

# How do I find a good meditation teacher? ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 How do you find a good meditation teacher or teachers?

00:00:11 One way to consider this is to think about different kinds of teachers.

00:00:17 I have in my own mind a kind of map, a classification system for teaching.

00:00:24 Actually, I don't really think so much in terms of teachers.

00:00:29 I don't think so much in terms of the noun, teacher.

00:00:35 I think more in terms of the verb, teaching. There is an activity called teaching.

00:00:42 Broadly, I classify the activity of teaching under three headings.

00:00:49 There is subtle teaching, there is descriptive teaching, and then there is explicit teaching.

00:00:59 From my perspective, everyone who does a spiritual practice or a meditative practice is a teacher

00:01:09 in that they teach. But they may only teach at the subtle level.

00:01:16 So what does it mean to teach at the subtle level?

00:01:19 Well, two things. As a result of doing the practice, we change.

00:01:24 Our vibe changes, how we carry ourselves moment by moment.

00:01:29 Our body odors probably change, our pheromones change.

00:01:35 Things about us change, and that shows. Perhaps only at a subtle level, it shows in

00:01:41 body language. As I say, it may show in odors, subtle cues,

00:01:47 how we breathe, how our eyes look here or there, and so forth.

00:01:52 Changes take place within us as the result of this practice.

00:01:55 People can detect those changes, perhaps consciously or perhaps below the threshold of awareness.

00:02:03 And that puts out a subtle teaching. You could be talking about anything, you could

00:02:07 be doing anything, but you're coming from a certain place.

00:02:12 As the result of your practice, you're subtly teaching with every action you do, every syllable

00:02:18 you utter. Even people who haven't done much meditation,

00:02:22 the change has already started to happen. So that's one aspect of subtle teaching.

00:02:27 Another aspect of subtle teaching is more large-scale, our behaviors improve, or they

00:02:34 should. If they're not, then there's a problem.

00:02:39 And people that know us see the behaviors improving. And that's impressive to

people.

00:02:47 Very impressive, actually. And that makes them interested, sympathetic,

00:02:54 maybe wanting to do that path or that practice themselves.

00:02:59 So the behavior changes that take place with time, coupled with the sort of  
vibe changes,

00:03:07 so we say energy changes that take place, to me this constitutes teaching.

00:03:14 Therefore every practitioner is automatically a subtle teacher.

00:03:19 Then there's descriptive teaching. What descriptive teaching means is you  
have

00:03:23 a practice, somebody asks you to describe your practice, and you can do so  
coherently.

00:03:32 Coherently means there's clear vocabulary, well-formulated sentences, it all  
hangs together

00:03:41 logically. That's what cohere means.

00:03:45 You can give a coherent description of what you do in words that the average  
person can

00:03:52 do. I call that the descriptive level of teaching.

00:03:58 I have a little phrase that I use, which is, what is coherent is cogent.

00:04:05 Cogent means compelling. It means, oh, that makes sense, and I see the

00:04:12 point. Maybe I'd like to do it myself.

00:04:16 So you're not telling them to do it, you're not proselytizing, you're not  
giving them

00:04:22 a practice and explicitly teaching them, you're just describing, hey, this is  
what I do, when

00:04:28 I have physical discomfort I do this, and it has this effect, when I have  
emotional

00:04:32 challenges I do this, and it has this effect, when I do formal practice I do  
this, and sometimes

00:04:37 this happens, and sometimes that happens. You're giving a coherent  
description of your

00:04:44 practice. Well, that's a teaching, and that's a level

00:04:51 of teaching. So any of you that have a practice and can

00:04:56 coherently describe it to people in words, average people, people that don't  
have a practice,

00:05:02 then I say you're a teacher at that level of teaching.

00:05:07 Then there's explicit teaching. Explicit teaching is you are running a  
meditation class, or

00:05:15 you're privately tutoring someone, and you are giving them techniques, you're  
answering

00:05:22 their questions, you're giving them detailed guidance, you're monitoring  
their progress,

00:05:28 and so forth, you're explicitly now a teacher.

00:05:34 Some people evolve to a place in their practice where they would like to be an explicit teacher,  
00:05:44 and that's good. Usually you need some sort of training for  
00:05:48 that, although not inevitably. Tell you the truth, when I moved from being  
00:05:55 a descriptive teacher to an explicit teacher, I myself did not have any training to do that.  
00:06:02 I just started to experiment and see what worked. Maybe that's not the best scenario,  
00:06:08 but that's what I did, and it just evolved with time.  
00:06:14 Among explicit teachers, I would say that there are various subcategories.  
00:06:20 There are paraprofessional teachers. That is to say teachers that teach part-time.  
00:06:27 In my organization we call them facilitators. I've trained numerous, many, many people to  
00:06:35 be facilitators. They can help out at retreats, they can answer  
00:06:38 questions, and so forth. They're sort of like a paramedic. They're  
00:06:45 a paraprofessional. Then there are professional teachers.  
00:06:48 A professional teacher teaches full-time. Someone like me.  
00:06:52 We derive their livelihood that way. Among full-time teachers, there's a class  
00:07:01 of full-time teachers that are capable of dealing with classical enlightenment.  
00:07:06 When it starts to happen to people, they can handle that phenomenon.  
00:07:11 They can handle the pathologies that may occur occasionally that can accompany classical  
00:07:19 enlightenment. Occasionally.  
00:07:21 They get all freaked out, it doesn't happen that often.  
00:07:24 We might call them masters. People that aren't afraid of the E-word,  
00:07:31 enlightenment. If you can find a teacher in that category  
00:07:39 that you can relate to, then that's good. It doesn't have to be one, though.  
00:07:44 You might find several teachers in that category that you can relate to.  
00:07:48 If you can't find a teacher in that category who is comfortable with handling the enlightenment  
00:07:55 issue, then okay, just find a professional teacher.  
00:07:59 Somebody that does this, is established. If you can't find that, a paraprofessional.  
00:08:06 If you can't find that, then a descriptive teacher.  
00:08:08 If you can't find that, then just someone that teaches at the subtle level, would be  
00:08:15 my general recommendations as far as how to think about teachers.