

SHINZEN'S WEIRD MEDITATION ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 So, I've been told that people like it when I talk about myself, my own experiences and

00:00:11 things like that.

00:00:15 So just for the heck of it, since I listen to your reports about your meditation, I thought

00:00:25 you might, I don't know, for what it's worth, be interested in hearing my report about my

00:00:30 meditation.

00:00:31 Now, this is just one person's experience, though, remember, so the danger in this is

00:00:38 to think, well, that's what Shinzen does, so that's what I should be doing.

00:00:45 But not the case, profoundly not the case.

00:00:53 My standard answer to the question, how should I meditate, what's my standard answer?

00:01:03 Whatever works.

00:01:05 Claims are made, systems have strong points, they have weak points.

00:01:11 And even a given individual may relate to one system at one point in their spiritual

00:01:16 itinerary, they may relate to quite a different way of working later on.

00:01:22 So I'm not about to give the, I want to avoid giving the impression that there's a certain

00:01:31 way that everybody should be doing practice.

00:01:35 So I had a really intense and unusual experience during the process as I was guiding you in

00:01:47 meditation in your practice today.

00:01:51 So I wasn't following my own guidance, I got off on this other riff, okay.

00:02:01 So what happened was is that I was sort of doing a version of outer sea rest, okay, that's

00:02:17 the like looking out but not at, sort of the defocusing of the eyes that you know about.

00:02:26 But I did a variation on it.

00:02:29 It was sort of like a combination of sea out and sea rest, in the sense that I experimented

00:02:41 to see how, with making a very, very small aperture, but just enough of an aperture that

00:02:54 pretty vivid patches of color would appear, okay.

00:03:01 And so it was sort of like sea out because it was color but it was right on

the cusp

00:03:09 of this urge to look at it as an object, okay, right on the cusp.

00:03:16 So what I saw was this field of patches of different colors that was the room in all

00:03:24 of you folks.

00:03:27 And then I sort of collapsed the distance between me and those color patches.

00:03:34 And those color patches were like paper thin but very vivid.

00:03:39 It was like really, you know, it's interesting the word in Sanskrit, rupa, is ambiguous.

00:03:48 It means both color and form.

00:03:51 So it means color, it means form, but it also means matter in the sense of materiality.

00:03:59 And you have to be a little careful when reading traditional Buddhist literature because sometimes

00:04:03 like in the phrase nama rupa, in this case rupa means matter as opposed to nama which

00:04:10 is mind.

00:04:11 But in other cases it literally means color or form, etc.

00:04:18 So I was looking at rupa in the sense of just patches of color.

00:04:27 So it was like really vivid, bright, but like paper thin.

00:04:36 And what that created was this huge need to look at what the object was, to not look at

00:04:51 it as just a patch of color.

00:04:54 And it was a need that I can only describe as being like the need to breathe.

00:05:03 It was like I'm just going to die unless I objectify that color patch, those patches,

00:05:13 and look at them as people and the room and so forth.

00:05:21 And the way that it, the form that it took was that, okay, so the subject of self, see

00:05:28 in, hear in, feel in.

00:05:32 Now there are many layers of activation within that system.

00:05:40 There's the surface that you could be aware of, but then below the surface there are subtle

00:05:47 associational spreads.

00:05:50 There are, they are many, but they're much lighter, thinner in a sense.

00:05:57 And then around those are subtler spreads.

00:06:02 So it's not like there's just three strands, see, mental image, mental talk, and emotional

00:06:08 body.

00:06:09 If you think of it as like three colors, so imagine that you have this big

red, this big

00:06:20 red rope, but when you look really carefully, carefully at that red rope, it's got like

00:06:27 green and blue mixed in.

00:06:30 And then if you take one of those little strands of green or blue, you see, well, you know

00:06:34 what, it's got some red and some other thing mixed in.

00:06:37 So it's really tangled, and it's tangled at many scales of subtlety.

00:06:45 So I didn't have any surface, I didn't have much surface organized, see in, hear in, feel

00:06:56 in, in the sense of the ordinary self kind of arising.

00:07:02 But I was aware of this undercurrent, this constant deep, deep, deep sort of swirling

00:07:14 of subtle see in, hear in, feel in that was going on, and what it was trying to do is

00:07:21 make sense of things.

00:07:24 And so that was part of what was driving that urge to objectify the patches of color.

00:07:32 But that wasn't the main thing that was driving the urge.

00:07:37 I don't know if I should even talk, I mean, you know, people say they want me to do this,

00:07:41 but I can see it's already getting weird and it's going to get weirder.

00:07:46 So I've never tried this before, so we'll just see what happens.

00:07:51 Okay, so there's this sort of background of really deep, really subtle flowing see in,

00:08:00 hear in, feel in that's so deep and so subtle that it's not really clear what it is.

00:08:08 But it's churning down there and it's trying to make sense of the world.

00:08:14 But what was really interesting was that, I don't know how to put it, cutting through,

00:08:25 like you know, like a hot knife through butter.

00:08:29 So cutting through that was this constant movement of incandescent terror, to borrow

00:08:48 a phrase from T.S.

00:08:51 Jackson, that would go away if I only looked at the world the way I usually look at it.

00:09:00 And it was deep and just hot, that's the only way I can describe it to you.

00:09:12 But because of years and years and years of practice, it was flowing.

00:09:18 So it was also blissful.

00:09:20 But it was absolutely incandescent, paralytic terror, associated with being right on the

00:09:29 cusp.

00:09:34 You know, it's like withholding an orgasm or something, sorry, okay I knew it was coming.

00:09:43 I just got it.

00:09:44 But, okay, but I'm not, I'm sorry, that's what it was like.

00:09:53 And the urge was, in this case, was to objectify the patches of dark and bright, the patches

00:10:00 of colors.

00:10:01 It was like, I just have to, but I'm not, I'm gonna suspend that.

00:10:07 And what was driving it was the terror.

00:10:09 But fortunately it was flowing so it was actually pleasant.

00:10:16 And otherwise it would be impossible to do this.

00:10:21 So it was like this magic world.

00:10:30 Because there was, my eyes, so then I was experimenting with aperture, okay, like how

00:10:38 wide can I get it and still just see patches of color and not give in to that need to make

00:10:44 an object.

00:10:45 Sasaki Roshi, some of you know this story, the first time I ever had a sanzen, or what

00:10:55 they call sanzen in Japanese, it's a one-on-one zen interview.

00:11:00 First time I ever had sanzen with him.

00:11:03 I can't remember exactly what he says, most of our sanzens were in Japanese, but, and

00:11:12 this was once.

00:11:14 I don't remember the exact words, but I remember the general purport, which was, okay, Shinzen,

00:11:26 you've been a monk in Japan, you know what this trip is about.

00:11:31 I'm tired of these wimpy Americans.

00:11:34 I expect you to reach the point where you never need to make an object out of self or

00:11:45 world again.

00:11:49 Okay, now, sometimes zen teachers intentionally use ambiguous language, but other times zen

00:12:04 teachers are very, very precise in their language.

00:12:11 Did you hear exactly what he said?

00:12:13 Because this was precise, okay.

00:12:15 He didn't say, reach the point where you don't make an object out of the world or the self.

00:12:21 He said, reach the point where you no longer need to make an object out of the world.

00:12:27 But I'll tell you what arose in my image space when he said that.

00:12:32 I had this image of him handing me a revolver and saying, okay, here's the

gun, here's the

00:12:40 bullets, put it to your head and blow it off, because, I mean, not make an object.

00:12:46 You're dead, right?

00:12:47 I mean, if you're not making corpses, don't make an object out of self.

00:12:54 But what the saving grace was is that I could see moment by moment, just by watching him,

00:13:01 that indeed, that's what he was experiencing.

00:13:04 I could also see that that did not one whit interfere with his ability to enjoy life and

00:13:14 to deal with life in an efficacious way.

00:13:19 In fact, it very much empowered both of those.

00:13:24 So I had this living proof that as counterintuitive as it might seem, it's like, who wants that?

00:13:33 I could see he was doing it.

00:13:36 It was evident in his body language.

00:13:39 And I could see it really worked.

00:13:41 It made him happy and powerful in the world.

00:13:47 So I guess it was okay.

00:13:51 If I were to describe the body language, I would say that he has the body language of

00:13:58 Ray Charles.

00:13:59 Now, if you've ever watched Ray Charles, it's like, you sort of can't take your eyes off

00:14:05 him.

00:14:06 It's just something that you don't know what it is, but you just, you're mesmerized.

00:14:14 Well, what I think you're seeing is there's one blind man that completely accepts his

00:14:22 blindness.

00:14:23 He does not need anymore to see the world as an object, and that's reflected in his

00:14:29 body language.

00:14:37 So this was sort of a case in point.

00:14:40 I could really see the structure of what was like driving me to turn colors of patches

00:14:48 into people and objects and rooms and so forth, colored patches.

00:14:53 So because of the years of training and skill and whatever, I was able to just maintain

00:15:00 this indefinitely.

00:15:01 And it was like really, really fun.

00:15:08 So it was an interesting, you know, sort of, ah, I see that's one way that

these sensory

00:15:20 structures work.

00:15:21 But then it got weirder.

00:15:25 Got really weird.

00:15:30 Because we're in this church, right?

00:15:34 Chapel.

00:15:35 And it became every church in the world and every synagogue and every mosque and every

00:15:46 guru bar, etc., etc., etc.

00:15:50 I mean like in a really tangible way.

00:15:56 Like a really tangible way.

00:16:03 And then I was thinking, oh, I remember something a little like this many, many decades ago.

00:16:14 And you know what that was, right?

00:16:19 Psychedelics.

00:16:20 Except no psychedelics.

00:16:23 This is 100% attentional skills.

00:16:31 Attention, clarity, equanimity, that's it.

00:16:34 But it was a trip.

00:16:37 And unlike psychedelics, it didn't just go away.

00:16:41 It's like just there and there and there and there.

00:16:44 So there was this sense of transcending time and space in a very tangible way.

00:16:54 Now why would that happen?

00:16:57 I wasn't really seeing the chapel as an object, but some part of me was processing it as what

00:17:07 it was, but more in the sense of the platonic ideal.

00:17:14 You know, it's interesting we have this word ideal.

00:17:18 If you look it up historically, it comes from a notion of Plato, that there are these universal

00:17:25 perfect forms.

00:17:28 And it's quite evident from reading Plato that he didn't just come up with this entirely

00:17:34 by intellectual speculation.

00:17:41 I think he had actual experiences.

00:17:44 So these idealized perfect forms of things is an aspect of how deep image space works.

00:18:00 I do a lot of my practice in visual experience.

00:18:05 Yesterday I mentioned that you don't necessarily have to maintain a formal technique all the

00:18:14 day.

00:18:15 For most people that's just not feasible, and you shouldn't think of that as

a defeat,

00:18:20 but you should have some practice in life, you should touch base.

00:18:24 But actually I do attempt to maintain technique during most of the day.

00:18:31 And if I am not doing the technique, it's actually a conscious decision, so it's almost

00:18:36 the other way around.

00:18:37 I decide, okay, let's take a little vacation, let's not get one-sided here, let's just go

00:18:42 unconscious and munch on a burrito and watch TV or whatever, without practicing.

00:18:53 But usually, like now, I have a technique going, right now as I'm talking to you.

00:19:00 And once again I hesitate to talk about it because it's like, well, okay, that's what

00:19:05 he does, so that's what I should be doing, it's not that.

00:19:08 But what I find, what allows me to be continuously tasting a deep meditative state is see out.

00:19:19 And I alluded to that earlier today when I said, you know, there's like a hundred thousand

00:19:26 shifts in the visual field.

00:19:28 See out, gone, see out, gone, see out, gone, see out, gone, see out, gone.

00:19:35 I'm actually verbalizing exactly what I'm noting, but the noting is on autopilot.

00:19:42 It just happens in the visual field for me.

00:19:45 But it took years and years and years of practice.

00:19:49 The first koan that Sasaki Roshi gave in that first interview, where, as I say, he handed

00:19:56 me the revolver and said, I want you to spiritually kill yourself, not physically.

00:20:03 The first koan was, when you see the flower, how do you experience true love?

00:20:10 And then when you can't do it, he says, okay, I'll make it easier.

00:20:17 When you see the flower, how do you experience God?

00:20:19 Oh, you don't get it yet?

00:20:22 Okay, like five months later, okay, well, I'll make it easier.

00:20:26 When you see the flower, how do you become free from yourself?

00:20:30 It's all the same thing, right?

00:20:35 Well, how do you become free from yourself?

00:20:38 Well, how does the self arise?

00:20:40 When the eyes are turned towards a flower, a self is going to arise as he in here and

00:20:47 feel it, isn't it?

00:20:49 Well if that doesn't arise, and if the visual field does not fixate, he can tell by your

00:20:58 body language and so forth, that's how you pass the koan, not by explaining everything.

00:21:06 You have to actually see the flower and everything.

00:21:10 Because then the next thing is, okay, you experience God when you see the flower, now

00:21:15 how do you experience God when you see Roshi?

00:21:17 Okay, now you've got to look at him and do it.

00:21:25 And you'll be amazed, even though you know exactly what you're supposed to do, it ain't

00:21:29 so easy.

00:21:30 They took him to see a Charlie Chaplin movie once, and afterwards they asked him, Roshi,

00:21:39 what do you think of Charlie Chaplin?

00:21:42 And he said, Charlie Chaplin, very great actor, but I am a better actor.

00:21:52 It's an authentic American Zen story.

00:22:03 Meaning someone told me it, and it should have happened even if it didn't.

00:22:09 One of the monks told me that that happened, so let's propagate that.

00:22:16 I wasn't there.

00:22:21 But I'll tell you, I was there translating when he said that enlightened masters should

00:22:30 model themselves on scientists.

00:22:35 And I mean, Sasaki Roshi is an old timer, 105 years old.

00:22:43 What does that mean?

00:22:44 Well, did you see the movie The Last Samurai?

00:22:48 If you saw that movie, that movie took place at the transition from feudalism to modern

00:22:56 Japan.

00:22:57 And there was a young emperor, remember the kid that he talks to that is the emperor when

00:23:04 he finally meets the emperor?

00:23:06 That was emperor Meiji.

00:23:08 So Sasaki Roshi can remember that emperor's funeral.

00:23:14 He's just one generation out of medieval Japan.

00:23:21 So for such an old timer to have such a radical notion, and it was specific, science improves

00:23:32 in each generation.

00:23:35 The paradigms and technologies of enlightenment should model themselves on that.

00:23:41 They should improve with each generation.

00:23:45 If you're as enlightened as your teacher, if you're as good a teacher as your

teacher,

00:23:52 you only have half the virtue of your teacher, is the phrase that he used.

00:23:58 Okay, well, that's a whole other little riff.

00:24:01 Let's get back to my epiphany in the chapel.

00:24:06 So what's going on here?

00:24:10 Why would the, you know, I'm not exactly into mystical schmistical, okay, but this is sensory

00:24:18 experience that is significant.

00:24:23 Why would this happen?

00:24:25 Well, it has to do with the freeing up of the deep levels of visual association.

00:24:37 There's see out and there's see in.

00:24:42 What's behind see out?

00:24:43 Well, presumably what's behind see out is an endless chain of causality that has led

00:24:51 to this object or that object and so forth.

00:24:56 That's called pratityasamutpada in traditional Buddhism, usually translated as a conditioned

00:25:04 co-arising.

00:25:05 Although utpada is a very interesting word because ut, it's actually cognate to the English

00:25:12 word out, but in Sanskrit it doesn't mean out, it means up, up.

00:25:18 And padati means to fall, so utpadati means to fall up.

00:25:24 So you know what it means to fall down, it just happens.

00:25:27 A leaf falls, it just happens.

00:25:33 This world, according to Buddhism, falls up into existence, the way a leaf falls down,

00:25:42 which is rather extraordinarily similar to a notion in physics called entropy.

00:25:49 Is that a coincidence?

00:25:53 Maybe.

00:25:54 But to me it's intriguing.

00:25:58 So pratitya means connected, or interdependent.

00:26:06 Samut means together, ut means up, and pada means falling.

00:26:13 So falling up together through interconnectedness.

00:26:17 The Japanese word is much shorter, it's engi.

00:26:23 Ti means arising, and en means connection, so connection arising, engi.

00:26:31 In Mandarin Chinese it would be pronounced yuanqi.

00:26:35 Now what's interesting is that as a technical term, engi means what I just said, it translates

00:26:43 the Sanskrit pratityasamutpada.

00:26:47 But it's also an ordinary colloquial word in Japanese that, well actually the

n part

00:27:02 of it, which is an abbreviation of engi, the n is an ordinary word in Japanese that means

00:27:14 relationship or connection.

00:27:16 If you sense that you have a natural connection with someone, then they say you have n with

00:27:24 that person.

00:27:27 So the flower koan, there's another version of the flower koan.

00:27:35 The older version, when I first started translating for him, wasn't how do you see God when you

00:27:41 see the flower.

00:27:43 For years he talked about how do you make a relationship with the flower.

00:27:48 Of course it's exactly the same thing.

00:27:51 It's another way to say, and if you think he's talking about different things, then

00:27:55 you get really confused.

00:27:56 And of course as soon as he says relationship, then it's like people get all tripped out

00:28:04 on relationship.

00:28:05 It's like a big buzzword for people, a big hot, warm, cold button, what have you.

00:28:13 So then you're all tripped out on that.

00:28:15 You don't really listen to what he means by relationship.

00:28:19 But of course he's also implying that interpersonal relationships are best dealt with the same

00:28:27 way you relate to experiencing God when you see the flower.

00:28:33 Because after you pass the flower and you look at him, then he says, okay when you see

00:28:38 your lover, how do you experience freedom from yourself, etc.

00:28:46 So this connectivity, as you well know, I don't claim, I try to be very, what would

00:29:01 be the word, modest in my claims.

00:29:07 I don't really claim to know any reality other than how the senses work.

00:29:15 So I don't know what's out there in terms of the objective world.

00:29:20 But if I had to make a guess as to what's behind see out, what we're actually looking

00:29:29 at when we look at this color and form, which as you can see is quite labile, my guess would

00:29:40 be that it's a vast network of connections without any things being connected.

00:29:50 Now, hey, don't meditate on this, okay.

00:29:56 This is just, I said, if I had to make a wild guess.

00:29:59 You know, what's really interesting is, and once again this is probably just a coincidence,

00:30:10 but if I say mathematics, most of you probably think, well, it's very abstract.

00:30:21 Especially, say, upper division or university level mathematics, sort of like abstract.

00:30:35 Among mathematicians, there's a branch of mathematics that they consider abstract.

00:30:43 If you read any Wikipedia article on any math topic, you know how the Wikipedia, it's organized

00:30:54 in a certain way.

00:30:55 The first sentence is supposed to be something that a high school or junior high person can

00:31:01 understand.

00:31:02 And the first paragraph is supposed to be something that certainly most people can understand.

00:31:10 But then they're allowed to go deeper and deeper and deeper into a subject.

00:31:16 So that by the time you reach the end, at least in the math articles, you're dealing

00:31:20 with the most advanced levels of mathematics.

00:31:24 Like if you look up multiplication, for example, it will start with what you learned when you

00:31:30 were six years old.

00:31:31 But in the end, there's going to be something that is so abstract that you will wonder what

00:31:38 in the world is this.

00:31:41 And that the last part of each article on math topics in the Wikipedia is taken from

00:31:49 that branch of mathematics that even mathematicians jokingly refer to as generalized abstract

00:31:58 nonsense.

00:32:01 And just for your reference, oh, by the way, how many times have you heard me say the way

00:32:11 to learn technical terms is to not attempt to associate them with what they mean in ordinary

00:32:20 English.

00:32:21 That will completely and totally screw you up.

00:32:29 Right?

00:32:30 When I try to explain what see in, hear in, feel in, et cetera, et cetera, I ask you,

00:32:36 don't associate it with ordinary English.

00:32:38 These are going to be defined in a certain way.

00:32:40 So anyway, I'm going to tell you what this branch of mathematics is called.
00:32:43 And it's an ordinary word.
00:32:45 And you're going to think it has something to do with what you think that word means.
00:32:49 And it don't.
00:32:50 Or if it does, it's like so beyond that you don't have to worry about it.
00:32:59 Anyway, it's called category theory.
00:33:02 You can look it up if you want to really see something abstract.
00:33:06 Why do I even mention this?
00:33:07 Well, what's interesting is that many mathematicians believe that this is the foundations of mathematics,
00:33:24 not set theory.
00:33:28 This is really the deepest, most powerful statement that math has made to date.
00:33:37 And if mathematics is the language of physics, and physics is the language of our best understanding
00:33:45 of the material world, then what's at the base of mathematics may, I don't know, maybe
00:33:57 have something to do with what's at the base of spirituality.
00:34:02 Anyway, why I mention this is, in this particular branch of mathematics, the only thing that
00:34:15 you're interested in is arrows that point.
00:34:23 And what do they point to?
00:34:24 Other arrows.
00:34:27 The objects are just arrows pointing to themselves.
00:34:32 It looks and smells like pratityasamutpada.
00:34:38 It's just this connected to this, it points this way, it points that way.
00:34:44 But there's no thingness here.
00:34:47 It's all directions and relations.
00:34:52 And it turns out that that's our most powerful statement.
00:34:58 And our ordinary arithmetic is a trivial consequence of this.
00:35:06 So anyway, if I had to make a guess, I think that there are just arrows pointing to arrows
00:35:13 pointing to arrows pointing to arrows.
00:35:14 This being that is not, this not being that is not, okay, you may have heard the talk
00:35:20 in those terms.
00:35:21 So there's this vast realm of connectivity, presumably, that is what is.
00:35:30 Color and form appear, my guess is that color and form are an abbreviated language that
00:35:36 the brain has come up with in order to represent what, in a way convenient to our species,

00:35:46 that vast network.
00:35:47 This is just a conjecture on my part.
00:35:50 But what I can tell you for sure is that when you look into image space, when you look visually
00:35:57 in the other direction, you actually see that vast network.
00:36:02 Which is your imaginesmundi, your stored images of the world.
00:36:11 It's constantly flipping through them like a rolodex at lightning speed.
00:36:17 When you look at the image space, when you look at the blank mental screen, sometimes
00:36:24 you might notice that there's a kind of shimmering there.
00:36:30 That can be various things, it can have physical causes.
00:36:34 But one of the things that it can be is the subconscious visual mind flipping through
00:36:38 the rolodex.
00:36:40 And you can get a sense that you're looking at worlds, and some of those worlds are memory,
00:36:49 but some of them are fantasy worlds, mythological worlds, possum worlds.
00:36:56 There's just a lot down there, and it just propagates.
00:37:01 But it's all color and form, just very, very subtle.
00:37:10 But it's the part that's so far in, it is me, you, it's my visual mind, but it's the
00:37:21 sort of part of me that is so far in that's sort of out.
00:37:27 It sort of connects with that other network.
00:37:34 So I think that's why I was in every church and mosque and synagogue, because the inner
00:37:47 and outer visual worlds were all getting unfixated and merging.
00:37:57 So it was really interesting that the fear level, like I say, it was like paralytic,
00:38:05 incandescent terror, just slowly sort of like, I don't know, like seaweed in a tide pool
00:38:14 just moving through my whole body.
00:38:17 And it was like, you know, it was scary, but it was blissful at the same time.
00:38:26 So that was my morning.