

Can ordinary experience count as meditation? ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 an art, for example, piano playing or the martial arts or dancing, they might approach

00:00:14 the art in a way that not only do they become extraordinarily focused while they're doing

00:00:20 their art, but that there's a carryover into daily life and they notice month after month,

00:00:26 year after year, as the result of having done that art in a certain way, their base level

00:00:33 of focus in daily life has changed.

00:00:36 So even though they're not calling it meditation, it is de facto a meditation.

00:00:43 So if I do that, I don't have to actually do regular meditation, I can just do my ballet

00:00:48 or piano?

00:00:49 Well, yes, but there's a tricky point because the issue is not do you become extraordinarily

00:00:56 focused while you're doing the endeavor.

00:01:00 That's not that uncommon.

00:01:03 What is much less common is that there's a carryover and you notice in daily life, in

00:01:11 other activities, that because of the way you're doing your art, that every moment of

00:01:18 your life is being informed by an elevated sense of focus.

00:01:23 That's fairly unusual, but that is zen and the art of.

00:01:27 You may have heard that expression, zen and the art of archery, zen and the art of flower

00:01:32 arranging tea.

00:01:33 Is that in the zone too?

00:01:35 Yes and no.

00:01:36 No?

00:01:37 It is yes in the sense that there is this locker room or sports term to be in the zone.

00:01:43 And that is the term that's used for entering a state of extraordinary concentration, say

00:01:51 during your performance of sport.

00:01:53 And of course, it's highly desirable.

00:01:56 The baseball player, Ted Williams, used to say he knew he was in the zone when he could
00:02:03 see the pitch coming at him.
00:02:07 He could see the stitches on the ball and those pitches come at like 100 miles an hour,
00:02:12 right?
00:02:13 So sports people call that in the zone.
00:02:16 Once again, it's not entirely uncommon for somebody to, quote, enter the zone during
00:02:21 their performance.
00:02:23 What is uncommon is that they do it in such a way that there's a carryover into daily
00:02:28 life.
00:02:29 There has to be the carryover.
00:02:31 Remember I defined the common denominator of meditation is, well, not just concentration,
00:02:37 but your base level of concentration.
00:02:39 When you're not trying to be concentrated, what are you like in daily life?
00:02:45 To count as meditation, something has to consistently elevate your base level of concentration.
00:02:54 So anything that does that is a meditation, whether it's called meditation or not.
00:03:00 But it's not just a matter of you get concentrated while you do it.
00:03:04 It's a matter of you get concentrated while you do it in a way that it retrains your ordinary
00:03:10 perceptions.
00:03:13 So that's why I'm very specific about elevate your base level, because it's not uncommon
00:03:18 that a person will become extraordinarily focused in some endeavor.
00:03:24 It is, however, relatively uncommon that that carryover into daily life in a dramatic way
00:03:31 that grows consistently with time.
00:03:35 Without special instruction, usually that doesn't happen.
00:03:39 They just have it spontaneously, but there's not the effect on life.
00:03:43 So that's why you actually do these formal meditation techniques and practices, because
00:03:47 that more directly elevates that base level?
00:03:51 Well, yes.
00:03:52 In other words, we can imagine, based on your line of questioning, that there could be some
00:03:59 ordinary activity you're doing as a meditation.
00:04:02 And then there could be some special exercises that you do that usually

involve sitting still

00:04:09 and focusing in some way and whatever, and you do those.

00:04:13 Now in either case, you could have an elevation of your base level of concentration, and that

00:04:19 elevation needs to grow dramatically with time.

00:04:23 If that's the case, then either of those count as meditation.

00:04:27 But usually people that get spontaneously focused, unless somebody points out to them

00:04:33 that it is necessary and possible to carry this over in daily life, they usually don't.

00:04:40 So it becomes a dead end, and it's not really a meditation, even though they may become

00:04:44 very much in the zone while they perform their sport or their art.

00:04:49 So in theory, you don't have to do systematic formal exercises that involve sitting and

00:04:55 that kind of thing, in theory.

00:04:57 But probably ...

00:04:58 Reality.

00:04:59 But probably, if you want to do it through an art, you probably will still need some

00:05:05 coaching into how to make your art carry over the state of the zone.

00:05:10 Do you do that?

00:05:11 Do you coach people how to turn the art into being in the zone?

00:05:15 Yeah, I can do that.

00:05:16 Oh, that's cool.

00:05:17 I can coach a person to make their running or their singing, what have you.

00:05:26 I can coach them so that they get the carry over.

00:05:30 But more typically, people will also do formal meditation practice, sitting in silence and

00:05:39 so forth.

00:05:40 So the upshot is that the common denominator of every form of meditation around the world,

00:05:46 inside or outside of religion, would be that they elevate base level of concentration.