

How Much of Buddhism Can Survive the Scrutiny of Science? ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 Traditionally in Buddhism, there's a criterion that the Buddha gave when his students said,

00:00:21 how can we know if something is consonant with your teaching?

00:00:30 And that criterion is called the pavalakshana.

00:00:37 So pava means existence, and if that sounds like the English word be, it's not a coincidence.

00:00:44 So existence.

00:00:45 And lakshana is a mark or characteristic.

00:00:49 So I said, well, if you teach these three marks of existence, then that's consonant

00:00:57 with what all the Buddhas teach.

00:01:02 So if you're interested in these kinds of topics, it's good to actually learn the Pali.

00:01:13 So anicca, most of you know that.

00:01:17 Can you say it?

00:01:18 Anicca.

00:01:20 Anatta.

00:01:22 Anatta.

00:01:23 Dukkha.

00:01:24 Dukkha.

00:01:25 So I didn't take AHA.

00:01:26 This is the Pali pronunciation.

00:01:28 So dukkha is usually translated as suffering, anicca, impermanence, and anatta, no self.

00:01:35 These are the marks of existence.

00:01:40 So not everyone in the world thinks Buddhism is right.

00:01:47 You can go on the internet and find all sorts of critiques and criticisms of Buddhism.

00:01:56 So I think it's important to think very clearly about these kinds of things.

00:02:06 If you want to be able to sort of untangle different things that people say and have

00:02:18 productive conversations.

00:02:20 So because I'm pretty much a logic and evidence-based guy, I tend to think of myself as a rationalist

00:02:33 and empiricist, so I have to ask myself in all honesty, how much of that can survive

00:02:49 the critique of science?

00:02:51 How much of Buddhism can survive the closest scrutiny and last into this century and last

00:03:06 for a long, long time?

00:03:10 When I ask myself that question in a very uncensored way, it seems to me that actually

00:03:27 quite a bit can survive, which is extraordinary when you think about it, given how old Buddhism

00:03:36 is and so forth.

00:03:38 I don't think it can all survive, though, the scrutiny of science, but so what?

00:03:47 The parts that can survive are enormously useful and powerful.

00:03:56 So time will tell.

00:03:59 But let's begin with dukkha, the claim that suffering is, that the nature of existence

00:04:16 is suffering.

00:04:20 What about this will stem the scrutiny of careful investigation and what might not?

00:04:30 Well, first off, we're a little bit hit with a problem, because a major feature in the

00:04:38 formulation of dukkha is the assumption that we live multiple lives, that we in fact reincarnate,

00:04:47 and that most life forms are uncomfortable.

00:04:55 In the West, there's a tendency to find reincarnation a comforting thought.

00:05:02 Oh, I'll be reincarnated.

00:05:04 I'm coming back.

00:05:05 I'm coming back.

00:05:07 But in India, that is not a comforting thought at all.

00:05:13 It's a scary, horrible thought, because Westerners typically always imagine that they're going

00:05:22 to come back.

00:05:25 Well, first of all, they imagine they have been like Egyptian princesses.

00:05:32 I was the advisor to the king, or I was a llama in Tibet.

00:05:40 And then the assumption is when I come back, maybe I'll be the president of the United

00:05:46 States.

00:05:48 But the Buddhist notion, the traditional Buddhist notion, is that pleasant incarnations are

00:05:56 extremely rare.

00:06:00 Someone once asked the biophysicist, one of the founders of biophysics, Hal Dane, if he

00:06:09 could discern any characteristic of God by having studied the mathematics of

biology.

00:06:19 Some of you are laughing.

00:06:21 His response was very funny.

00:06:26 He said, well, apparently God has an inordinate fondness for beetles.

00:06:32 There are more beetle species far and away than anything else.

00:06:37 So your probability of your next thousand lives being a beetle is very high, whereas

00:06:48 being the vizier of the pharaoh or whatever, not very probable at all.

00:06:58 In fact, even a fairly decent life where you get a chance to hear about meditation and

00:07:07 maybe practice it, but at least you've heard the dharma, you know what the traditional

00:07:12 metaphor for how rare that is?

00:07:15 Some of you do.

00:07:17 Well, there's a bunch of ones.

00:07:19 But there's this piece of wood that's floating in the ocean and has a little hole in it.

00:07:29 And there is a turtle in the ocean.

00:07:33 And the probability that when the turtle sticks his head out of the water, it will go through

00:07:40 that exact point is the probability that you'll hear the dharma in your next lifetime.

00:07:47 Of course, the lesson in that case is use this opportunity, okay?

00:07:55 So part of the notion of suffering that's pretty intrinsic in traditional Buddhism and

00:08:03 always talked about is most forms of existence are uncomfortable.

00:08:09 And so the statement that suffering is the nature of existence is somewhat based on that

00:08:20 notion.

00:08:22 So is there compelling evidence that in fact we have multiple lives?

00:08:30 Not that I can see.

00:08:32 On the other hand, if it were to turn out that we have multiple lives, personally I

00:08:38 would not be in the slightest surprised.

00:08:41 Not in the slightest.

00:08:43 If the Buddhist tradition turns out to be absolutely correct in this regard, it wouldn't

00:08:49 surprise me at all.

00:08:51 But that's not really the same as compelling evidence.

00:08:56 You know, Carl Sagan's thing about extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.

00:09:07 Now, does it, is it, how can I put it, does it make, can I understand why

someone would

00:09:15 think we reincarnate?

00:09:17 Absolutely.

00:09:18 Because, remember, I've talked several times about these states where you appreciate the

00:09:30 full extent of what happens in the deep mind moment by moment, even when you're just processing

00:09:38 ordinary sensory experience.

00:09:41 The deep mind in the limit spreads out to encompass this and as far as I can see, all

00:09:49 conceivable worlds.

00:09:51 It points to that.

00:09:54 I'm not saying it literally contains that.

00:09:57 But it's a mandala and it's like a fractal and it just, as you sort of look down into

00:10:06 that, where it's pointing to is all worlds.

00:10:10 And it is, this is called the experience of boundless consciousness.

00:10:15 And it's part of the jhana system.

00:10:18 But it's nothing mystical schmistical.

00:10:20 It's something you can access just by observing image space very, very carefully, very, very

00:10:29 deeply.

00:10:30 And it's, you are that, okay?

00:10:37 That's all in each of us.

00:10:40 And it's very easy to identify with any particular part of that and say, oh yeah, I, you know,

00:10:48 I'm that part, I'm that part, because we're all of it.

00:10:53 So meditators, people that have looked deeply within, it's not surprising that they would

00:11:04 come up with the notion of, well, you jump from life to life based on your behavior,

00:11:10 et cetera, et cetera.

00:11:12 So it's not an insignificant perception, and to come to the point where you have that kind

00:11:20 of awareness, that depth of contact with how the visual mind works is a very significant

00:11:29 stage in practice.

00:11:32 However, is that hard-nosed evidence that in fact we reincarnate?

00:11:40 Can we show scientists compelling evidence whereby they must accept this doctrine?

00:11:50 Not yet.

00:11:52 Maybe someday.

00:11:54 Maybe never.

00:11:56 Now, maybe it's a little shocking to you to hear someone who works within the Buddhist

00:12:01 tradition sort of say something like this, but I've been on stage with the Dalai Lama

00:12:08 of Tibet, like closer to him than I am to St. Pan right now, and heard him say, if science

00:12:16 should someday prove that in fact there is no reincarnation, then we have to modify Buddhism

00:12:26 to match that.

00:12:28 That's the Dalai Lama of Tibet, whose entire power base is predicated on this entire system,

00:12:35 okay?

00:12:36 So, you know, if you want a gripe, don't come to me.

00:12:40 He's got my back.

00:12:42 Thank God.

00:12:45 Thank Gama Lungi De Svava.

00:12:48 I don't know if you ever see him.

00:12:51 Now, why bother saying something like this?

00:12:54 Well, the reason is because I think a lot can survive the scrutiny of science, and that's

00:13:02 important.

00:13:04 That's like really important for the future of humanity.

00:13:09 So, what about this notion that the nature of suffering, the existence is by nature suffering?

00:13:19 To me it's contentious to predicate that on the belief that we reincarnate and that pleasant

00:13:28 lives are very rare.

00:13:31 However, let's see what we can say that more or less is not contentious, that no one would

00:13:39 disagree with.

00:13:41 To what extent is suffering the nature of existence?

00:13:49 Well, one of the things that you learn with this practice is that although pain is unavoidable,

00:14:03 physical and emotional pain are unavoidable, suffering is in fact optional.

00:14:12 Suffering is what happens when you experience pain without skill.

00:14:19 When you have an incomplete experience of pain, it's suffering.

00:14:26 To the extent that you start to bring concentration, clarity, and of course equanimity, major factor,

00:14:35 to that extent the pain becomes more poignant and less problematic, it still motivates and

00:14:42 directs.

00:14:43 It doesn't drive and distort.

00:14:46 It's part of the richness of being a human, but it does not haul our existence.

00:14:56 So, when you look around and you realize that suffering is optional and then you look at

00:15:06 how much suffering there is, you realize that an enormous amount of what people go through

00:15:16 from the intrapsychic to the interpersonal to the international level and intercommunity

00:15:23 level in between, there is an enormous amount of absolutely avoidable suffering going on.

00:15:35 And that's, I think, that gives credence to this view that certainly the nature of existence

00:15:51 for people that don't work hard on themselves entails an enormous amount of suffering.

00:16:02 So, I think that stands the test of logic and evidence.

00:16:11 And it's important to know.

00:16:13 It's like hugely important to know.

00:16:19 So, there's that.

00:16:21 There's also something else.

00:16:24 The Buddhist tradition says that even pleasant things are unpleasant, which seems, maybe

00:16:34 doesn't, does not seem to ring true to people.

00:16:41 But it's all a matter of, it's relative, I guess might be one way to put it.

00:16:54 What people call pleasurable, relative to the experience of complete pleasure, is actually painful.

00:17:06 It's slightly uncomfortable.

00:17:09 But you don't realize that until you start to have experiences of complete pleasure.

00:17:16 What most people seek in pleasure is intensity, duration, and variety.

00:17:22 Not actually that there's anything wrong with those things.

00:17:26 But there's another dimension, which is not the dimension of any of those three, intensity

00:17:34 and variety or duration.

00:17:40 There's another dimension, which is how fully you experience the pleasure, which is measured

00:17:50 by how much concentration, clarity, and equanimity you bring to the pleasure.

00:17:55 And once you start to have some experiences that are starting to approach pure pleasure,

00:18:05 pleasure unalloyed with craving and aversion and gaps in awareness and unconsciousness,

00:18:12 pure pleasure is actually pure fulfillment.

00:18:17 And relative to that, when you look back at, quote, ordinary experiences of pleasure that

00:18:25 you had as a non-meditator or in the early years of your practice, there's a kind of

00:18:32 coagulation and tension around it that is subtly painful.

00:18:42 So this is not obvious until you've done a bit of meditation.

00:18:50 But I think this is another way in which the Buddhist claim about the suffering nature

00:18:56 of things does pass the test of logic and evidence.

00:19:03 Evidence meaning you can check it out yourself and see if it's not true.

00:19:09 And relative to nirvana, which is the limit of complete experience, so complete that it

00:19:22 is right on the cusp of existence and non-existence, relative to nirvana, everything hurts.

00:19:32 Subtly, subtly, subtly, but subtly significant.

00:19:37 So actually, I think the Buddhist doctrine does pretty good about the suffering nature

00:19:48 of things.

00:19:51 There's also the flip side, which is the nature of suffering, which I've already sort of mentioned,

00:19:58 at least the way I think about it.

00:20:01 The nature of suffering is what happens when we have uncomfortable experiences without

00:20:11 concentration, clarity, and equanimity.

00:20:14 And it's also what happens when we have neutral experiences without those.

00:20:18 And it's also what happens when we have pleasant experiences without those.

00:20:24 This is one of the first insights that I had in my meditation career.

00:20:36 As you all know, I approached Buddhism in the old-fashioned way.

00:20:43 It was old school.

00:20:44 It was Asia.

00:20:47 And they made me sit in the full lotus for a full hour, hour after hour.

00:20:59 And it was all about pain.

00:21:02 It was all about pain.

00:21:04 I thought, this is Looney Tunes.

00:21:08 But that's it.

00:21:11 Take it or leave it.

00:21:13 That's the way we do it.

00:21:16 But it was so worth it, because you're sitting there, and it's getting worse and worse and

00:21:24 worse.

00:21:25 And then at some point, discrimination, vipassana, seeing separate.

00:21:33 You actually see that the pain is one thing, and the fighting with the pain is another

00:21:42 thing.

00:21:43 They are different critters.

00:21:46 And before that, you never noticed, because as soon as there was the pain, there was the

00:21:53 fighting.

00:21:54 So someday, some tricky lawyer is going to do some tort case where they're going to say,

00:22:04 well, this person's a Buddhist, so they can only be recompensed for the pain, not the

00:22:08 suffering.

00:22:09 Because it's always like you get pain and suffering.

00:22:14 Oh, I shouldn't put this on the internet.

00:22:16 Someone will actually think of this.

00:22:18 OK, hey, you're a Buddhist, right?

00:22:20 So we're only going to give you half as much, because you just got the pain.

00:22:24 You didn't have the suffering.

00:22:26 I can be meditative.

00:22:27 So you can see it.

00:22:32 So all my life, until I started to meditate, it's like, well, as soon as I have pain, I

00:22:40 have suffering.

00:22:41 They're the same thing.

00:22:42 And that's why the lawyers ask for pain and suffering if you've had a tort.

00:22:49 But now I can see it's like, OK, the pain is one thing, and my mental judgments about

00:22:57 it are quite a different thing, and the way my body tightens around it is yet a completely

00:23:03 different thing.

00:23:04 And oh, yeah, we can relax that tightening, and we can let go of those judgments.

00:23:10 And then it's like, does it hurt?

00:23:12 Yes, but it's just not the same.

00:23:14 That discrimination, that was worth every moment of what I had to go through.

00:23:23 Because otherwise, I never would have known.

00:23:26 Who would have thunk it?

00:23:29 Pain is one thing.

00:23:31 The suffering is something else.

00:23:33 The resistance to the pain is a completely different thing.

00:23:38 And when the two come together, you have suffering.

00:23:41 So that's the nature of suffering.

00:23:45 And then when there's just the pain, without this other stuff, there's less suffering.

00:23:51 And then I extrapolate it.

00:23:53 It's like, OK, if diminishing the resistance somewhat causes the suffering to diminish

00:24:02 somewhat, then where will this lead?

00:24:06 Well, it is theoretically possible that there could be zero resistance, and therefore no

00:24:12 suffering at all.

00:24:14 And that would apply both to emotional pain and physical pain.

00:24:20 So if I only got that one insight in my entire meditation career, it would still be worth

00:24:27 the price and admission.

00:24:29 Because otherwise, I would have had to live my life without knowing.

00:24:33 Oh my god, how does anyone live their life without knowing that?

00:24:38 You've got this sort of Damocles hanging over your head.

00:24:43 It can fall down any time.

00:24:46 So there's the suffering nature, which I think has maybe not everything that the Buddhist

00:25:01 tradition says about that is valid.

00:25:03 But I think plenty of it is when you analyze.

00:25:07 There's the suffering nature, and then there's the nature of suffering, which is a very,

00:25:14 very useful insight.

00:25:17 Anicca.

00:25:18 I'm sorry, dukkha.

00:25:20 OK, anicca, impermanence.

00:25:22 What about that?

00:25:24 Well, that's pretty evident, that things don't last.

00:25:34 And if we pin 100% of our happiness on things that aren't going to last, then we are definitely

00:25:43 setting ourselves up for suffering.

00:25:50 What else is there to say about that?

00:25:52 Well, a couple things, actually.

00:25:59 One of the criticisms of Buddhism is that, well, because it encourages people to become

00:26:07 indifferent to circumstances, objective circumstances, because it's all impermanent.

00:26:15 So why bother?

00:26:18 Why care?

00:26:20 And it doesn't help that the early Buddhist lifestyle was one of renouncing

the society

00:26:30 and going off and living a sannyasi life.

00:26:37 That means you know, when I became a Buddhist monk in Japan, there's quite a little ceremony

00:26:47 that you do.

00:26:49 You, well, I haven't thought about this for a long time.

00:27:00 What was it?

00:27:01 Yeah.

00:27:06 Kokuro, fumo, kokuro, uchida.

00:27:12 Just remembering in Japanese.

00:27:14 So they shave most of your head except for a little piece that they leave, and I get

00:27:24 shaved at the ceremony.

00:27:26 Okay, so symbolically that's the last thing.

00:27:29 And you put on robes for the first time.

00:27:32 I haven't thought about this for a long time.

00:27:38 This is like 1970.

00:27:40 So the robes have really long sleeves, and I, so they put these robes on you, you know,

00:27:53 you complete the ceremony, you get the last little piece of hair is cut off, and then

00:28:00 you have to go like to this shrine area and chant some mantras and things.

00:28:06 And so I like walked out the door, right, and the first thing I did was catch that sleeve

00:28:13 on a post and rip it.

00:28:16 Okay, this is mindfulness clothes I've got on.

00:28:23 These clothes are designed to make you pay very close attention.

00:28:28 You know, just like as a Buddhist monk.

00:28:33 But what I was remembering was that just before they cut off that last hair thing, there are

00:28:42 three kakemono.

00:28:44 Kakemono in Japanese are those scrolls that hang, you know, or like long rectangular pieces

00:28:53 of paper.

00:28:54 And you have to bow to each one three times to say goodbye, goodbye forever.

00:29:04 And the first one says Fumo, Fumo, right, father and mother.

00:29:14 And the second one says Kokuro, Kokuro.

00:29:19 The king of the country or the ruler of the country.

00:29:26 And the third one says Uchidami in Japanese.

00:29:31 Chinese that would be Jashan, your family gods.

00:29:37 And you say goodbye.

00:29:39 That represents all of traditional society of ancient times in Asia.

00:29:46 You say goodbye to that because now you're in a completely, you are Chuja, you have left

00:29:53 Chuke, you have left it all.

00:29:57 That's called sannyasa in Sanskrit.

00:30:00 So that was the system that was set up in India because India is a very stereotyped

00:30:11 society and has had, had and still has very stereotyped roles.

00:30:18 So if you wanted to be a transcendent specialist, there's good news.

00:30:24 You can.

00:30:25 The society will support you, but you have to shave your head and wear the robes of a

00:30:31 criminal.

00:30:32 You know, the orange jumpsuits, the criminals.

00:30:35 It's the same thing in India.

00:30:37 You're just out of the pale of society.

00:30:41 You're just a whole different thing.

00:30:46 So because there is that social model in Buddhism, you can see why people, and then because there's

00:30:56 this notion, okay, everything's impermanent, so Buddhism must teach people that, to be

00:31:04 indifferent to circumstances and the needs of society.

00:31:10 I'm criticizing to, in order to answer the critics, okay.

00:31:15 This is the stuff that you see on the internet, anti, the things that people that don't like

00:31:20 Buddhism, this is the kind of things that they say about it.

00:31:25 It's like, because it teaches everything is, any compounded thing is impermanent, so the

00:31:39 implication is, why bother about compounded things?

00:31:42 And besides, it's sort of the proof of that is these social structure of early Buddhism,

00:31:49 which was just say goodbye to the world.

00:31:54 Now just because India at that time had a certain social structure, and that worked

00:32:02 for the Buddha, does not mean there is anything intrinsic in the notion of impermanence that

00:32:11 says we should be indifferent to circumstances.

00:32:18 It just says that we should not pin 100% of our happiness on circumstances, which I think

00:32:27 is very reasonable.

00:32:30 We should allocate a certain amount of time and energy towards exploring happiness that

00:32:38 is not dependent on something that is impermanent.

00:32:44 And unfortunately, that form of happiness actually does exist.

00:32:52 You often see a confusion between detachment or indifference with regards to the object

00:33:05 of world, and detachment or, I wouldn't even say indifference, I would just say, people

00:33:15 confuse that with what I call equanimity.

00:33:19 And so my concept of equanimity is designed to answer the critics, and also to clarify

00:33:27 things for people that work within the Buddhist tradition.

00:33:36 The ability to let sensory experience come and go without push and pull, the ability

00:33:45 to do that, I think is a very important ability.

00:33:53 That does not mean two things.

00:33:58 It does, the ability to allow sensory experience to come and go without involvement, to take

00:34:06 a hands-off attitude with regards to the expansion and contraction of sensory experience, that

00:34:14 ability does not imply two things that some people think it implies.

00:34:22 It is a pretty radical thing, because we're not just talking about bodily sensations,

00:34:30 we're talking about mental states also.

00:34:32 The ability to allow sense and nonsense to come and go with indifference, the ability

00:34:41 to allow physical and emotional pleasure and pain to come and go with indifference with

00:34:47 regards to how they expand and contract in your senses, that ability is very useful.

00:34:54 But notice I said, the ability to do that.

00:34:59 Because what people think you're saying is that you're advocating walking around all

00:35:05 the time stuck on that and that only.

00:35:10 Equanimity is an ability.

00:35:14 On demand, when it's appropriate to be able to have this hands-off attitude.

00:35:20 At other times, you can absolutely take a stand with regards to your sensory experience.

00:35:29 We do it all the time.

00:35:31 Every time we do Nurture Positive, we're saying we're selectively attending to positive content.

00:35:41 We're not just letting anything come and go.

00:35:44 That's a different practice.

00:35:47 And actually, the ability to let negatives come and go in the background helps us selectively

00:35:57 attend to positive content.

00:36:00 And even to be open to that positive content informing our being, which is the Nurture

00:36:08 Positive practice.

00:36:10 So, the ability to, when it's appropriate or when you want to, to detach from sense

00:36:20 and nonsense in the mind, positive and negative thoughts, let them come and go without carrying,

00:36:28 or rather without push and pull.

00:36:30 The ability to do that, the ability to let pleasure and pain, physical and emotional

00:36:34 come and go, the ability to allow things to congeal and melt without preferences, that

00:36:45 is equanimity and that's a hugely useful skill to have.

00:36:51 But it doesn't mean that that's all you ever do just because you have that skill.

00:36:56 You can take a stand.

00:36:57 You can reject negative thoughts.

00:37:00 In fact, you can do that better if you have that skill.

00:37:03 And the other thing that it doesn't imply is that you're indifferent to external circumstances,

00:37:09 that you're going to take a hands-off attitude with regards to how your life goes or how

00:37:15 the society goes.

00:37:19 And I would claim that in fact the ability to not interfere with the way the world makes

00:37:26 you feel frees up energy to take a stand, to make the world a better place.

00:37:35 So, yes, everything in the world may be ultimately impermanent and therefore to pin your happiness

00:37:48 on it is 100% is not a good idea, but you can pin some happiness on it.

00:37:56 There's some limited predictabilities in the world.

00:38:01 But you want to have another source of happiness, one that's not dependent on impermanent things.

00:38:09 And so that's why I formulated the notion of equanimity.

00:38:21 And I always say it's a skill that's a relationship to sensory experience and should never be

00:38:29 confused with indifference to circumstances.

00:38:33 But there's a deep, deep, deep reason why people do make that confusion.

00:38:39 Because it is not easy to let, to just allow the world to impact on your mind and body

00:38:52 without interfering with that impact.

00:38:55 It seems like you're going to just die.

00:38:58 And it seems like you're going to become passive and ineffectual.

00:39:06 In other words, the sensory experience of equanimity at a deep level initially seems

00:39:19 like it's going to make you indifferent and therefore vulnerable and irresponsible.

00:39:26 And so you're afraid to have complete equanimity.

00:39:31 And it's only after you've sort of gone over that hump and you realize, no, it doesn't

00:39:36 work that way.

00:39:38 Just because I have the ability to experience the litany of horrors that is the six o'clock

00:39:45 news so fully that I don't suffer, that does not mean that I stop caring about

00:39:55 what I see on television.

00:39:57 In fact, very much the opposite.

00:39:59 But some part of us doesn't believe that until we've been over that hump.

00:40:05 And so it just holds on.

00:40:08 And it's like, no, I can't totally let this have me because then I'm going to be half.

00:40:17 So anyway, impermanence.

00:40:24 So what is it that we can have that will be a reliable source of happiness if conditioned

00:40:40 things are impermanent?

00:40:43 Well, we'll talk about that in a moment.

00:40:50 No self.

00:40:58 There's a very good reason to define enlightenment in terms of realizing no self.

00:41:11 As long as you don't get too caught up in words, because half the world calls that experience

00:41:21 the true self.

00:41:24 And if you're caught up in words, then it's like you just miss the point.

00:41:30 You can't see the liberation in people that have theistic religions or people that are

00:41:38 working within a Hindu context that are talking about realizing the true witness, the true self.

00:41:46 You can't see that the Yoga Sutras are talking about the same thing as the Buddhist sutras.

00:41:52 You can't see that because the description seems to be the diametric opposite.

00:42:00 If Buddhist enlightenment is no self and someone goes around saying self, self, self, then they

00:42:08 must be quite misguided.

00:42:12 No, they've just chosen for very legitimate reasons to call that self.

00:42:21 So I would just give that one little caveat.

00:42:24 We don't want the litmus test to be certain words.

00:42:30 We want the litmus test to be certain experiences.

00:42:39 It's been my experience that there are perhaps four different flavors of no self.

00:42:53 I like to use this inner system of mental image, mental talk, and body emotion for a

00:43:04 lot of different reasons.

00:43:06 I like to use that to analyze the experience of self as a sensory system.

00:43:15 Now, there's other ways to chop up that pot.

00:43:19 There's the five aggregates, there's the four foundations.

00:43:23 You could broadly say, well, anything mind and body is self, et cetera, et cetera.

00:43:29 But for various reasons, parsimony and a bunch of other things.

00:43:34 Oh, parsimony, that just means simplicity.

00:43:40 I like to use that system.

00:43:42 So just for now, we're going to work within that system.

00:43:52 I always like to say that the inner see, hear, feel sometimes reacts to the outer sight,

00:43:59 sound, touch.

00:44:01 Sometimes it goes off proactive, spins memory, plan, fantasy.

00:44:09 The individual elements interact with each other.

00:44:13 That's why I call it a system.

00:44:16 It's a system.

00:44:18 And then every once in a while, the interactivity just turns off.

00:44:25 Sometimes it turns off because out expands.

00:44:28 There's only a finite amount of real estate in consciousness, so out expands and in contracts.

00:44:34 And that's those famous sad stories of master enlighten me.

00:44:39 And the master says, go down!

00:44:43 The master says, see, I enlightened you.

00:44:48 The idea being for just a moment before there was the reaction.

00:44:53 If you just look back, you see the system just went offline.

00:44:58 The inner system was just swamped by the sound.

00:45:01 But it's very hard to notice that moment.

00:45:04 But if you sit and just sort of watch, either because out expands or just because the system just goes offline,

00:45:14 when the interactivity ceases, there's no sense of I.

00:45:19 And if you're looking or hearing or touching something external,

00:45:25 and that continues unbroken 30 seconds, a minute, two minutes, the inner system does not activate,

00:45:33 your identity just goes elastic and you just start inhabiting what was formerly out.

00:45:40 So that's one flavor of no self.

00:45:43 Another flavor of no self is, well, the system is activated,

00:45:49 but the components at all of their fractal scales are completely untangled.

00:45:55 Because remember, it's not just one scale of image, talk, body, emotion.

00:46:01 Inside an image is all sorts of subtle talk and body emotion.

00:46:05 And inside each one of those strands is like subtle images.

00:46:12 And so untangling this multi-scale scheme of inner senior field is no small deal.

00:46:24 But if you get them completely untangled, an emergent property called self is thing vanishes.

00:46:35 And you know I've given several metaphors for that.

00:46:39 If you have red and white thread and you just sort of tangle them together and look at it from a distance,

00:46:48 it seems to be pink.

00:46:50 But then as you get closer and look at what's actually there,

00:46:54 the emergent property, the illusory property of pinkness goes away.

00:46:59 It's just red and there's white.

00:47:02 So there's senior field, inner senior field, mental image, mental talk, body emotion,

00:47:09 particularly the self-referential stuff, but in general all of it.

00:47:13 And it's all tangled together.

00:47:17 With sensory clarity, if at all the scales, not just the surface scale, but at all the scales,

00:47:24 if you get those waveforms completely untangled and they are able to interpenetrate without interfering like soliton waves,

00:47:38 that gives you an experience of flow self that is ...

00:47:44 No, no, I'm sorry, that gives you an experience of no self that's based on untangling,

00:47:57 on untangling or resolution effect.

00:48:00 And this is the classic description of no self in early Buddhism.

00:48:04 It's usually applied to the five aggregates.

00:48:07 And I've given many talks, you've heard this many times.

00:48:15 It's also done with the four great elements in early Buddhism.

00:48:19 There's this shocking description the Buddha gives of just as a skillful butcher would carve up a steer,

00:48:30 and at some point the perception steer goes away and the perception meat arises.

00:48:37 That's actually in the Buddhist scriptures.

00:48:40 Clearly they weren't vegetarian 2500 years ago, or at least some were.

00:48:49 Okay, so you chop it up and the perception, well, just to extend the

metaphor,

00:48:55 the perception self goes away and the perception inner seer field clearly arises.

00:49:03 And it's not a thing called self.

00:49:05 So if we call the turning off of the inner system no self in the sense of N-O,

00:49:11 I sometimes jokingly call the no self experience that comes through fully untangling,

00:49:18 I call that no self, K-N-O-W, self.

00:49:21 You so fully have known the components that it's a no self experience.

00:49:26 Then those individual components can show you that they're vibrating super strings.

00:49:38 This of course is just a metaphor.

00:49:40 Again, I'm not saying that it's quantum physics, okay.

00:49:44 But they're sort of like vibrating super strings.

00:49:47 They are vibrating space.

00:49:55 And sometimes the whole inner system, even if you can't untangle the strands at all the levels,

00:50:07 you get this sense that the surface activity in the inner system has sort of gone away,

00:50:13 but there's this undercurrent of shimmering on the mental screen.

00:50:17 There's this rumbling in talk space, a kind of idling in the emotional circuits.

00:50:22 There's this vibratory flow that's filling the subject in space.

00:50:27 If you sort of zoom out, cover that whole space,

00:50:31 and just sort of give permission for that inner field to shimmer,

00:50:38 that will create another flavor of insight into no self.

00:50:46 And then there is the even deeper experience of what's behind that shimmering field,

00:50:58 which is this effortless simultaneous expansion contraction that I talk about every time I talk, almost.

00:51:09 This is, Sasaki Roshi called it, Mujo no Hataraki.

00:51:21 The activity of impermanence, Kongen no Hataraki, the activity of the source.

00:51:31 Busho no Hataraki, the activity of the Buddha nature.

00:51:36 These are just all synonyms.

00:51:41 But impermanence is maybe its main name.

00:51:50 Because it's like trying to pin, it's like trying to nail tofu to the wall.

00:51:58 As soon as you think it's expansion, it's also contraction.

00:52:02 As soon as you think it's contraction, it's also expansion.

00:52:06 And it embraces.

00:52:11 It is a kind of flow of space.

00:52:16 And there can be a figure ground reversal.

00:52:25 Where you say that, well, because that's what's behind all that foam,

00:52:36 and that foam is what senior field is made of, then this is what I am.

00:52:47 And that's where the irony comes in that we finally come back and answer our question.

00:52:55 Well, if conditioned things are impermanent, so we shouldn't pin all of our happiness on that.

00:53:08 We can pin some happiness on it.

00:53:10 But we should allocate a certain amount of time and energy to finding a happiness and ordering principle that is permanent.

00:53:28 And that's where the little irony can be found.

00:53:32 Because it is the activity of impermanence that is our true birthright.

00:53:44 And since it does give us an experience of not only the inner senior field, but the outer senior field arising, co-arising.

00:53:57 Well, not only does it provide that permanent fulfillment, because even after the mind and body die,

00:54:08 to the extent that you've said, I'm not my mind and body, but I am this empty activity that is responsible for my mind and body.

00:54:21 To the extent that you've said that many, many times, thousands of times, thousands of times a day, during a lifetime,

00:54:29 to that extent, you don't die. You just side-switch.

00:54:33 You just do an end run around the passing away of your mind and body.

00:54:43 So a case could be made that therein lies a permanent source of happiness.

00:54:53 But because it's not just what molds the inner world, the inner senior field, it molds the outer senior field.

00:55:05 So it seems like you're always looking at that with which you share a womb.

00:55:17 You're looking at ... the fraternity and sorority of creation are in your face constantly.

00:55:29 And so that source of personal, permanent happiness is also a constant reminder to care about other people,

00:55:43 thus totally giving the lie, totally overcoming the misconception that people that do this practice become indifferent to the plight of others.

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