

What are your specialties as a teacher? ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 Someone wrote in and asked, what are your specialties as a teacher?

00:00:11 I think the first thing that comes to my mind is that I attempt to take the mist out of

00:00:19 mysticism.

00:00:21 All around the world we find people that have had deep experiences of meditation and perhaps

00:00:32 gone beyond deep experiences of meditation to experiences of no self or enlightenment.

00:00:40 And scholars of comparative religion who study such things say that they're studying comparative

00:00:49 mysticism.

00:00:50 I think a more contemporary term would be contemplative studies, but it pretty much

00:00:55 boils down to the same thing.

00:00:59 Mysticism sometimes refers to what I call the realms of power.

00:01:05 That's sort of like the new agey kind of stuff.

00:01:07 That might be called mysticism with a small m.

00:01:13 But mysticism with a capital M, as is used by trained scholars of world religion, has

00:01:22 a very different meaning.

00:01:23 It means the path into deep states and then the path beyond deep states to experiences

00:01:29 of enlightenment.

00:01:32 If you look at the standard works on mysticism, most of the older ones, unfortunately, written

00:01:39 by people that were not themselves mystics, which is a little bit like sex manuals written

00:01:46 by perpetual virgins or books on the nature of music written by people that are tone deaf

00:01:55 or maybe deaf.

00:01:56 But if you look at some of the older books on mysticism, the first thing that always

00:02:03 appears is this can't be described in words.

00:02:10 That's almost the defining feature of mystical experience.

00:02:13 Now it is quite true within the core of mystical experience, the experience of direct contact

00:02:24 with the source.

00:02:25 There most assuredly are no words.

00:02:29 No words in your head, no words coming out of your mouth, because there's no head.

00:02:35 There's no body.

00:02:36 There's no time.

00:02:37 There's no space.

00:02:38 So certainly no words.

00:02:41 That is true.

00:02:43 But can everything surrounding that be precisely put into words?

00:02:49 I think so, actually.

00:02:53 That goes against a lot of established doctrine.

00:02:56 But I think we can do this.

00:02:57 We meaning the human species with enough time.

00:03:01 So I would refer to that as taking the mist out of mysticism.

00:03:06 Or another way to put it is developing a vocabulary around these really deep spiritual practices

00:03:18 that has the same precision and rigor as the vocabulary that has developed within science

00:03:25 and mathematics.

00:03:27 It took a long time and centuries of contention and confusion for science to develop the precise

00:03:38 vocabulary it now has.

00:03:42 This was not a quick thing and not an easy thing.

00:03:45 We can speak about the natural world in a very powerful and precise way now, which we

00:03:51 couldn't say 500 years ago, 1,000 years ago, and so forth.

00:03:57 So I think something like that can occur with regards to the mystical or contemplative experiences

00:04:05 that are universal to humans around the world.

00:04:08 So I call that taking the mist out of mysticism.

00:04:11 That's sort of one of the things that I view as my specialty.

00:04:16 Another thing that I view as a specialty is that the way that I work with people is interactive.

00:04:28 In other words, my system is designed to be taught and deepened and sharpened by real-time

00:04:38 interaction with a coach.

00:04:40 So if you come to a residential retreat with me, you will have at least one or two times

00:04:48 where you'll have 90 minutes where it's just you and me.

00:04:53 Well not exactly just you, it's effectively just you and me.

00:05:00 That's a little complicated to explain how I do that, but I multi-process

several people

00:05:06 working on telephones, but each one is privately working with me.

00:05:10 I give you a technique, you get set up, I go work with somebody else, five, ten minutes

00:05:15 later I come back, okay, when you did that technique, this or this may have happened,

00:05:21 tell me which one happened.

00:05:22 Depending on what you tell me, we're going to either keep to the same guidance, slightly

00:05:26 modify it, give you some new information, give you a choice of options, suggest that

00:05:30 you do this, etc., etc.

00:05:32 It's an algorithm that loops and branches.

00:05:35 Then I get you optimized, you're optimized now for the next five or ten minutes, I'm

00:05:39 off processing somebody else, doing the same thing for them.

00:05:43 They don't hear what you're going through because you're all on separate telephone lines.

00:05:48 Then I come back to you, okay, what happened?

00:05:52 Now if you call me up at home, if you're someone that comes to my retreats, I actually give

00:05:58 you my own home telephone number and you can call me at home, then you have a one-on-one

00:06:03 interactive session with me.

00:06:05 Unlike traditional systems that are sort of like, okay, here's the cushion, here's the

00:06:10 technique, now go off and do it, come back in a few hours, come back in a few days, come

00:06:14 back in whatever and we'll see what's happening.

00:06:19 I do micro-interactive coaching, like having a personal coach next to you while you're

00:06:25 using pieces of exercise equipment.

00:06:28 My metaphor is that my five ways are exercise stations and if you have someone from the

00:06:36 staff of the YMCA next to you while you're using the anomalous equipment, you're going

00:06:41 to have an optimal experience of using it.

00:06:45 Another specialty of mine is this interactive personal coaching way of teaching the practice.

00:06:55 Another thing that may be unique, I don't know if it is unique, but it may be unique

00:07:01 to my approach is that I didn't develop my approach alone.

00:07:07 I developed my approach through taking feedback from students and taking suggestions from

00:07:14 students.

00:07:16 Maybe 50% of what's innovative in what I teach, I didn't discover, a student discovered.

00:07:23 Sometimes a student with not a whole lot of experience, but in interacting with them,

00:07:30 they had sort of seen something that was very significant.

00:07:34 So for three decades, I've been intensely collaborating with my students, developing

00:07:43 the five way system.

00:07:44 It wasn't just like, okay, I'm alone and I'm going to figure out how to do this.

00:07:51 So it's actually been a sort of distributed collaborative endeavor.

00:07:56 And that may be, that certainly is unusual in the history of these things.

00:08:02 I don't know if it's entirely unique, but it's probably another distinctive feature

00:08:08 of what I do.