talk colorations, you might say.

And those two flow together, and that gives a unification of inside and outside along this dimension. And even easier for most people is with sound. That's probably why people like music so much, because whether they know it or not, they can have an experience of merging or oneness with the music. But if you understand the sensory components and how allowing your thoughts and reactions to the music to arise without any interference, so they just flow, they're suffused with concentration, clarity, and equanimity, so they become simply a flow of energy. And the music itself is relatively easy for people to experience that as a flow of energy. The hard part is to experience the listener as a flow of energy. What I found interesting when I asked people about their experiences of music, people that weren't meditators, right? Lots of people talked about the music gives them a kind of energy. And that means that although they don't quite have the categories clear and they don't quite realize the potential, when they're having that kind of, quote, energy with the music, the music is beginning to cease being a thing and it's starting to become a flow, a doing.

But that's the easy part. The hard part is you're going to have thoughts and emotions that react to that music. To experience them with so much concentration, clarity, that they flow. And the music is also flowing, so the music and the listener literally become a single, integrated arabesque of empty energy. And if you can do it with music, you can do it with ordinary sounds. And if you can do it with ordinary sounds, you can do it with annoying sounds like somebody breathing in the meditation hall when they're not supposed to, or your neighbor's blasting the stereo, or you have to room with somebody that's snoring, et cetera, et cetera. So you have these various rageful reactions to the sonic invasion.

Well, that's feel-image-talk. And then there's the flow of the sound. It turns out that impermanence, flow, change is the great integrator. It integrates the head and the heart. It integrates the mind and the body. It integrates the inside and the outside. It's a vacuous integration, though.

It's a one and a zero at the same time. In addition to integrating the head and the heart, the mind and the body, the inside and the outside, there's an even more awesome level of integration. We could say that broadly, touch, sight, sound is it, and feel-image-talk is me, broadly. So self and world can be integrated. But there's one more contrast, deeper than the contrast between I and it, is the contrast between both of us and the formless source. In other words, between creation and creator, if we want to use a somewhat Western paradigm. When that connection becomes integrated, when there is one with the zero, the ultimate zero, that's the ultimate integration. That's the experience of living nirvana.

"Do Nothing" Meditation ~ Shinzen Young

A lot of the techniques that I give you, the noting techniques and so forth, they require a certain amount of effort.

It's good to be able to drop effort also. The techniques I give you involve a certain amount of making decisions, even moment by moment when you're doing a noting. If more than one phenomenon is available, you have to sort of choose. And also you choose sort of what approaches you're working on. So it's also good to have a practice that involves no choices whatsoever, not even a choice as to directing what's happening in attention. So some people call this choiceless awareness. Some people call it just sitting.

Some people call it the great perfection in Tibetan Dzogchen or the grand symbol in Sanskrit Mahamudra. There's different ways of describing it. I like to call it do nothing.

That's just my name for it. So there is a way to do nothing, a conceptual framework. Needless to say, because the verb do and nothing don't go together, there are some subtleties as to what this all refers to. The do nothing technique is designed with time. I cannot overemphasize that phrase.

With time, not when you practice it at a given occasion, but with time. It is designed to create a sensitivity for a certain circuit in human consciousness, the circuit that controls attention. And it sets up an environment wherein that circuit will turn itself off for a while. If you try to turn it off, obviously that's not going to exactly work, is it? Because you're trying to turn off, you have to keep it on in order to try to turn it off. The do nothing technique doesn't involve your hand turning off yourself.

It sets up a situation where nature will grow that hand, reach around and turn off the robot self for a brief period of time. At some point, you and the world will come back. So nothing bad at all will happen.

You don't have to be afraid. So that's one way to look at the do nothing technique. With time, it will set the stage. You'll develop a sensitivity for the part of you that controls attention. And that's a very, very primitive part of our being. And then once that sensitivity is developed, it will for periods of time turn off. A lot of people report when I ask them about their experience in practice, well, I can't decide what to do certain times.

I'm just confused with all the options. That's a really good experience. I know you think it's a bad experience. But actually, that's a good experience because when you sort of like, I don't know what to do with my meditation right now. The part that controls attention is maximally activated at that time.

That's the thing that's going to turn off through the do nothing technique. But when it's maximally activated, it's good to know because that points you to, oh, that's the place. Whatever place this sort of, I don't know what to do and I should be able to figure out what to do next. Whenever that confusion about what should I do with the practice arises, that's a strong arising from the place of choice. That's good because for a moment, your attention is adverted to the place of choice.

Love that. Maybe that wouldn't be a bad time to do nothing. The instruction set for how to do nothing is very short.

Just two sentences. Let whatever happens, happen. As soon as you're aware of an intention to control your attention, drop that intention.

So let's go through the inevitable subtleties, the inevitable confusions. There's nothing in this technique that says that you should maintain an intention to drop intentions. It says when you are aware of an intention to control your attention, drop that intention. You might think that the technique is saying moment by moment, monitor whether you have an intention or not, and always maintain the intention to drop those intentions.

Well then you'd be doing two things instead of doing nothing. Let whatever happens, happen means whatever sensory experiences are going to happen, let them happen. Thinking that you may be very scattered, maybe that you may get sleepy and go unconscious, that you may get lost in monkey mind for long periods of time, that you will have very little concentration, clarity, or equanimity. Those are some of the things that could happen. They come under the phrase, let whatever happens, happen. So there's nothing in this technique that says those things won't happen, and they may be all that happens. However, it also says as soon as you're aware of the intention to control your attention, so if you have an intention to do something about anything that has happened, drop that intention. Simple question, what happens if I can't drop it? Well that goes to needing clarification about what drop means and what intention means.

So the phraseology has been extremely carefully developed. Whenever you're aware of the intention to control your attention, drop that intention. We're going to define intention in a very specific way, and we're going to define drop in a very specific way. Intention is something that by definition you have complete control over. You can initiate it, or you can drop it. I have complete control over the movement of my arm.

I can raise it, and I can decide not to raise it. Drop does not mean get rid of. It's in the moment. You drop the intention, the intention might come back immediately.

That's fine. When it comes back, drop it again. If you can't drop it for even a second, then it's not fully free will. It's not full intention. So you don't have to drop it. Something that you might think is an intention to control your attention, that when you drop it you simply can't, then actually that's not free will.

It's happening to you. If you can't drop the intention, you don't have to drop it because the technique doesn't ask you to do that. And certainly the technique does not ask you to have a restful experience, although that could be a consequence of the technique, and with time tends to be a consequence of the technique.

If the experience is horribly agitating and uncomfortable, there's absolutely no reason why you need to continue with this technique at that time. The catch phrase that I use is, if noting makes you racy, try do nothing. If do nothing makes you spacey, try noting. Notice the phrase, as soon as you're aware of, you may very seldom be aware of the intention to control your attention.

That's perfectly okay. I didn't say you'd be aware of it very often. Specifically, you are not being asked to moment by moment monitor for the presence of that intention.

You have to wait for the awareness to be there, which might not be much of a wait, or it might be a long wait while you're lost in reverie and sleepiness. Perfectly okay as far as this technique goes. This is gomme. Last night I gave a Tibetan word, dakme. I said me means without, dak means self. Gom is the Tibetan word for meditate. Gomme means don't meditate. Of course, you are meditating, though. The true gomme would be the state of 99.9% of human beings all the time. They truly don't meditate.

This is a form of meditation, but it's a sort of anti-meditation. As soon as you're aware of that intention, then drop it whenever that may be, which may not be very often. There's no noting or labeling involved, obviously. Common question, well, what if I have the intention to move my body? Well, that's okay.

I wouldn't always give into it. What you're pinpointing with this technique is most specifically whatever it is within us that decides to initiate thoughts, attempts to suppress thoughts, attempts to direct thoughts, decides to pursue a thought once it arises or take it in some other direction once it arises or use thought to do something about thought. That sort of place within us, whatever that place is, is what this technique will pinpoint with time. There are automatic responses of concentration, clarity, and equanimity within meditators. You don't have to have an intention for those to occur.

They occur automatically. You don't drop that because you'd actually have to have an intention to stop an automatic meditator's response. You absolutely do not interfere with the momentum of concentration, clarity, and equanimity that you've developed with the other techniques.

In fact, that's sort of the whole idea. If there's any meditation that occurs, it's because in this technique, it's because of all the meditation you've done before is meditating you. You're not meditating. So two things are meditating you. The momentum of your previous practice and whatever you want to call it, the nature of nature, spirit, time, God, God's grace.

Choose your words. I repeat, you're not meditating. But two things are meditating you.

The momentum of what you've done previously and whatever you want to call this other thing. Someday we won't have to use this technique. We'll have a complete circuitry diagram of the human central nervous system that will be extremely complex, to put it mildly. But we'll probably be able to point to that circuit and probably be able to, from the outside, turn it off for a little while. Perhaps inducing at will experiences of freedom from limited identity.

"Practicing Noting" Mix #1 (Bloopers & Out-takes #1) ~ Shinzen

Young

And my eye interaction with the camera is good. Yeah, actually I'm enjoying it because it's like I'm talking to someone inside the camera. I can see a person inside that camera that I'm talking to. I mean in some weird way, not hallucinating way. Actually, it's a homunculus.

Oh, it's me! Reflected. I said, all the time we've been shooting this, but a cover on the lens, is that a problem? I guess this is the metaphor. I guess this is the metaphor, right? Or no, I guess... We're filming this in Niagara Falls, Canada. So I have with me the actual icon itself of Canada.

It's also an icon for where I live, Vermont. I think we're just about as good at this as you Canucks are. So... Now, here's the metaphor.

There is a general pattern that happens on the spiritual path. Filming? Are we filming? I'm going to ask you. Well, start filming. I'm filming. I'm farting right now. You wanted the guru farting on camera, now you got it.

Okay, I'm going to try to do a close-up. This is pure Prana Shakti coming out of me, dude. Hey, let's face it, on these retreats, we get a little dumb, okay? And that's good, okay? Actually, that's good, because that's a sign that you're dropping deep. How's that? What are your recommendations for surmounting the five hindrances in your mindfulness training? You have to remind me what the five hindrances are.

Sloth and torpor? Yeah, that's exactly why you have to remind me. What the fuck does that mean? I just couldn't resist that one. Join me on the dark side.

Oh, wait, wait, wait, no. Here's the true crosses here, and here's Tim Horton's hockey stick. Which one do you worship? I'll twist you around there. Twist me around? I've already twisted enough. I think that was a... we were even a little further twisted than that, don't you think? I think he's really twisted. Yeah, no, no, no, we know that. It was a little further twisted than that.

I don't remember being so twisted. I do. All right. How do I know if it's better for me to focus on developing concentration first, and then applying that concentration to investigation, or whether I should go with dry vipassana approach? I don't know. Okay.

Does formal meditation ever end? No. Okay. Okay. We'll be out of here in a heartbeat.

Okay. I'd like to read a quote to you, and I'd like your response. Another time when someone kept pushing Shunryu Suzuki to talk about enlightenment, he replied, what do you want to know for? You may not like it. You'd like my response to that comment. Is that it? No, I'm going to give a response. I'm not that Zen. Okay. Okay, roll. And this is where I show my Yiddish kite, my big Jewish punnama. Good.

"Practicing Noting" Mix #2 (Bloopers & Out-takes #2) ~ Shinzen

Young

I will Ah yes, now the progeny begins to float. I don't normally talk like this, Shunzhen, but when I hear you do something like this, I've got to say, you're a fucking genius. Pardon the French, yes. There are times when darn just isn't enough. It's like when you hit your thumb with a hammer, you know, saying, oh darn. Well, now I've got local global of pleasant self-referential approbation flavors. I thank you for that. And I can get the spread. I'm getting I'm zooming in and out.

The primary is here, but it's down there and there too. Okay, now I'm going to get to use a real, real geek word. If a single person in this room knows what this word means, I am going to be immensely surprised.

Now you're all listening. Now, mind you, there are approximately a half million words. No, no, quarter, quarter, no, about a half. Yeah, about a half million words.

The word does it did pop up into my talk space. Lysencephalic, S-I-L-I-S-E-N-C-E-P-H-A-L-I-C. Our brains got too big for our skulls, so they developed convolutions. So we have these gyri and sulci. But if you look at a rat brain, it's flat. It's smooth.

The surface is smooth. So non-convoluted brain type are called lysencephalic. So why is this related to anything? Well, the problem is the convolutions obscure the organization of the brain, especially in a human brain. So they have what they call exploded brains that a computer can do where it makes it into a giant ball. So then it makes you see how it's really organized. It's more intuitive. But you don't need that with a rat brain.

It's already that way. And if you look at the mapping of the processing areas in a rat's brain, here's the part that does the body, here's the part that does the auditory, here's the part that does the visual. I suggested that we do, as a practice in life, focus on positive during this ten minutes that we've been talking.

Since I suggested doing it, to you folks, that means, of course, I have to do it. I got this immediate, incredibly subtle hit of fear and sadness. So if you decide to have a positive social emotion with actual other humans, don't be surprised if it may resonate with some other emotion.

For no reason whatsoever, other than you suddenly add the temerity to work with feel space in front of a group of people. Yeah, yeah. From myself, just, oh my god, I'm going to have to be in po... It's not like I don't do it, okay, but it's like, no, I have to do it, and they're going to do it. And there was like this fear, which I can understand, but why the tear? And I don't need to know, because I spotted it, and I quantified it.

"Strong Determination" Meditation Sits ~ Shinzen Young

Strong determination sit is an English translation of a Pali expression *aditana*. That means that you make a determination or an intention that for a certain period of time you're going to sit without moving voluntarily.

It could be an hour, it could be two hours, three hours, four hours, or longer. And in general, there is the issue of sitting for long periods of time, whether you make a vow not to intentionally move or not. I encourage people, as a general principle, at least occasionally, to do long sits and or strong determination sits.

I think it's a very good way to push the envelope of practice. There are some parameters, of course, some basic principles you have to keep in mind. The first and obvious one, but still needs to be mentioned, is I would never encourage anybody to sit to the extent that it causes any harm to the body. Usually for the average person, you would have to sit quite a long time to cause harm to the body in terms of joints or paresthesia of nerves or that kind of thing.

I mean abiding paresthesia from having damaged nerves. I don't think that's likely to happen for the average person in just an hour or two hours of strong determination sit. But a person does need to be careful that no physical damage arises due to the practice. And how you do that is basically you start experimenting, and if you do something that causes you to be limping for a half hour after you get up, well, that's a sign that you don't want to be doing that kind of thing. We want to just deal with the sensations, the sensory challenge that's involved in the long sits.

So what's the sensory challenge involved in strong determination sit or long sit? Well, clearly it brings up physical discomfort, and that physical discomfort then brings up mental and emotional reactions. So the mental reactions come through mental images and internal talk. The emotional reaction comes from the emotional type sensation in the body, which many of you know I call feel, body sensation that seems to a given individual at a given time to be emotional in nature. And then the more physical type sensations, the pain, the fatigue, and so forth, the sleepiness, possible nausea, those sensations I call touch in contrast to the feel. So basically the longer you sit, the greater the intensity of sensory challenge that arises. Mental discomforts become more intense, your feel-image-talk reactions to them become more intense.

So at some point you have a touch-feel-image-talk storm going on in yourself. Now to the extent that you can bring concentration, clarity, and equanimity to that, to that extent it's going to turn into a flavor of empowerment and purification. On the other hand, by forcing yourself to sit long or sit without moving, it may drive you into a state of concentration, clarity, and equanimity. So one use for the longer sits or the strong determination sits is it will force you or literally drive you into new levels of mindfulness that can be extremely useful because that then becomes the new set point for your practice. So sometimes people will tell me, well, I've reached a certain plateau with my practice.

What can I do in order to push the envelope to move on to the next level, and so forth? Well actually there's a bunch of things a person can do, but one of the simplest things they can do is start doing at least occasionally, not necessarily every time, but at least occasionally doing longer sits, strong determination sits, dealing with that challenge pushes you forward. I said that there's some guidelines. One of the guidelines is, well, don't damage the body with this. Another guideline is don't get goal-driven in terms of thinking that the issue is how much can I take for how long.

That's not the issue in this kind of sitting. The issue is how much can I learn and retrain the nervous system. That's sort of your goal. The goal is not like, okay, I've got to make it to four hours without moving kind of thing.

The goal is, okay, how much mileage retraining of my processing of touch, feel, image, talk can I get from what I'm doing? The guidelines are don't damage the body. And yes, there is a goal, but the goal is not to achieve certain personal records in terms of duration of sit or intensity of what you sat through. The goal is, well, how effectively am I learning? There's something to be gained by bearing down. There's something to be gained by easing up. The main advantage to this is, as I say, that it will tend to push the envelope of your practice in a natural way because the natural response to intense physical discomfort is actually to drop into equanimity. But in order to access that natural response, you may have to push the envelope a little bit. For certain people, this is actually a very easy way. Well, no, I won't say a very easy way. It's a relatively easy way to make a lot of progress, a lot of tangible progress.

So if you find that you're one of those people, I would encourage you to explore this within the parameters that I mentioned. Remember that if you've got 10 units of physical discomfort, 10 units of emotional discomfort, 10 units of disconcerting imagery, and 10 units of negative talk, if you can keep that all separate, you'll have 10 plus 10 plus 10 plus 10, which is 40. If they get tangled, you're going to get the impression of 10 times 10 times 10 times 10, which is 10,000. Put alternatively, a level of perceived suffering that the average person would say is 10,000 and utterly unbearable, it's fainting, it's kill-me-now level for the average person. For someone with mindfulness skills, it's not 10,000, it's 40, and that's quite doable. So if you bear that in mind and explore in that direction, then this can be a very meaningful practice for you.

"Vipassana" & "Mindfulness" ~ Shinzen Young

What is the origin of the word vipassana? Literally, if we look at the etymology, that is to say, the origin of the word vipassana, we can analyze it into the prefix vi- and the word passana.

Passana means seeing. It comes from the root pas in Pali or pas in Sanskrit, which means to see. Paschati is to see. And although it might not be immediately evident, actually that root in Sanskrit, paschati, is related both to the Latin specere, speck, which means to see. Speck becomes, spash becomes pasch in Sanskrit. And it's related to the Greek scope, skeptos, that kind of thing. Essentially, the ka sound of Indo-European can sometimes become a sha sound in Sanskrit.

So that's how you get speck becoming spash, becoming pasch. And vi has several meanings. It's actually derived from dvi. And dvi is the same root that gives us duo or the English word two, which is really two, right? T-W-O. So the dv and the tw are the Indo-European root that means two or separate or apart. So the corresponding Greek word is dia, D-I-A, which would have been pronounced dia in ancient Greek. If you look at how dia is used in forming words in English, dia has a meaning of through.

For example, diathermy is to send heat through a person as a healing modality. On the other hand, dia also means apart or separate. For example, a diagnosis is to know separately or to know distinctly. A diacritic is a distinguishing mark, something that allows you to separate similar things.

So not surprisingly, the corresponding prefix in Sanskrit, vi, means those two things. It means both separate and through. So literally, vipassana would mean to see separately, but it would also mean to see through. So to see separately, in my interpretation, is the ability to separate the basic sensory elements of experience, which I like to classify in terms of touch, sight, sound, feel, image, and talk.

I've described the meanings of those elsewhere. So vipassana in the sense of separate sensory elements, we can also have even finer separations. Different flavors of feel can be separated, different flavors of touch.

You can distinguish different kinds of images, images that are of people, places versus objects, and so forth. So to separate the sensory strands is one meaning of vipassana, to see separate. But vipassana also means to see through. That means that once you separate a strand, you intently focus on that strand, and your awareness soaks into its interstices.

That has the effect of causing it to soften, dissolve, so that it shows you its empty and vibrant nature. That seeing through or soaking in aspect also has the effect of reaching down into the subliminal neuronal circuitry, into the unconscious itself, so that there's a kind of trickle-down of clarity down to the depths of one's subconscious levels of processing. So I take vipassana to mean the twofold endeavor of separating strands and then soaking into those strands and literally seeing through their somethingness. Now vipassana also has a third meaning.

The V can be combined with pasana to mean insight. In other words, the aha or wisdom experience, the change in paradigm that we call no-self or insight into the marks of existence or enlightenment. That change in paradigm, that wisdom or insight, is also implied by the word vipassana.

So vipassana means, as I like to interpret it anyway, it means separate, see apart, see through, and see into your true nature or insight. And it has all three of those meanings in one word. So we don't have anything like it in English.

There's no English equivalent. There's no word in English that means separate your sensory experience into natural components, soak your awareness into those components, and as the result of that you will experience a paradigm shift called wisdom. Vipassana means all of that as one word. So in my usage I essentially use vipassana and mindfulness as synonyms. Now strictly speaking, historically, the word mindfulness goes back to sati or satipatthana, it goes back to a different word, but really the notions in my way of thinking are essentially the same. The way I like to set up my definition of mindfulness involves the separating, the soaking into, which I call the sensory clarity.

Of course, in order to do that you have to have concentration power. And then the equanimity piece is not implied by the word vipassana etymologically, but in terms of practical considerations, all mindfulness teachers emphasize this sort of gentle matter of fact. Sometimes it's defined as non-judgmental. That's not the term I use, but I prefer the more traditional equanimity term. But all vipassana teachers emphasize that in addition to the clarification aspects. So that's sort of how I understand the terminology.