

Working Smarter ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 Sometimes when people first are introduced to your techniques, there can be a bit of
00:00:14 an overwhelm because they're not prepared for the technical nature of them.
00:00:23 What would you say to people to help them get through that initial overwhelm so that
00:00:32 they stick around to get the ultimate simplicity and good stuff it leads to?
00:00:41 I would say don't try to understand it, get used to it.
00:00:50 There's a Japanese proverb, which literally means that.
00:00:57 It's not a matter of learning it, it's a matter of getting accustomed to it.
00:01:04 Someone once asked a very prominent 20th century mathematician, John von Neumann, about the
00:01:16 mathematics that he had used during a lecture, they said, Professor von Neumann, I can't
00:01:23 understand your math.
00:01:25 He said, math is not something you understand, math is something you get used to.
00:01:32 When I heard that, it was hugely helpful for me.
00:01:42 You listen and you think and you practice and you read and you listen and you think
00:01:48 and you practice and you read and you listen and you think and you practice and read over
00:01:54 and over and over again, and with time, it sinks in.
00:02:00 There is a reason why I formulated that copious and precise vocabulary.
00:02:12 In the long run, it's going to hopefully allow people to work smarter. Because the old-fashioned
00:02:20 way, where you have to just sort of discover it on your own, and often it's a brute force method,
00:02:27 you just have to put yourself through such horrific ordeals that at some point you're just
00:02:35 forced to experience certain states and forced to do certain things. Well, the average modern
00:02:43 person is not going to intentionally put themselves through that kind of thing. So my idea was,
00:02:50 instead of the brute force methods, if we can make the formulation crystal clear,
00:02:59 yes, up front it takes a little bit of work, because it's like we're being sent back to school.
00:03:04 It's like, what? I have to learn vocabulary, I have to learn definitions, I have to make
00:03:11 subtle distinctions with regards to things that seem irrelevant or that I haven't experienced.
00:03:17 So I do understand that people have that resistance at the beginning. There's always
00:03:23 strong points and weak points in every way of working. The weak point in the way that I work,
00:03:32 one of them, is that up front you're asked to really carefully think about the nature of sensory
00:03:41 experience, to have a classificatory system for sensory experience and also for the things that
00:03:48 lead beyond sensory experience. It's described in a vocabulary that is something like the
00:03:57 rigor and precision that we would find in mathematics. So it's like, wow, you're right,
00:04:03 that's a major stumbling block for people because they don't expect to have to learn
00:04:10 to work that way. They're thinking they're coming to a retreat. Yeah, it's going to be
00:04:19 Zen poetry and a finger pointing to the hazy moon and suddenly it's like calculus. What am I doing
00:04:27 here? However, my idea is that for that relatively small investment up front, in the end it will
00:04:37 allow them to work smarter and be able to achieve the classic goals, I don't necessarily say faster,
00:04:45 but with less necessity for horrific intensities. Because when you hear about the sort of

00:04:56 traditional trainings that are done... And you're talking monastery... Yeah, monastic intensities,
00:05:01 like, wow, who wants to put themselves through that kind of thing? So my idea is by giving people
00:05:08 this very precise vocabulary and having them maybe work a little smarter, that in the end,
00:05:16 that will allow them to have comparable depth of experience, but still have their normal North
00:05:22 American or modern, let's say, comfortable lifestyle. So yes, it's some investment up front,
00:05:31 but I think, number one, if they realize how much it's going to help down the line, and number two,
00:05:40 if they just take it gradually, just gradually get used to it. That's what I would say with regards
00:05:46 to that. Maybe take a break and do easing up, bearing down and easing up to balance, so that
00:05:52 if they've been working very hard, they can ease up and do something that would be less intense.
00:06:00 Well, I think you're asking with regards to learning the vocabulary, is that correct?
00:06:05 Well, I was actually talking about first coming in with all the five ways and all the techniques
00:06:11 and that potential overwhelm. I remember before the five ways, when I first went to one of your
00:06:17 retreats, I said, you know, I was in an online with you and I said, you know, this is like playing
00:06:22 scales. This is technical work, I'm having to pay attention and really play scales. And I stopped
00:06:30 being a classical musician because I didn't want to practice my scales. And you said, it is like
00:06:35 playing scales, but the music is your life. And I thought, good answer. You know, so that you're
00:06:46 developing the skill to use in your life. Well, I would say that the reason I present people with
00:06:54 several approaches is not that I necessarily want them to learn how to do all those approaches.
00:07:04 I would like them to be exposed to a range of possibilities so that they can find what works
00:07:10 for them. Some people like the flexibility of having five contrasting ways of working,
00:07:16 but some people will just choose one of those five and decide that's all I'm going to go for.
00:07:28 But at least they can see the range of what is available. And then, so the idea is not that you
00:07:37 have to learn this giant system. The idea is all you have to do is find one good technique that
00:07:47 works for you. And then if you want to just stay with that, fine. If you want to learn other things,
00:07:53 that's fine too. So I think the combination of realizing that you only need one good technique,
00:07:59 plus giving yourself time to get used to the vocabulary and take it slowly, plus realizing
00:08:07 that the complexity and the scrupulous precision will in the end pay off because you'll be able
00:08:19 to work smarter or get more bang for the buck, so to speak. I think keeping that in mind may
00:08:26 help people a little bit with the challenges of studying meditation with a demented physics
00:08:34 professor. Somebody once called me that. A demented physics professor. I like that. You can use it.