

Meditation Teacher's Qualifications and Liberation Experiences

~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 People sometimes ask, how can I know if a teacher is really qualified?

00:00:17 How can I know if a teacher has had a liberation experience?

00:00:22 Well, actually, merely having a liberation experience doesn't necessarily make you qualified

00:00:29 to be a teacher.

00:00:32 And not having liberation doesn't necessarily exclude you from being a good teacher.

00:00:40 I use two criteria to sort of guess whether a person has had a liberation experience or

00:00:51 not.

00:00:52 Notice that I say guess.

00:00:53 I can never be really sure, but I can make a pretty good guess.

00:00:58 The two criteria that I use are body language and personal behavior.

00:01:05 Now, the body language is fairly easy.

00:01:09 All you've got to do is look at them, listen to them, and so forth.

00:01:16 The personal behavior piece is hard, because you'd have to hang out with them.

00:01:20 You'd have to actually be their wife or their secretary or their husband or their child,

00:01:31 something like that, to really know the personal behavior.

00:01:35 You'd have to be close to that person over a long period of time.

00:01:39 Knowing the personal behavior is only something you can do in a relative way, unless you happen

00:01:43 to have a very special close relationship.

00:01:49 Maybe a familial relationship.

00:01:52 So it's a combination of the flow of emptiness and impermanence expressing itself in that

00:02:00 person's body language, voice, gaze, and so forth.

00:02:05 That plus their personal behavior would be the two criteria I would look for to judge

00:02:13 levels of enlightenment.

00:02:15 Even then, like I say, I can only guess, but I can be fairly confident in those guesses.

00:02:25 There's a tricky thing, though, about the body language piece.

00:02:27 I'll tell you an interesting story.

00:02:29 I was once driving in Santa Monica, California with a senior student of mine.

00:02:37 If you don't come from California, you might not know, but there's a lot of homeless people

00:02:45 in Santa Monica.

00:02:46 In Southern California, they make it a comfortable place for homeless people.

00:02:51 They're known for that.

00:02:52 So there's all these homeless people there.

00:02:55 We saw this homeless person, and we looked at each other.

00:03:00 It was one of those weird psychic moments where we knew we had had exactly the same

00:03:05 thought.

00:03:08 We had, actually.

00:03:10 We knew it.

00:03:11 The thought was, if you clean this guy up, put him in white clothes, put him in front
00:03:20 of an audience, and don't let him say anything, but just let him sort of do his thing, he
00:03:36 would have something very close to the body language of an enlightened master.

00:03:41 Now, that may be very shocking and off-putting for some people to hear.

00:03:46 Notice I said the body language, not the mental state.

00:03:50 Apparently, a combination of mental illness and harsh life had more or less driven the
00:03:58 ego out of his body.

00:04:01 A kind of pseudo-enlightenment, actually, but certainly not enlightenment.

00:04:04 You can have somebody that has the body language of no-self, but not really have a classical,
00:04:12 clear enlightenment-type consciousness inside of them.

00:04:15 Now you see why vibe is not enough.

00:04:19 Then there has to be the behavior.

00:04:20 The behavior of that person was of a homeless, helpless, ineffectual street person living
00:04:29 by begging.

00:04:31 So that's not the behavior, typically, of a qualified teacher.

00:04:38 In terms of, well, okay, besides, sort of, is this person capable of dealing with the
00:04:50 enlightenment issue, how do you know they're qualified?

00:04:57 Well, the very first thing that pops into my head if somebody asks me, how do you know
00:05:04 if a teacher is qualified, is look at the students.

00:05:11 The virtue of a teacher is only in the results that that teacher can get with students, as
00:05:19 far as I'm concerned, because there aren't any teachers.

00:05:22 There's just the activity of teaching.

00:05:25 And so what's the effect?

00:05:26 How are their students doing?

00:05:29 Somebody once asked Tony Robbins what his qualifications were for doing what he does.

00:05:36 He's a, you may know, a well-known self-help speaker.

00:05:44 And he said, because, I don't know, maybe there was an implication, hey, you don't have
00:05:49 any degree, you don't have any credibility, what gives you the right to tell people what
00:05:57 to do?

00:05:58 And he said, well, I have a degree in results.

00:06:01 I like that answer.

00:06:04 That's what I look for.

00:06:06 By those standards, there are some very enlightened teachers, very enlightened individuals who
00:06:13 are not very good teachers.

00:06:16 And there may be some teachers that haven't had a whole lot of enlightenment or haven't
00:06:24 had the deep experiences of some of the great masters, but they get really good results
00:06:29 with people.

00:06:30 And they can deal with anything that a student is likely to go through.

00:06:36 So I would say those are the things that come to my mind.

00:06:40 Look for body language.

00:06:42 And maybe that doesn't make a whole lot of sense to you.

00:06:44 You don't know what I'm talking about.

00:06:46 It's something you develop a sensitivity to.

00:06:48 Unfortunately, it's a little bit of a catch-22.

00:06:51 You don't know what to look for until you start to become a little bit that way yourself.

00:06:58 Basically what you're looking to see is, is there a flow of empty energy that's animating

00:07:10 this person?

00:07:11 That's the body language.

00:07:13 But that alone is not enough because they might just be crazy.

00:07:16 So then you have to look for behavior.

00:07:19 Are they a mensch?

00:07:20 Are they an ordinary good person?

00:07:23 And then what kind of results do they get with people?

00:07:26 Those would be some things that come to my mind apropos the issue of teaching.