

GUIDED MEDITATION of EXPANSION & CONTRACTION

~ by SHINZEN YOUNG

00:00:00 Once again, take a moment to stretch up and settle in.

00:00:28 The spine is erect through balance and alignment, less through strength and effort.

00:00:54 Like a tree expanding to meet father sky, while the whole rest of the body hangs limp

00:01:04 and loose, yielding to the contractive force of mother earth.

00:01:14 This posture is born in between expansion and contraction.

00:01:20 Therefore, the first consciousness, the shoushin, sometimes translated as beginner's mind,

00:01:32 the first thing you experience when you sit, exemplifies the ultimate goal of the practice,

00:01:47 to give yourself back to the fundamental forces of expansion and contraction.

00:02:04 We've been exploring what I call surface expansion contraction, meaning manifestations of the

00:02:15 source that are available to anyone.

00:02:21 Of course, they may not seem like the source.

00:02:24 They may seem quite ordinary, sometimes uncomfortable, even problematic.

00:02:37 A good doctor can cure your disease.

00:02:41 Probably an extraordinary doctor can convince you you were never sick.

00:02:51 Let's review what we've explored so far.

00:02:56 We'll begin with the principle of increase or decrease.

00:03:04 Something can get more intense.

00:03:07 Something can speed up.

00:03:10 Something can get larger in one, two, or three spatial dimensions.

00:03:22 Nothing special about that.

00:03:23 It's expansion though.

00:03:26 Affirmation, the principle of increase.

00:03:34 Something can decrease in the same ways.

00:03:38 Get less intense, where the frequency of an arising can slow down, or something can shrink

00:03:49 in one, two, or three dimensions of space.

00:03:56 Let's take a moment to explore expansion and contraction in this guise.

00:04:05 You may only be aware of increase or decrease.

00:04:09 You may be aware of both at the same time.

00:04:13 Or there might not be any such movement present, in which case it's actually a form of rest,

00:04:22 freedom from those two kinds of change.

00:04:29 The expansion and contraction in the sense of increase, decrease may be in just one part

00:04:35 of your being, or in one modality, or one location.

00:04:40 Or it may be evident broadly throughout your experience, perhaps even a sense that there's

00:04:50 always both everywhere.

00:05:02 Sometimes the expansion-contraction can be cyclic.

00:05:06 Something expands, then it contracts.

00:05:11 Or something simultaneously both expands and contracts.

00:05:20 And then they disappear.

00:05:24 Sometimes the sense of expansion and contraction can be abiding.

00:05:35 There's an eternal in and out, in part or all of your being.

00:05:45 It's all good, it's all natural.

00:05:47 A certain amount of guessing and groping will be involved if you haven't done a lot of this.

00:05:53 Recall that one of the dimensions of mindfulness is clarity, and one of the sub-dimensions

00:05:58 of clarity is the ability to detect.

00:06:08 And this is a detection skill, a noticing of a commonality that may be subtle.

00:06:36 If you wish to label, the labels would be expansion, contraction, both, and rest or

00:06:46 none for an absence.

00:12:46 Okay, good.

00:12:55 Now let go of that.

00:12:56 And we're going to explore another manifestation, which is pressure force.

00:13:06 Often it's in the body, but it could be in visual and auditory, both inner or outer.

00:13:14 You may have a sense that something's pushing in, pulling in rather, or pushing out, or

00:13:20 doing both at the same time.

00:13:23 Or there may be no pressure whatsoever anywhere in your being.

00:13:29 Instead of interpreting pressure as problematic, we're going to just think of it as a force

00:13:37 that's moving out or moving in, or moving in both directions at once.

00:13:44 If it moves in both directions at once, it might interdigitate, sort of pass through

00:13:50 itself.

00:13:58 Or there might be a clash, an interference.

00:14:04 There's no one to blame.

00:14:08 If the pressure waves just pass through each other, interpenetrating without interfering,

00:14:15 like two ghosts walking along a road, move through each other, well, then fine.

00:14:28 But if there's a bang, like two cars hitting each other, just have equanimity with that

00:14:37 to the best of your ability.

00:14:42 If there's no pressure, enjoy the freedom from pressure.

00:14:46 It's a rest or a non-situation.

00:14:48 Typically, we have a sense that we need to do something about pressure, ameliorate it

00:15:03 in some way.

00:15:04 And actually, there can be times when that's useful, appropriate.

00:15:10 But for now, we're just going to observe it.

00:15:25 I'm going to get my light.

00:20:22 Okay, good. Now let go of that and we're going to explore yet another manifestation of expansion-contraction,

00:20:48 one which is often interpreted as problematic, and indeed is from a certain perspective,

00:21:02 but from another perspective can be looked upon impersonally and blamelessly as just

00:21:11 part of the dance of space. You may be aware of your attention scattering or being flooded,

00:21:23 you're pulled to more than one thing at the same time, pulled in and out at the same time,

00:21:30 or pulled to many places in your body, or pulled to your mind and your body, or your

00:21:35 mind goes to many places. Scattering, we'll consider that to be a form of expansion. Or

00:21:48 you may be gripped and held by something. It won't let you go. Often we interpret it
00:21:55 as I won't let it go. And that can be a valid interpretation, but we're going to think of
00:22:01 it differently now. Your space is being limited, held. There's nothing personal about it. There's
00:22:13 no blame. Scattering is a part of the dance of space. Gripping is part of the dance of
00:22:23 space. So if there's no scattering or gripping, great, enjoy that as a rest state, a freedom
00:22:31 from this aspect of expansion, contraction. But if there is, yield to it. Let yourself
00:22:42 be spread to the six directions or let yourself be nailed down without fighting. Just taking
00:23:02 it to be the flow of space seems like it's scattering and gripping forces, but actually
00:23:12 it's just the curvature of space. It's actually an interesting metaphor from general relativity.
00:23:24 Whole different way to think about things.

00:28:54 Okay, good. Now we're going to explore one more ordinary manifestation of expansion-contraction.
00:29:14 But I'll give you a little heads up. There's some subtlety involved in this one. We like
00:29:31 to get comfortable by resting in some center. Maybe we're enjoying thinking about a certain
00:29:49 something or we're comfortable in a certain sensory environment. We settle in or, quote,
00:30:07 get centered. It's comfortable, it's ordering to be centered somewhere, moment by moment.
00:30:27 If we get ripped away from whatever our center might be, or if we get knocked off center,
00:30:43 that's interpreted as disorder. And it's often uncomfortable. Then we may scramble to get
00:30:53 back to center. There's nothing wrong with being centered. But there's something good
00:31:12 about becoming free from the need to be centered, to have a fixed position, even for a fraction
00:31:24 of a second. This next exercise will probably involve a considerable amount of guessing
00:31:45 and groping, and that's perfectly okay. Notice that as soon as you might find a center, something
00:32:04 is going to knock you off that center, pull you to the right or to the left or in front
00:32:16 or behind or above or below or in all directions at once. The pull might be visual, auditory,
00:32:27 somatic, all of them. It could be inner, it could be outer, but as soon as there's a centering,
00:32:39 there's a de-centering. Who's responsible for the de-centering? Who gives you that gift
00:32:50 that sets you free? It's expansion. Something expands somewhere. And it could be very, very
00:33:05 slight, incredibly subtle, but there's a force to pull you off wherever the comfortable alighting
00:33:15 center may be, to de-center. Put alternatively, it knocks the center away or causes a gone
00:33:32 or a partial gone of wherever the comfortable center might be. When you're aware that your
00:33:53 center is being tugged or the rug is being pulled, that's expansion doing that. And the
00:34:06 actual collapse of the center, the slipping of the rug under your feet, is a form of contraction.
00:34:21 The center will not hold. It dissipates. We'll consider that to be a form of contraction.
00:34:31 It's very subtle, it's counterintuitive. In one way, having a center itself is contraction.
00:34:40 In another way, the gone of the center is contraction. Expansion prevents you from getting
00:34:54 fixated, leaving you with the prospect of learning about a new ordering principle, becoming
00:35:17 that authentic human that has no fixed position. The disappearance of the center, however,
00:35:31 is contraction. The force that causes it is expansion. Those forces are a primordial ordering
00:35:44 principle that can never be disordered, and to the extent that you have one foot firmly
00:35:49 placed in each, you can travel effortlessly back and forth between heaven and hell with
00:36:01 impunity. If you're aware of your center being even slightly messed with, interpret that
00:36:28 as contraction and let it happen. Don't hold on. Move on. But also notice that's happening
00:36:39 because of expansion. You're simultaneously expanding and contracting. And it's liberating.

00:36:53 I fully appreciate that the words I just spoke may seem utterly inscrutable. That's okay.
00:37:09 Just explore. In five minutes, five years, 15 years, 15 minutes before your death, they
00:37:25 may be very significant.
00:43:25 So far, all of the aspects that we've been looking at are ordinary. Something gets more
00:43:41 intense or speeds up or larger. There's an outward pressure force or a scattering force
00:43:52 or a force that pulls you out of a comfortable position in consciousness. Or something decreases
00:44:12 or slows down or gets smaller or there's an inward pressure force or a gripping force
00:44:20 or a disappearance of the ability to hold a center. De-centered, knocked off center.
00:44:42 Related with all of the above may be an awareness of deep expansion contraction or not. Deep
00:45:00 expansion and contraction is a sense of space effortlessly spreading, effortlessly collapsing
00:45:10 or doing both at the same time. Or being perfectly still. No movement from or towards. Deep expansion
00:45:33 and contraction lies around, behind, within. All of the ordinary things we've been looking
00:45:41 at. Sort of hidden. The reason for looking at surface expansion and contraction is it
00:45:56 directs your attention to possibly detecting the effortless dance of space that is the
00:46:06 primordial great perfection that proceeds and follows each sensory and motor event.
00:46:16 And actually if you understand deeply you'll realize it pervades each sensory and motor
00:46:28 event. From the good back to the good without ever leaving the good is to live at the source.
00:46:41 To live near fauna. Now let's explore the possibility, certainly not the certainty,
00:46:56 but the possibility that something like that might be available to attention at this time.
00:47:05 All that will be associated with the ordinary stuff. Something gets more intense there tends
00:47:13 to be a spreading. Something speeds up there tends to be a spreading. Something gets larger
00:47:21 obviously there's a spreading. But sometimes the pressure could cause a spreading. The
00:47:31 scattering is definitely a spreading. And likewise for the converse. So sort of letting
00:47:42 go of the sensory content and becoming fascinated with the spirit contour. Let's just explore
00:47:55 the possibility that you might be able to detect at this time the deep version. And
00:48:04 if that's not available that's perfectly okay. Just choose one or a combination of surface
00:48:10 expansion contraction to attend to.
00:48:27 Absolutely wow.
00:49:55 Sometimes deep expansion and contraction is cyclic.
00:50:20 There's a both and then a God of both of them.
00:50:27 Both rest, both rest cyclically.
00:50:35 Typically small pieces of experience are born in those small cycles.
00:50:40 An itch here, an image there.
00:50:48 But sometimes the awareness of expansion and contraction is eternal.
00:50:56 It's always both.
00:51:00 Peppered by an absolute tranquility.
00:51:10 It's always none.
00:51:23 The reason it's always both and always gone everywhere is because of all those little
00:51:33 cycles they sum up.
00:51:38 To an eternal efflux and reflux.
00:51:45 A formless fountain of youth.
00:51:54 A formless spirit womb whose peristalsis births self and world moment by moment.

00:52:21 It may just be an idea for you at this time.

00:52:25 That's fine.

00:52:29 But let's explore the possibility of an experience.

00:52:53 Be filled.

00:54:11 Now in a moment, we'll transition from formal practice to a bit of discussion.

00:54:40 Decide how you'd like to practice intentionally, if at all, during the discussion period.

00:54:50 You could maintain formal practice.

00:54:53 You could have something sort of going in the background.

00:54:57 You could pepper it with micro hits or just suspend the involvement and enjoy the conversation.

00:55:07 But make it a clear decision.

00:55:08 It's all good.

00:55:12 Recall that the goal is to maintain formal practice at all times other than the possibility

00:55:18 of during talks and discussions and such.

00:55:27 Thank you.