

Teacher's or Student's Issues Impeding Spiritual Progress? ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 What is the main thing to look for in spiritual progress?
00:00:08 The main thing to look for in either of those circumstances,
00:00:12 whatever the causality, whether the teacher is inducing it
00:00:15 or whether you're creating it all on your own,
00:00:20 the main thing to look for that's going to get in the way
00:00:24 of your spiritual progress is developing
00:00:27 a dependency on a teacher.
00:00:31 Some teachers foster that dependency
00:00:36 through some mixture of altruistic and selfish motivations perhaps,
00:00:42 but also students have a tendency,
00:00:45 whether the teacher has issues or not,
00:00:48 students have a tendency to develop dependence on the teacher.
00:00:55 So I would say that's the main thing to look for.
00:00:59 Whatever the cause may be, am I developing a dependence on the teacher?
00:01:04 If so, well then you want to take measures
00:01:07 to militate against that, because the name of the game
00:01:12 in the spiritual path is happiness
00:01:16 independent of conditions, independence.
00:01:20 A competent liberation teacher
00:01:23 does not want students.
00:01:28 A competent liberation teacher wants colleagues,
00:01:33 wants peers, wants people that are independent
00:01:40 and free of that whole sort of investment
00:01:46 with the individual teacher.
00:01:50 So sometimes people ask me,
00:01:54 oh, Shinzen, you've given me so much,
00:01:57 what can I do to repay you and so forth?
00:02:00 And the impish side in me just blurts out,
00:02:05 forget about me, that's the biggest favor you can do,
00:02:08 forget I ever existed.
00:02:10 Just take what you have learned, take the principles,
00:02:14 take the skill set and run with it on your own.
00:02:20 Forget about the person that taught you those things.
00:02:26 The way I look at it, there's actually only one teacher
00:02:30 in the universe throughout all time and space,
00:02:33 and it's not a person, it's a doing.

00:02:36 All the individual teachers are just reflections
00:02:41 of that one teacher activity.
00:02:44 Mythologically or archetypally,
00:02:46 we could say that that would be represented
00:02:48 by the thousand-headed,
00:02:54 two-thousand-armed goddess of compassion.
00:02:59 And the individual, I mean, don't take the math literally,
00:03:03 right, maybe there's ten thousand heads historically,
00:03:07 some bigger than others.
00:03:10 But all sort of appendages on the same activity.
00:03:16 Even that goddess is not a person,
00:03:20 it's just an activity called teaching,
00:03:23 which should grow and improve with time,
00:03:25 like science does, I would hope.
00:03:27 Dependency on the teacher, I would say,
00:03:31 can impede your progress.
00:03:35 So watch for that.
00:03:38 That's why I sort of like the Zen tradition way of working.
00:03:41 When you do San, or at least the Rinzai Zen way,
00:03:46 well actually it's true of Soto Zen too,
00:03:48 but specifically in Rinzai Zen,
00:03:51 during a Sesshin or intense meditation practice period
00:03:56 that typically lasts a week,
00:03:58 you have what's called San Zen or Dokusan,
00:04:02 which is one-on-one interaction with the Roshi,
00:04:07 depending on the temple or the center,
00:04:10 that can be two or three times a day,
00:04:15 or it can be up to five times a day.
00:04:19 For most of his teaching career, before he got very old,
00:04:23 Sasaki Roshi used to see his students,
00:04:26 every single student, five times a day.
00:04:29 Now I think he's down to three or four times a day at 102.
00:04:34 And there could be 60 students there, so do the math.
00:04:39 So they're coming in for the interview.
00:04:41 The interviews though are not like Vipassana interviews,
00:04:45 where we talk about your practice
00:04:47 and explain things in a linear way.
00:04:50 They're very non-linear,
00:04:53 transfer of an energy of emptiness from the Roshi to you.
00:05:01 You might say when Catholics take communion,
00:05:04 they experience the true presence of Christ.
00:05:09 Well, when you go in for San Zen with a Rinzai Zen master,

00:05:14 you experience the true absence of that master,
00:05:19 which is a kind of dynamic doing, a bouncy emptiness.
00:05:26 And some of that is transferred onto you
00:05:29 by the intense interaction that you have with that Roshi.
00:05:34 They never talk about it in explicit terms.
00:05:38 But it is a kind of Shaktipat,
00:05:40 if I were to use the Hindu terminology.
00:05:44 But unlike Shaktipat, where it's formalized
00:05:48 and they talk about, okay, the guru's going to zap you,
00:05:53 it's never talked about in Rinzai Zen.
00:05:56 You either develop the sensitivity to capitalize upon it,
00:06:02 or you don't.
00:06:05 So you either figure it out or you don't figure it out.
00:06:07 But that's mostly what you're going in there for.
00:06:10 It's not to pass these koans.
00:06:12 It's to internalize the passage,
00:06:16 the freedom of the Roshi by merging with him or her.
00:06:22 So you get this zap,
00:06:25 but then you have to go back to the zendo,
00:06:29 to the meditation hall.
00:06:31 What follows the transfer from the teacher
00:06:34 is not a big celebration of how great the teacher is.
00:06:40 What follows from the transmission from the teacher
00:06:44 is you go back to the meditation hall,
00:06:47 where it's always either too hot or too cold,
00:06:50 there's bugs biting you, your buttons are being pushed,
00:06:54 people are abusing you,
00:06:58 they're hitting you, they're yelling at you,
00:07:00 you're exhausted, you're confused.
00:07:04 Now, can you apply that hit that you got from the Roshi,
00:07:15 can you apply that, can you truly internalize it
00:07:18 and make it yours by applying it
00:07:21 to the nitty-gritty of the real world right now?
00:07:25 So you're thrown back on your own resources.
00:07:29 You don't waste time glorifying the teacher
00:07:32 or even thinking about the teacher.
00:07:34 Whatever you got, now you got to make it yours.
00:07:38 And the goal in this training is to produce peers,
00:07:42 it's to produce colleagues,
00:07:44 it's to produce people that are completely confident.
00:07:48 They're confident in themselves.
00:07:50 So this way of training, the reason I like it is

00:07:53 you sort of get the best of both worlds,
00:07:55 because you do get a transfer,
00:07:58 but it's set up in such a way to make it impossible
00:08:01 for you to develop a dependency,
00:08:04 at least if it works right.
00:08:06 Whatever that teacher has given you,
00:08:08 you have also had to work on your own
00:08:11 very, very, very hard to internalize and apply that.
00:08:19 Your spiritual path is not a path of dependency on the teacher.