

# Turn Towards, Turn Away, Focus on Flow w Physical Discomfort ~ Shinzen Young

## Interactive – 1 of 4

00:00:00 I like to think of challenges as coming in two types.

00:00:12 There are behavioral challenges like, you know, I'm procrastinating or I'm smoking cigarettes

00:00:18 and I want to change the behavior.

00:00:20 So I call those behavioral challenges.

00:00:23 Then there are what I call sensory challenges, which are because of some condition, some

00:00:31 sensory experiences arising in the body, in the mind, in sight, sound, and so forth.

00:00:38 And that's an uncomfortable sensory experience.

00:00:40 So it's a challenge in that sense.

00:00:43 So in my general formulation, I would say you're experiencing a sensory challenge and

00:00:50 that challenge is uncomfortable touch, defining touch as physical type body sensation.

00:00:55 Essentially when a person has a sensory challenge, they have three broad categories of strategies

00:01:06 that can be applied.

00:01:08 You can either turn your attention towards the sensory challenge and bring concentration,

00:01:13 clarity, and equanimity to it.

00:01:16 That would be a sort of turn towards and you're sort of perfusing the sensory challenge with

00:01:21 mindful awareness.

00:01:23 A second strategy could be called turn away, your concentration to focus elsewhere onto

00:01:29 something that's pleasant.

00:01:31 For example, you can focus on restful states or focus on the sound of music or positive

00:01:37 emotions and so forth.

00:01:39 And I call that a turning away strategy.

00:01:42 A third strategy is that you can pay attention to how things change.

00:01:46 And it's sort of not this too shall pass, but if you look carefully enough, this is

00:01:54 passing moment by moment.

00:01:56 And the passingness of it, both in terms of the sense that it's moving and flowing and

00:02:01 in terms of the sense that each piece of it sort of falls away moment by moment, you can

00:02:07 become so absorbed in the change that pretty soon you're just aware of change and you're

00:02:12 not aware of it.

00:02:14 I call that strategy focus on change.

00:02:16 So you can turn towards or you can turn away or you can turn towards, you can focus on

00:02:23 change.

00:02:24 The tendency is to think, well, if I turn towards it, I'll just make it worse.

00:02:28 So I don't want to do that.

00:02:30 And then, well, if I turn away from it, I'm just avoiding and denying and suppressing.

00:02:34 So I don't want to do that.

00:02:36 And I know it's not going to change because it's rock solid.

00:02:39 So what's the point of that?

00:02:41 So then the person has set themselves up for failure.

00:02:44 Although it is true that it may temporarily get worse if you turn towards it, if you really

00:02:50 give it what it needs, in other words, experience it fully, because that's what mindful awareness

00:02:55 is, is a full experience of something.

00:02:59 If you experience it fully, it may get worse, but then it will break up.

00:03:04 And then people say, well, if I turn away, I'm denying.

00:03:07 But to turn away, you have to develop concentration, right?

00:03:12 Because it takes a discipline to focus on something other than the sensory challenge.

00:03:17 And you're not suppressing the sensory challenge.

00:03:19 You're giving it permission to be there.

00:03:21 You're just not intentionally focusing on it.

00:03:23 So you are bringing equanimity to it, even though you're not paying attention to it.

00:03:28 And you're also developing sensory clarity to learn how to detect a pleasant, restful

00:03:32 state while you have a huge pain and emotion state.

00:03:37 You're learning how to detect subtle, pleasant things that may always be there that you might

00:03:41 not have noticed.

00:03:42 The turn away strategy is valid.

00:03:45 And as you're turning away, it may cause the thing to sort of cool out, the sensory challenge

00:03:49 to cool out a bit.

00:03:51 Then when you use those same skills that you've developed by turning away, you then can apply

00:03:57 the concentration, clarity, equanimity, turn towards.

00:04:00 The more cooled out version of it, it may be more penetratable.

00:04:05 So the focus away is absolutely as legitimate as focus on.

00:04:10 And as far as, well, I know nothing changes as solid as the rock.

00:04:14 Well, how carefully have you looked?

00:04:16 If you look microscopically, you might start to notice, oh yeah, well, it's changing, but

00:04:23 it's trivially changing.

00:04:25 So what?

00:04:26 But then as you pay more and more attention to that, it's like, oh, well, actually, come

00:04:29 to think of it.

00:04:31 And then that theme of flow and vanishing starts to dominate awareness.

00:04:36 I have noticed, actually, I've noticed change.

00:04:39 It is constantly changing.

00:04:42 That's the physical discomfort?

00:04:43 The physical discomfort, yeah.

00:04:45 Is it possible to describe the type of change?

00:04:49 By that I mean, my general word for continuous change is flow.

00:04:54 And then if something disappears, I say it's gone or has vanished.

00:04:58 Some of the flavors of flow that people experience are sort of like a waviness.

00:05:04 Some people get like a bubbly vibration kind of thing.

00:05:08 Some people get a sort of expansion or contraction or sort of both at the same time, like something

00:05:16 sort of like pushing out and pulling in at the same time.

00:05:20 Is it possible to characterize the flavor of flow experience inside the itchiness?

00:05:26 It's like there's needles sticking in my arm, like millions of them, all at different times

00:05:33 and all in different places, but roughly in the same area.

00:05:37 But just instantaneous little pricks of a needle.

00:05:41 And so it's kind of like little bubbles, almost sounds pleasant.

00:05:46 It's not pleasant because it's pricks, but it's like that in the sense of little pops.

00:05:55 Yes.

00:05:58 That's a strategy that we might take.

00:06:01 We might choose to focus on change based on what you're reporting.

00:06:05 Do you understand the three basic strategies?

00:06:08 Turn towards, turn away, or focus on change?

00:06:12 Those three sort of basic options.

00:06:14 Now if we choose to turn away from the discomfort, we could either focus on restful states like

00:06:20 relaxation, physical relaxation or mental blank, mental quiet, that kind of stuff.

00:06:26 That would be one turn away strategy.

00:06:29 A second turn away strategy would be to focus on positive thoughts or positive emotions,

00:06:36 like sort of hold a positive image or positive feel in the body or have some sort of positive

00:06:43 talk in your head.

00:06:44 So we could focus away from what you're doing, the uncomfortable touch, on either pleasant

00:06:52 feel-image-talk states, or we could focus on restful states.

00:06:57 So that would be a focus away.

00:06:58 If we did a turn towards, we would pay attention to the touch itself, but we might also look

00:07:09 for feel-image-talk reactions that might be subtly present.

00:07:13 And if we do a focus on change, we're going to explore ways that your sensory experience

00:07:19 is constantly changing, not only the sensory challenge, but like other places.

00:07:24 Because when one part of the sensory system starts to flow, other parts will often flow.

00:07:30 So even if your pain is solid, if we find flow in some other part of your sensory experience,

00:07:39 on that sometimes it spreads and breaks up the solidity in the painful areas.

00:07:44 These strategies all make sense and the sort of techniques that we would use for each one

00:07:50 are clear to you?

00:07:51 Yes.

00:07:52 That's good.

00:07:53 Now, as you can see, they all sort of work, but you may have a curiosity or a preference

00:07:59 as to where you'd like to start.

00:08:02 If we do turn towards, we can either work just with the touch of the pain itself, or

00:08:09 we can work just with your feel-image-talk reactions to it.

00:08:12 Those would be the two turn towards strategies.

00:08:15 The two turn away strategies would be focus on pleasant restful states or actively create

00:08:21 positive thoughts and feeling.

00:08:25 And then the focus on change will be we'll find change wherever we find it, emphasize

00:08:32 that and then see how widely that spreads.

00:08:35 Does one of these particularly appeal to you?

00:08:39 I think the focus on change.

00:08:41 Let's explore that then.

00:08:42 That could be very interesting.

00:08:44 Okay, good.

00:08:45 Are you comfortably seated?

00:08:47 Yes.

00:08:48 Okay, good.

00:08:49 So I'm just going to do my own practice as you do yours.

00:08:54 So I'd like you to take a moment to lengthen your spine and let your whole body settle.