

The Best Path? ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 What is the best spiritual path?

00:00:05 People often ask me, what is the best path?

00:00:10 What's the best spiritual path?

00:00:13 What's the best meditative path?

00:00:15 And so forth.

00:00:17 When I get asked that question, a couple of things pop into my mind immediately.

00:00:23 The first is that I feel this urge to say, the best path is the one that works for you.

00:00:35 It's been my experience that different approaches work best for different people at different times.

00:00:43 It's not an absolute, what's the best path, who's got the real answer, which one is the

00:00:51 pure, the authentic, the true, can take me to the place where the other ones leave off,

00:00:58 etc., etc.

00:00:59 I don't really think that's the issue so much.

00:01:03 I think the issue is what works for you at a given time.

00:01:10 And it might change over time.

00:01:13 There are people that started out with me doing mindfulness practice and had certain experiences.

00:01:22 And I recommended that they go to a Zen teacher, my teacher, Sasaki Roshi.

00:01:30 And after doing that practice, they decided they wanted to work more within the Zen framework, the traditional Zen framework.

00:01:37 So they transitioned from Vipassana to Zen.

00:01:42 It can go the other way too, though.

00:01:44 I have among my students people that have long, long, decades-long Zen practices that now feel more comfortable working within the mindfulness framework.

00:01:56 A number of years ago, we had a meeting at the Spirit Rock Mindfulness Center in California,

00:02:07 Jack Kornfield's place, of Western teachers, Western teachers defined as people teaching in the Western world.

00:02:18 And I suspect there was a couple hundred of us there at that meeting.

00:02:24 And Jack asked us an interesting question.

00:02:28 He asked us, how many people in this room would say that more than one lineage of practice had been significant in their life?

00:02:40 In other words, how many people in this room have done Vipassana and Vajrayana practice, for example, or Vajrayana and Zen practice, that kind of thing.

00:02:51 And of those people teaching in the West, more than half of them said that very different lineages of practice were significant for them in their development.

00:03:04 I find that very interesting.

00:03:06 In a sense, the sort of immediate or perhaps somewhat cavalier answer that I feel like

00:03:14 giving is, well, the best one is whatever works.

00:03:16 It's pragmatic and it may be different at different times for you.

00:03:22 One might say, but isn't there a path that is in some way absolutely better than others?

00:03:34 Is there some way of lining up the paths in terms of, well, this will take you so far,

00:03:41 but then you have to do this, then you have to do this.

00:03:43 Some people make claims like that to be perhaps a little bit blunt.

00:03:48 I don't buy it.

00:03:49 I don't buy those claims.

00:03:51 There is a way to compare maps and spiritual paths, I believe, but it takes a lot of courage.

00:03:59 You need to be able, number one, and willing, number two, to talk about the strong points

00:04:14 and the weak points of whatever path you teach.

00:04:20 And that's hard.

00:04:23 We tend to want to talk about the strong points.

00:04:28 But it has been my experience that if you want to compare paths, what you compare is

00:04:35 strengths and weaknesses.

00:04:37 And they tend to have certain strengths and they tend to have certain weaknesses.

00:04:43 And to me, that's an honest comparison.

00:04:46 For example, I would happily tell you what I consider to be bad about the way I teach

00:04:54 meditation.

00:04:57 Maybe that would be another talk.

00:05:00 But, well, just briefly, here's all the things that are bad about how I teach meditation.

00:05:10 It's very complex.

00:05:13 There's a lot of subtleties.

00:05:15 You have to remember a lot of technical vocabulary because I'm very picky about words and precision

00:05:22 and description.

00:05:23 There's a lot of emphasis on implementing procedures in a certain way, although it is

00:05:32 an algorithm, meaning you're never asked to do anything you can't do.

00:05:37 You're not asked to do the impossible.

00:05:39 But you're asked to do doable things, but in a very specific way.

00:05:43 A lot of people want to be a little more free-form about things.

00:05:48 I tend to place things in a sort of secular type of language, which may lack some of the

00:05:58 more overtly or explicitly spiritual symbols and terminology and so forth.

00:06:08 So anyway, that's a few of the things that may be bad about the way that I teach.

00:06:12 If I thought about it, I could probably come up with some more.

00:06:16 So anyway, if you want to compare paths, I think you want to say, okay, this one is strong

00:06:23 in this way, this way, this way, but it's sort of weak in this way, this way.

00:06:28 For example, TM, strong point, anybody can do it right away and have some experience

00:06:33 of being a little bit calm.

00:06:36 Weak point, well, it might not take you any further than that.

00:06:39 Now, I said might not, I didn't say it won't.

00:06:43 But that might be, in fact, the weaknesses are tendencies.

00:06:48 They're not absolutes.

00:06:49 This tends to be strong this way, this tends to be weak this way, as a path.

00:06:55 So I think if you want to compare things, that's the way you compare them.

00:07:00 Tendencies towards this strength or this weakness.

00:07:05 Then the other thing that I always like to keep in mind is that all of these paths are

00:07:16 not very good, the ones that we have now, that have come down to us that anybody has.

00:07:21 They can be vastly improved upon, and as the result of improving upon them, we will see

00:07:28 more democratization of enlightenment over the planet.

00:07:33 So it always helps me to keep in mind that the best path is yet to be discovered, if

00:07:40 there is indeed a best one.

00:07:43 And that's exciting and wonderful.