

Be The Master of Every Situation ~ SHINZEN YOUNG

00:00:00 So, we've been talking about this happiness independent of conditions.

00:00:12 We've talked about it from a lot of points of view.

00:00:23 When I first went into the Zen temple, after I'd been at Mount Koya for a while, I decided

00:00:32 that I wanted to experience training in the Zen tradition.

00:00:44 I think I'd been at Mount Koya for two years and I'd completed what's called kegyo, which

00:00:54 is the basic training in Shingon.

00:00:57 That's a hundred days in isolation.

00:01:03 So I went to the abbot of the temple and I said, can I go away for the summer, for four

00:01:19 months to Kyoto to do the summer training at one of the Zen temples in Kyoto.

00:01:28 He was not very happy about that actually, but what he said is, well first of all he

00:01:36 scared me.

00:01:39 He said he himself at once considered going to do the Zen training, but when he looked

00:01:48 into it, the Zen people said, because you belong to another school, you're going to

00:01:57 probably get beat up even more than us.

00:02:01 He told me this story, right?

00:02:05 So it's like, oh, okay, well I still think I'd like to try it.

00:02:12 And then he said, okay, but just all I ask is don't come back here with a half-baked

00:02:22 knowledge of Zen and criticize Shingon.

00:02:27 Don't come back with a half-baked knowledge of Zen and criticize your school, the Shingon

00:02:33 school.

00:02:34 So I said, okay, I won't do that.

00:02:36 And he gave me permission.

00:02:39 So I was like really scared because it's like you're going to get beat up more than even

00:02:51 those guys, okay, and they get beat up.

00:02:55 Now beat up could mean physical, but it could also be emotional.

00:03:01 So the way I got into the temple, it was Shokoku-ji.

00:03:07 Actually Gary Snyder had practiced at Shokoku-ji at an earlier period.

00:03:13 He even writes about it.

00:03:15 You can find his writings about the Rohatsu Sesshin at Shokoku-ji temple.

00:03:22 Shokoku-ji is one of the seven Rinzai Zen training centers in the city of Kyoto, which

00:03:28 is the old capital of Japan.

00:03:30 So anyway, everything in Japan is done through Shotaijo.

00:03:35 That means a letter of introduction.

00:03:40 So I got Abe Masao, who helped a lot of foreigners get involved in practice in the early days,

00:03:48 was a friend of mine.

00:03:51 And so I asked him to sort of find a Zen temple that would take me and sort of set it up for

00:04:04 me and he did.

00:04:07 So there's different things you have to do and I've told you some of the stories about
00:04:15 little tests that they put you through before they let you in.
00:04:18 But then once they let you in, they really let you in.
00:04:21 It was pretty cool.
00:04:23 So one of the things that you need to be a Zen monk is you need a copy of the Rinzai
00:04:30 Roku.
00:04:32 So the Rinzai Roku is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese book Linji Lu.
00:04:43 And Lu means a record.
00:04:45 Linji was a famous monk.
00:04:48 He is the monk that started the Rinzai school.
00:04:51 Linji is the Mandarin pronunciation of Rinzai.
00:04:55 So these are the sayings of Master Linji, who lived in the Tang Dynasty.
00:05:04 So what happens is each morning, the master of the Zen temple, the Roshi, gets up and
00:05:12 gives a taisho based on this text.
00:05:18 And he reads it in Sino-Japanese, what's called Kanbun.
00:05:23 He reads it in Sino-Japanese, but it's absolutely impossible to understand by just listening.
00:05:31 I mean, simply impossible.
00:05:33 Even if you were a Buddhist scholar, you can't understand just by listening because there's
00:05:39 so many words that sound the same in Sino-Japanese.
00:05:45 Sino-Japanese has to be seen to be comprehended.
00:05:48 So every Zen monk has a copy in Chinese of the Rinzai Roku, the sayings of Master Rinzai,
00:05:59 so that when the Roshi is reading in this weird pronunciation, you can see with the
00:06:06 kanji, you can see the characters and you can follow what he's saying.
00:06:11 So I needed a copy of the Rinzai Roku.
00:06:15 So Abe Sensei gave me a copy of it.
00:06:23 It's really cool because it's not a modern printed book.
00:06:27 It's the old style of woodblock printing, you know, and the old style bindings, the
00:06:35 way they used to make books hundreds of years ago in that part of the world.
00:06:40 So it's like, you know, it's like really, really old fashioned, right?
00:06:45 So he gave me a copy of the Rinzai Roku.
00:06:48 And so I remember I'm there and it's like the first night and I'm going to, you know,
00:06:57 the next day I'm going to start this little series of tests.
00:07:02 And I knew that if I passed all those tests and got in, you know, I was just going to
00:07:10 be bossed around for six months.
00:07:12 I was going to be like someone's slave.
00:07:19 So it was like really, really scary.
00:07:23 And so I was sort of going through my stuff and organizing my stuff and I saw the Rinzai
00:07:34 Roku, the Lin Chi Luke book that Abe Sensei had provided for me so I could follow the
00:07:41 Teishos.
00:07:42 And so I opened it up just to look at it and he had calligraphed on the cover, on the first
00:08:01 page of it, you know, before you get into the text, like just the title page, he had
00:08:05 calligraphed in his own writing with a brush four kanji.

00:08:20 And those are the kanji.

00:08:43 And it just jumped, like jumped off the page and into my heart.

00:08:54 It's a phrase from one of the Zen masters.

00:08:59 And what it means is, be the master of every situation.

00:09:11 Now that's the literal meaning of these four characters, be the master of every situation.

00:09:24 Zuishoni shu tonaru.

00:09:29 Suichu zuochu in Mandarin Chinese.

00:09:36 And I knew, because I'd done enough study and practice, I knew what he was trying to

00:09:45 convey.

00:09:48 You might think that he was saying, you can tough it out.

00:10:04 You know, don't let them get you down.

00:10:10 One might think that that's what that meant, but I knew for sure that that's not at all

00:10:22 what he was reminding me of.

00:10:27 Because I'd seen the phrase before in my studies, and I knew in the Zen tradition what it referred

00:10:35 to, and it referred to something very specific.

00:10:41 When the Zen people talk about being the master, so the master is the person that owns the

00:10:50 house.

00:10:53 They talk about host and guest.

00:10:55 So this also means host.

00:10:59 So when you contrast host and guest, I said master, but it also means host, the person

00:11:04 that owns the house.

00:11:07 So when they say, be the host in every situation, or be the master in every situation, this

00:11:18 is an idiom that refers to a very specific experience.

00:11:28 Yesterday, I talked about a sense of compassion arising from wisdom.

00:11:47 Because wisdom allows you to experience each person, each thing really, as being molded

00:11:59 moment by moment before your very eyes, before your sight, sound, touch.

00:12:07 Compassion and contraction are loving your world into existence.

00:12:21 This is not a theory, it's not a belief, it's not even a feel-good emotion.

00:12:27 It's in your touch, sight, sound circuits.

00:12:30 So you can't escape it, even if you would want to, and who would want to.

00:12:35 So you experience your inner world, your inner sea, your feel, is this sort of bubble that's

00:12:44 percolating up from the still point of the turning world.

00:12:49 And simultaneously, this other bubble is percolating up, that is the flower or the person or the

00:12:57 tree, what have you.

00:13:00 It's like the two bubbles, it's like God's thought balloons or something, that are sort

00:13:08 of like expanding and then collapse down and then expand out again.

00:13:14 Now experiencing yourself and the so-called other simultaneously born from the same source

00:13:25 leads to a sense of connection, that leads to an effortless compassion.

00:13:37 The quality of mercy is not strained, it falleth like the gentle rain from heaven.

00:13:43 That's Shakespeare.

00:13:46 But he's talking about a spontaneity, a just happeningness in one's caring.

00:13:55 So that's what happens when you experience the outer world and the inner world, both

00:14:06 arising simultaneously, and you experience them with the wisdom mind.

00:14:11 So there's an it and there's a me.

00:14:22 But they're coming and they're both arising, I'm reacting, there's a self over here that's

00:14:28 experiencing an it over there, but I'm experiencing both of them as sharing the same source.

00:14:37 So that leads to a compassion, an I-Thou relationship as opposed to an I-It relationship.

00:14:49 Or there's another thing that can happen.

00:14:57 It's similar but even more challenging.

00:15:02 What happens if instead of these two bubbles simultaneously arising from the same source,

00:15:13 what happens if there's only the out, no inner reactivity at all?

00:15:22 What happens then?

00:15:25 Well the identity moves out and literally lives inside what was formerly other.

00:15:41 For however long there's contact in touch, sight, sound.

00:15:49 That's what they mean by being the master.

00:15:53 You're the host inside each of these houses that normally you think of as other.

00:16:06 It's like you're now inside that person looking out from their eyes, or if it's a flower,

00:16:13 they don't have eyes, but you're inside the activity called flower because you're doing

00:16:18 the activity called flower and you're not for a brief moment, 30 seconds or shorter

00:16:26 or longer, the activity called shinzen has completely flatlined.

00:16:33 The only activity that there is is the activity called flower or the activity called Peter,

00:16:40 Paul, Mary, whoever you're interacting with.

00:16:44 There's just that.

00:16:46 So it seems like you're in each place, each place, each place, you're the lord of that

00:17:02 house, you're the master of that place.

00:17:09 So what he was really telling me is, in just four kanji, he was saying, okay shinzen, I

00:17:19 know you're scared shitless and you're going to encounter some harsh shit here, but

00:17:30 no matter how seemingly mean or scary or in your face, the so-called other may be, you

00:17:52 know what your job is and if you remember that job, you're going to be just fine.