

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

00:00:00 There's an experience that some people have in their spiritual path that in the Pali language
00:00:14 is called Bhanga, B-H-A-N-G-A.
00:00:18 Pali is an ancient Indian language, the one in which the earliest Buddhist writings are
00:00:26 preserved.
00:00:27 Bhanga means dissolution, literally, and it's reported all over the world.
00:00:34 It is by no means distinctive to Buddhist practice.
00:00:40 In fact, it's pretty central to a lot of shamanic paths in different tribal cultures.
00:00:49 The dissolution or Bhanga experience has two sides to it.
00:00:54 On one hand, it can be unbelievably blissful because your whole body dissolves into champagne
00:01:03 bubbles, this pleasant vibratory energy.
00:01:07 Not just your whole body, your whole body and your whole mind, or maybe even not just
00:01:12 your body and your mind, but even your external senses of sight and sound all dissolve into
00:01:18 champagne energy.
00:01:20 It's like having a bubble bath.
00:01:22 It's like being massaged by the Holy Spirit.
00:01:29 It's like the cosmic parents are holding you, embracing you, stretching you and squeezing
00:01:40 you in loving ways that totally fulfill you.
00:01:46 That's the heavenly side to the dissolution experience.
00:01:53 Having said that, you might be saying, gee, I hope I get that someday.
00:01:58 First of all, you don't have to have that kind of experience in order to gain insight
00:02:05 and purification.
00:02:07 Secondly, there is another side, the side that is not heavenly.
00:02:15 The side that hopefully will be purgatorial and hopefully will not be hellish.
00:02:26 Purgatory and hell are very different, theologically speaking.
00:02:31 Purgatory is a temporary place where you are purified.
00:02:38 Consciousness is purified and every minute that you spend in purgatory, although it may
00:02:42 be uncomfortable, is a moment that takes you closer and closer to heaven, the beatific
00:02:52 vision.
00:02:54 Hell is a place of pointless suffering.
00:02:57 It doesn't lead you anywhere.
00:03:00 Purgatory definitely has a goal and there's a silver lining to the cloud, you might say.
00:03:11 So sometimes the experience of dissolution can be purgatorial.
00:03:17 It can seem as though you're being torn apart.
00:03:21 You can be terrified.
00:03:23 It can seem as though you have no firm ground to stand on.
00:03:29 There are horrific, painful mental images, images of death and destruction.
00:03:38 In classical shamanic cultures, this sometimes takes the form of animals eating you up.

00:03:44 The whole thing is in some ways like being sick, the purgatorial side of dissolution.

00:03:53 In fact, in traditional African cultures, this stage is often associated with actual

00:04:00 physical illness from which the shaman recovers and then knows their vocation as a server

00:04:08 of humanity.

00:04:10 There's exactly four possibilities.

00:04:15 Some people do the path without any dissolution.

00:04:18 Some people do the path with the heavenly kind of dissolution.

00:04:25 Some people do the path with the purgatorial kind of dissolution.

00:04:31 Some people do the path, there's a mixture of the heavenly and the purgatory.

00:04:37 My favorite poet is T.S.

00:04:39 Eliot.

00:04:40 He pulls no punches.

00:04:41 Apparently for him, the Bhangra did not have much of the blissful aspect that I'm describing.

00:04:50 As I said, it's different for different people and you have to just accept.

00:04:53 Some people don't have dissolution experiences, some people have blissful ones, some people

00:04:58 have horrific ones, and some people have a mixture of the two.

00:05:03 It seems, if we just base on what Eliot had to say, that his was much more purgatorial.

00:05:12 In part of the Four Quartets, he compares this to being sick.

00:05:23 He compares the action of the Trinity to a surgeon, that would be the son, and to a nurse,

00:05:35 that was the Holy Spirit, and to the owner of the hospital, which is God the Father.

00:05:42 Remember that Eliot was a traditional high church Anglican, very conservative Christian.

00:05:55 He thought of his job as not trying to convince people of Christianity through poetry.

00:06:03 He didn't think that was the poet's job.

00:06:05 The poet's job, if they're a Christian poet, is to allow people to experience what it's

00:06:13 like to be a Christian, even if they may not be Christians.

00:06:18 You can experience what it feels like to be a Christian, in his case a form of Catholic

00:06:26 Christian, Church of England.

00:06:28 You can experience what it's like to be that, even though you might not believe in that,

00:06:33 by reading his poetry, and that's why I like his poetry, because although I wouldn't say

00:06:39 that I buy into the belief system of that path, I really appreciate that by reading

00:06:47 him I can experience what it's like to be somebody on that path.

00:06:53 So I'm going to read for you a little section on how the Holy Spirit, which is the Christian

00:07:02 term for the activity of impermanence, how the Holy Spirit acts on you in order to rip

00:07:11 apart your somethingness, and in a sense kill you, but kill you in the sense of dissolving

00:07:25 the somethingness of self within you so that there's nothing in between you and the beatific

00:07:32 vision, which is their word for the direct experience of the source.

00:07:40 The wounded surgeon plies the steel that questions the distempered part.

00:07:46 Beneath the bleeding hands we feel the sharp compassion of the healer's art, resolving

00:07:52 the enigma of the fever chart.

00:07:56 Our only health is the disease if we obey the dying nurse, whose constant care is not

00:08:02 to please, but to remind of our and Adam's curse, and that to be restored our sickness

00:08:11 must grow worse.

00:08:13 The whole earth is our hospital, endowed by the ruined millionaire, in which if we do
00:08:19 well we shall die of the absolute parental care, which will not leave us, but prevents
00:08:27 us everywhere.

00:08:28 The chill ascends from feet to knees, the fever sings in mental wires, if to be warmed
00:08:38 then I must freeze and quake in frigid purgatorial fires of which the flame is roses and the
00:08:46 smoke is briars.

00:08:50 The dripping blood our only drink, the bloody flesh our only food, in spite of which we
00:08:57 like to think that we are sound, substantial flesh and blood.

00:09:03 And in spite of that we call this Friday good.