

# Description of & Paths to Liberated Experience (Enlightenment) ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 There are many ways to come to optimal happiness.

00:00:27 You can carefully observe phenomena, break them down into finer and finer distinctions

00:00:37 until you see the vibrant void that is their nature.

00:00:42 That's sort of the observing and we use that a lot here.

00:00:48 There's another strategy that can be successful which is more the nurture positive kind of

00:00:58 thing.

00:00:59 If you go all the way and develop an absorption level of concentration on positive image,

00:01:10 talk and emotional body, you literally become that and your former identity passes away

00:01:22 or at least is suspended for a while.

00:01:25 So I reckon that at least in theory, nurture positive could be a path to radical freedom

00:01:37 and in fact, this is one of the major claims of Vajrayana practice in Tibet that these

00:01:45 so-called deity yoga practices, they're not just concentration exercises.

00:01:54 They are a component by component replacement of the inner seer, of the ordinary human seer

00:02:03 feel with an alternate archetypal identity.

00:02:09 The reason to do it is not to go insane, to think that you're a myth.

00:02:16 The reason to do it is not shamanic possession.

00:02:20 It's a very different critter.

00:02:21 It's done systematically in order to gain insight into the arbitrary nature of self-identification.

00:02:31 So part of the influences on me in developing the way of teaching that I teach, well I'm

00:02:41 very influenced by early Buddhism that took the divide and conquer strategy which is,

00:02:50 okay, you break it down into pieces, sub-pieces and eventually you sort of know it to death

00:02:59 and love it to death and you become free.

00:03:02 The it in this case is self.

00:03:06 Okay, so that's what sort of leads to the focus in approach that I use.

00:03:17 However the nurture positive working explicitly with image, talk, emotional body and in Vajrayana

00:03:25 you also work with the physical body by making mudras.

00:03:31 Working with those components, if you develop enough concentration, that's why they call

00:03:36 it deity yoga.

00:03:37 Yoga has many meanings.

00:03:38 One of the meanings is exercise.

00:03:41 Another meaning of yoga is merging or becoming.

00:03:47 So you merge with, you actually become the archetypal content that you create and as

00:04:02 I say it's not to go insane and it's not to shamanically channel something, it's to gain

00:04:09 insight into the arbitrary nature of self-identification.

00:04:13 It's like playing with identity like with Lego toys.

00:04:20 It's like a tinker toy kit.

00:04:22 You put one identity together, you take it apart and then you put another one together  
00:04:26 then you take it apart.  
00:04:27 Because it's not just one deity yoga, it's like a sequence of deities.  
00:04:34 I take that as a path that could in theory give you insight into no self.  
00:04:42 So that's a whole way of working.  
00:04:45 Then there's sort of Zen which has a lot of different aspects to it which I won't go into  
00:04:53 but one, just one of the aspects in Zen is merging of inside and outside by pouring all  
00:05:07 your attention on the physical sight, physical sound, physicality of the body.  
00:05:13 There's only so much real estate in consciousness.  
00:05:17 So if all the water sloshes out, that inner world contracts and vanishes and you merge,  
00:05:28 you become one with what was formerly out.  
00:05:33 So that's a way of working.  
00:05:37 Then there's a whole other approach which might be called the meditation of no meditation  
00:05:44 where you simply drop all efforting.  
00:05:49 That contrasts with the other ways of working, right?  
00:05:54 You can take the components of self and untangle them and see their vibrant void nature or  
00:06:05 you can merge with an archetype.  
00:06:10 The ordinary identity contracts, a mythic identity expands.  
00:06:17 Once again, you get insight into the arbitrary nature of self-identification.  
00:06:24 Or you can merge out, see out, hear out, feel out.  
00:06:30 But those all require effort, particularly the deity yoga type practice.  
00:06:39 You're having to actually create intentionally the image, the talk, the body sensations and  
00:06:46 so forth.  
00:06:48 So very contrasting with that is, okay, drop all effort.  
00:06:55 So that's a do nothing kind of approach.  
00:06:58 That works for some people well.  
00:07:03 A contrasting approach to all of the above, which I don't normally do as part of the system,  
00:07:13 but is definitely something that is powerful and something to look into if you're interested,  
00:07:20 is this whole sort of self-inquiry way of working.  
00:07:27 It's been discovered and rediscovered in different forms, different cultures, different times.  
00:07:39 It tends to be associated with some of the Hindu Advaita teachings and so forth.  
00:07:47 There's some great, great Advaita teachers online that have had really deep experience  
00:07:54 using this approach.  
00:07:59 So in Sanskrit, it's called Atma-Vichara.  
00:08:03 Vichara means to investigate and Atma means self.  
00:08:09 But it also is another part of some of the Zen teachers.  
00:08:17 Who am I?  
00:08:18 What are you?  
00:08:20 In fact, that was the koan that my very first teacher gave me, Okamura Keishin Sensei.  
00:08:33 That was the last time when he and I were together in Japan.  
00:08:38 I was going back to the US and he said, okay, here's your koan.  
00:08:45 Who are you?

00:08:46 What are you?

00:08:47 It's like, okay, how do I work on this koan?

00:08:55 Turn the light back on itself.

00:08:59 What do you mean?

00:09:02 Bring them back to the source of the stream of consciousness.

00:09:09 What's that mean?

00:09:12 Just do it.

00:09:14 So that was sort of the, I'm paraphrasing, but that was sort of the dialogue, okay.

00:09:20 There's not much you can, it's not an algorithm, okay.

00:09:23 It's like groping.

00:09:25 You're pushing back, pushing back, pushing back.

00:09:31 A question, koan, who am I?

00:09:36 Or where does thought come from?

00:09:38 Or who sees?

00:09:39 You can choose any language that you want.

00:09:42 There's a lot of ways to formulate the question.

00:09:45 The important thing to realize is this is koan work.

00:09:49 This is not an intellectual question that you're going to say, oh, I am, and there's

00:09:57 going to be a substantive, and now you have answered that question.

00:10:01 That's not what this is about.

00:10:04 This is about each arising of self.

00:10:11 You're trying to sort of metaphorically look over your shoulder and see where it came from.

00:10:22 As I say, it can be formulated in a lot of different words, but the method is the same,

00:10:29 essentially the same or very similar.

00:10:34 For some people that ends up very much related to that spacious thing that we were doing,

00:10:42 where you start to get a sense that, okay, I'm the space all around looking in.

00:10:48 That might be a stage that you pass through and you disidentify with the content of experience.

00:10:57 A good teacher of this method won't let you mistake a fixated sense of witness as the

00:11:09 true self, though.

00:11:12 If it's at all fixated in space, like, okay, I'm over here kind of thing, well, now you

00:11:18 need to look back a little further.

00:11:22 So interestingly, it's not just in Hinduism and some of the Buddhist schools of Zen, but

00:11:38 you actually find this method or something a little like this used in some of the Theravada

00:11:45 traditions where they're trying to sort of like inquire, push it back, push it back.

00:11:53 I've seen some Theravada teachers that teach this way.

00:11:58 And really interesting is some anonymous guy in the 15th century in England hit upon this.

00:12:19 And I would almost be certain that he hit upon it without anyone pointing it out to

00:12:25 him.

00:12:26 He just hit upon it, just discovered it.

00:12:32 Do you know who I'm talking about?

00:12:33 He's anonymous, but there's a work of literature he wrote.

00:12:38 That's the Cloud of Unknowing, a classic in both Catholicism and Anglicanism, Episcopalian

00:12:49 in other words.

00:12:53 In there you can see him struggling to try to describe something that had no tradition

00:13:02 in Europe.

00:13:06 But you could see it was really important for him.

00:13:11 I should have prepared, showed you the section, but I'm paraphrasing, but it's something like

00:13:19 keep beating away at the cloud of ignorance with the sword of love of God.

00:13:48 Pushing back, pushing back to experience your existence, what lies behind you moment by

00:14:02 moment.

00:14:03 I'm paraphrasing, maybe I'll go find the quote on the internet.

00:14:08 But it's something to that effect.

00:14:10 It's very obvious that he's struggling to describe something like a self-inquiry process.

00:14:17 Seems obvious to me anyway.

00:14:19 I find it extraordinary that someone would have hit upon this independently and within

00:14:28 the context of, that was pre-Reformation, so within the context of Catholicism basically.

00:14:37 That's a whole other way of working.

00:14:46 The approaches are, it's nice because the approaches contrast.

00:14:50 So each person can find one or a combination of these that they can relate to.

00:15:00 So there's a wide range of ways that you can go about.

00:15:09 And personally, some people are sort of mono-spiritual, they do best with just one approach.

00:15:19 But I find that a lot of people are bi or multi.

00:15:24 I certainly am.

00:15:26 All those approaches to me seem like one approach.

00:15:32 I would say that the closest thing within what I do to the self-inquiry way of working

00:15:42 is just not gone.

00:15:46 Can you see why?

00:15:47 Can you see the parallelism?

00:15:53 What's the question that self-inquiry asks?

00:15:58 Where does it come from?

00:16:01 What's the question that just not gone answers?

00:16:09 It answers the question where does it go to?

00:16:12 Because you're developing an appreciation for where things go to when they disappear.

00:16:20 Now I know initially, so gone is defined very, very carefully within my system.

00:16:31 All or part of something abruptly subsides and you notice it.

00:16:38 That's the definition of gone.

00:16:39 And you might wonder, why set up such a weird definition?

00:16:45 Why language it that way?

00:16:49 Where something goes to when it disappears is the same place it comes from.

00:17:06 Where A goes to when it vanishes is where B comes from in the next instant when it manifests.

00:17:15 So an inquiry method, you're sort of, okay, A has arisen, where did it come from?

00:17:25 You're trying to sort of look back to the source of the stream.

00:17:32 Turn the light back on itself.

00:17:34 Turn consciousness back on itself.

00:17:36 Or a very common paradigm, be conscious of consciousness.

00:17:44 So the gone is A just disappeared.

00:17:51 And if you briefly look in that direction, you're going to see that that's where B is

00:17:58 going to pop out of.

00:18:03 And what is it?

00:18:06 Well, it's emptiness.

00:18:12 That's the tranquil side of the process.

00:18:21 So that's one side of emptiness.

00:18:28 And then the dynamic side of the process is how emptiness breaks apart.

00:18:36 It happens to everyone hundreds of thousands of times a day.

00:18:44 It's so subtle, we just don't notice it by and large.

00:18:51 But the nothing which is not extended in time and space, it breaks apart.

00:19:06 And that happens with a kind of bouncy spontaneity.

00:19:13 Just happens.

00:19:17 And there's a sense of space effortlessly spreading.

00:19:24 And at the same time, there's a sense of space effortlessly collapsing.

00:19:30 In terms of traditional Theravada formulations, they talk about Udayabhaya or rising passing.

00:19:40 At some point, your awareness is dominated by this cyclic sense of there's just rising

00:19:50 and passing.

00:19:51 And you're real detached from the content.

00:19:56 It's just risings, passings, risings, passing.

00:19:59 Some of it's pleasant, some of it's unpleasant, some of it makes sense, some of it doesn't

00:20:03 make sense.

00:20:05 But you have a sense that you're in contact with some primordial ordering principle that

00:20:13 is a pre-human order.

00:20:17 The order of nature.

00:20:20 Human order is my body's comfortable and my mind's got answers.

00:20:25 This pre-human order is what proceeds?

00:20:32 Pre-energy entropy, maybe.

00:20:35 That's my guess.

00:20:40 That's what causes things to pratityasamutpadati, to fall up into existence.

00:20:51 So a stage comes and typically you pass through this stage 10,000 times in a lifetime, but

00:21:06 it just becomes clearer and clearer and clearer.

00:21:09 With each new challenge level, you sort of have to go through the same thing again.

00:21:15 That's one way to look at progress.

00:21:17 There's a lot of different ways to map progress.

00:21:19 But one is, okay, can you be in an arising-passing situation with this level of pain in your

00:21:28 leg?

00:21:29 Okay, well how about the next level of pain in your leg?

00:21:30 Well, how about ache in your heart?

00:21:32 Well, how about, how about, how about, how about, how about?

00:21:37 When you reach the point where it doesn't matter how big or how complex or what the

00:21:42 content is, but you can instantly be in an arising-passing situation, then you're doing  
00:21:51 pretty good.  
00:21:53 However, after the arising-passing thing, or on a continuum in a sense with that, is  
00:22:05 a sense of passing as it's arising.  
00:22:09 No sooner is it arising, but it's already passing.  
00:22:13 This is described in the classic Visuddhimagga, the path of purification, written by Buddhaghosa.  
00:22:20 It's also described by the Anglican poet T.S.  
00:22:25 Eliot, in my beginning is my end.  
00:22:30 That's how one of his lines opened.  
00:22:33 My beginning is my end.  
00:22:34 It's like already dying as soon as it's born.  
00:22:40 That is the, that's taking a temporal slice.  
00:22:45 As soon as it's arising, it's already passing.  
00:22:49 But spatially, that means as soon as it's spreading, it's already collapsing.  
00:22:56 Because remember, sensory events occupy time-space volumes.  
00:23:02 They last for a period of time, and they have width, depth, and height.  
00:23:09 Check it out.  
00:23:10 We did it in the group process.  
00:23:13 Does your C-ear feel not have width, depth, and height?  
00:23:16 It does.  
00:23:17 So as soon as it's spreading in terms of width, depth, and height, it's already collapsing  
00:23:24 along all three of those dimensions.  
00:23:29 So that's sort of the extreme version of arising-passing, is like passing as it's arising, spreading  
00:23:41 effortlessly as it's collapsing effortlessly.  
00:23:50 And in the folds of that vibrant dance of space are born the inner and outer C-ear feel  
00:24:04 that create the surrounding scene experience, and the I-have-a-self looking out at the surrounding  
00:24:15 scene experience.  
00:24:19 There's a metaphor from the Vijñānavāda school based on a snail.  
00:24:31 The snail's eyes, they belong to the same snail, but they come out on these two different  
00:24:42 stalks and then they can actually face each other.  
00:24:49 Consciousness comes from one formless source, and it's visual-auditory-somatic, but half  
00:24:58 of it seems out and the other half seems in, but it's really just consciousness looking  
00:25:04 at consciousness.  
00:25:06 So those sensory experiences arise in the vibrating folds in between this effortless  
00:25:22 spread and collapse of space.  
00:25:25 So that sense of space effortlessly spreading and collapsing, that's the dynamic side  
00:25:35 of emptiness.  
00:25:39 And then at some point that process sort of comes to an end, expansion and contraction  
00:25:50 cancel out, there's a flat line, but that's not the right metaphor.  
00:25:56 It all collapses back down to the next gone.  
00:26:07 So sometimes people like to talk about non-dual.  
00:26:12 I mentioned that term a few minutes ago, advaita, non-dual.

00:26:17 So non-dual is another way to say one, or it's another way to say healing a wound, healing  
00:26:33 an alienation, healing a cleft that separates.  
00:26:42 So there's a lot of healings that have to take place.  
00:26:51 One is the seeming separation of inside and outside.  
00:26:56 If you were listening carefully to what I said, you should have an idea of how that  
00:27:04 duality can be transcended.  
00:27:08 And to transcend the duality of inside and outside, that's no small thing.  
00:27:16 What are some of the ways?  
00:27:17 Well, I actually mentioned a few of them.  
00:27:21 One is you can allow out to expand while in contracts.  
00:27:29 In other words, the see out, hear out, feel out of the surrounding scene, you pour all  
00:27:34 your attention on that.  
00:27:37 So much so that the see and hear and feel in of the reactive self contracts to nothing.  
00:27:46 And then your identity just goes out and inhabits what was formerly other.  
00:27:52 That's one way to go about it.  
00:27:54 Another way to go about it is the outer scene arises and there's a reactive self.  
00:28:03 It also arises.  
00:28:05 However, there's so much habitual concentration, clarity and equanimity in those circuits that  
00:28:12 both the outer scene and the inner self arise as a wave form.  
00:28:22 And so the two waves completely interpenetrate.  
00:28:30 And there is a oneness of inside and outside as a kind of unified dance of energy.  
00:28:41 That's another way that you can have a you can break down the duality between inside  
00:28:49 and outside.  
00:28:51 One of the major paradigms of enlightenment in world mysticism is the oneness.  
00:29:05 In Taoist terms, it tends to be oneness of inside and outside.  
00:29:09 In theistic religions, it tends to be oneness of the soul with God.  
00:29:18 How do you experience oneness of the soul with God?  
00:29:24 Well, how about experiencing yourself arising in between the two sides of God moment by  
00:29:32 moment?  
00:29:33 That would do the trick.  
00:29:39 Especially if it's your screwed up self.  
00:29:43 That would be really good.  
00:29:48 To experience your screwed up self being loved into existence by the dance of space moment  
00:29:57 by moment.  
00:29:58 It's pretty good.  
00:30:00 Might help you be a little more loving of your screwed up self.  
00:30:11 To achieve a sense of oneness of inside and outside is admirable.  
00:30:21 But I would say that it's not the deepest experience of non-dual.  
00:30:32 The deepest experience of non-dual comes about when the duality or separation between the  
00:30:48 one nothing and the ten trillion somethings, when that separation is healed.  
00:31:06 That's real non-dual awareness.  
00:31:11 What in the world is he talking about?



00:31:14 So the one nothing that is the source, that's what gone points to.  
00:31:22 That's also what you see when you're successful in self-inquiry.  
00:31:26 When you see where you come from.  
00:31:31 See where you go to.  
00:31:34 That's the one nothing.  
00:31:40 Then there's the ten trillion somethings of self and world.  
00:31:48 Another way to put it is emptiness and form.  
00:31:53 So the Heart Sutra says, form is emptiness, emptiness is form.  
00:32:04 Now it's very interesting.  
00:32:05 They put it both ways.  
00:32:08 Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.  
00:32:12 That is the entire path viewed from one point of view.  
00:32:19 That's only one point of view, but that's the entire path right there.  
00:32:24 The first half of the path is form is emptiness.  
00:32:28 That's dissolution.  
00:32:30 That's loving and knowing form to death.  
00:32:38 Within the Jewish meditation tradition it's called B'TUL HAYESH, the annihilation of the  
00:32:46 somethings.  
00:32:50 Don't be afraid of it.  
00:32:52 Don't be afraid to just sit there and totally let go of the ordinary ordering principle.  
00:33:00 The ordinary human ordering principle, which I reiterate, what did I say the human ordering  
00:33:07 principle is?  
00:33:09 Body is comfortable and mind has answers.  
00:33:12 Now I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with the normal human ordering principle.  
00:33:18 In fact we're humans.  
00:33:20 Maybe that's what we need, but we also need a larger context, a pre-human ordering, the  
00:33:28 source of the human ordering, presumably.  
00:33:34 So don't be afraid to just let it all collapse into what seems to be chaos.  
00:33:46 Because what's interesting is what seems to be random is in fact what causes order to  
00:33:57 arise, entropy.  
00:34:05 So you sort of surrender to that and you let the somethingness just be torn apart.  
00:34:22 And you throw caution to the wind and for a period of time abandon totally the ordinary  
00:34:32 ordering principle.  
00:34:35 Doesn't matter if the body's comfortable or not.  
00:34:37 Doesn't matter if my mind is confused or not.  
00:34:44 Annihilation of the somethingness.  
00:34:48 And what will happen is it'll all become rising, passing, arising, passing, and then it will  
00:34:52 just be passing, passing.  
00:35:00 And then you will begin to see how that nothing molds each moment.  
00:35:19 And each moment is one of the ten trillion somethings that I'm alluding to.  
00:35:25 The ten trillion somethings of self and world.  
00:35:28 This is happening here.



00:35:30 I'm experiencing this here.

00:35:32 My mind's doing this.

00:35:33 My body's doing this.

00:35:35 They're doing that.

00:35:36 We're over here.

00:35:38 It's ten trillion somethings that constitute a life.

00:35:48 How can we connect, have an unbroken, a non-dual link between the one nothing over here and

00:36:04 the ten trillion somethings?

00:36:08 Well, this is about the deepest principle that I am personally aware of in practice.

00:36:19 What the umbilical cord, the thing that allows for a smooth and continuous transform from

00:36:29 the one nothing to one of the ten trillion somethings back to the one nothing.

00:36:37 What connects is the two doings.

00:36:42 The two doings are the two sides of emptiness.

00:36:46 Space effortlessly spreading and collapsing.

00:36:52 They are the two sides of zero.

00:36:57 And in the folds is, arises one of the ten trillion somethings.

00:37:06 And whatever it is, a thought, a body sensation, a sight, a sound, whatever it is, it's always

00:37:16 embraced from without and within by the two doings.

00:37:23 So it, the ordinary experience, is touched by the two doings.

00:37:32 But the two doings are in fact the two sides of the one nothing.

00:37:41 And that allows you to have an experience thousands and thousands of times a day of

00:37:54 this miraculous arising of something from nothing.

00:38:04 Form is emptiness.

00:38:07 That's the path of dissolution.

00:38:11 Emptiness is form.

00:38:13 If you are heroic enough to do that, you get to live the rest of your life seeing each

00:38:28 sensory event as this kind of miracle that arises sitting on the totality of the universe.

00:38:39 It seems like you're participating in that process.

00:38:46 And in the Hebrew that's called Bri'ah Yesh Me'ayim.

00:38:54 The continuing, continuous creation of yesh, things, me, from, ayim, the divine nothingness.

00:39:05 That's a spontaneous bouncy process.

00:39:13 And because of that, you look upon each thing as sort of sharing your womb.

00:39:29 And in the Jewish tradition, at least the Jewish mystical tradition, it is said that

00:39:43 through that participation comes about something called tikkun olam, the mending of the world.

00:39:58 Happy eid!