

6 Buddhist Consciousnesses & the 12 Sensory States ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 I wanted to talk a little bit about how this classification of sensory experience that
00:00:13 I like to use relates to some of the more traditional Buddhist categories. In early
00:00:20 Buddhism, sensory experience was classified into what was known as the six consciousnesses.
00:00:28 Here the word consciousness is vijñāna in Sanskrit or viññāna in Pali. So the traditional
00:00:37 six consciousnesses are hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, body sensation, and thinking. What
00:00:44 I've done is, we have sound and sight, so that's the external hearing and the external
00:00:54 seeing. I've broken thinking as a sensory experience into two components, the auditory
00:01:01 thinking, talk, and visual thinking, image. The reason for that is that if we ask people
00:01:08 to observe their thinking, this is very intangible. How do you observe the thinking process? In
00:01:18 order to make it tangible and sensory, it's very helpful to have a visual image. So if
00:01:25 you have a visual image, you can see the thinking process. In order to make it tangible and
00:01:32 sensory, it's very helpful to ascribe qualitative and spatial tangibility to thinking. Here's
00:01:43 what I mean by qualitative tangibility. There's an auditory quality to thinking in words and
00:01:50 so forth. You can sort of hear it, so it has a sensory quality of auditory. There's a visual
00:02:00 quality to thinking in pictures, so it has a sensory quality of visual. That makes thought
00:02:09 qualitatively tangible. Also, the talk tends to be located in the head at the ears, and
00:02:14 images tend to center in front of, behind the eyes, although they can occur elsewhere.
00:02:19 If your eyes are closed, images of your surroundings will tend to be projected out around into
00:02:26 the ambience. Images of your own body tend to be where the body is. If we take the sort
00:02:34 of mental screen in front of, behind your eyes, and also include the locations of the
00:02:39 around you and back on the body, this gives a spatial position to visual thinking and
00:02:53 makes visual thinking spatially tangible, localizable. That allows us to track the thinking
00:02:58 process in terms of sensory whats and spatial wheres, locations in space as it unfolds moment-by-moment
00:03:16 in real time. This allows us to make the surface of mental experience quite tangible and observable.
00:03:23 We'll talk about the depths later on. I break body experience into the emotional type body
00:03:33 sensations and then everything else. The emotional ones I call feel, and then everything else
00:03:39 I call touch. The reason for this feel category is that when a person has emotional experience,
00:03:44 and we're constantly having emotional experience, it's important to be aware that there will
00:03:51 often be a somatic component, a body component. A lot of times we tend to conceive of emotion
00:03:58 as mental only. Certainly it is the case that emotional experiences can have a mental component.
00:04:03 It's important to be able to detect the body component, especially when the body component
00:04:22 is subtle, because subtle is significant. Very wispy, subtle, emotionally colored body
00:04:27 sensations can have an enormous effect, a distorting effect on people's perception and
00:04:34 behavior. I needed to have a word that meant body sensation that's emotional in nature,
00:04:41 so I call that feel. Then everything else, which is most of what's in the body most of
00:04:46 the time, is touch. I further subdivide the traditional Buddhist category of body, and

00:04:53 then the more physical type sensations. I subdivide the traditional category of mind
00:05:00 into image, talk. For simplicity's sake, I consider smell and taste to be a form of physical
00:05:07 body sensation that allows us to have this nice symmetrical system.
00:05:14 I'm going to talk a little bit about the body, and then I'll talk a little bit about the
00:05:21 symmetrical system. A person might say, well, I can sort of appreciate that the surface
00:05:28 of the mind is talk and image, but what about the depths of the mind? Well, it turns out
00:05:37 that as you become intimate with talk space and learn how to find that space and listen
00:05:44 to it, and likewise image space, when the surface conscious talk and image sort of goes
00:05:53 away, you become aware of subtle undercurrents of processing that are going on, a kind of
00:06:03 vibratory matrix out of which conscious talk and image arise. That's the subconscious.
00:06:12 Those are the depths. Those circuits are, the phrase I use is, massively parallel and
00:06:21 fleeting in their processing. Massively parallel means they're processing a whole bunch of
00:06:27 stuff at once, and it's very fine, very subtle, and very fleeting. It just disappears very
00:06:35 quickly. It's actually a kind of vibratory energy. By looking at the surface for a while,
00:06:43 you can then develop a sensitivity for monitoring in real time the general level of activation
00:06:52 of the subconscious mind. This system allows us a way to not merely work with surface thought,
00:07:04 but actually directly in real time eyeball the subconscious mind. That's sort of how
00:07:17 the six basic sensory spaces that I work with relate to the traditional Buddhist category
00:07:26 of the six consciousnesses.