

Inside Shinzen's Brain: How Shinzen Experiences his Daily Life

00:00:00 I'm interested in what happens inside your brain in any given day.
00:00:12 Obviously from doing this practice for as long as you've been doing it,
00:00:18 you're functioning in a different way.
00:00:21 And I remember you telling me of how they hooked you up one time
00:00:25 to get your brain studied at the University of Arizona.
00:00:30 And the technician came in to you and said,
00:00:35 now don't start meditating yet until we turn on the equipment.
00:00:39 And you said, as if I could stop.
00:00:42 And you used the analogy of saying it's as if you asked someone with a lot of muscles
00:00:48 to just don't have muscles for a minute.
00:00:50 It's so much a part of how you function.
00:00:53 I'd like you to give me a taste of what it's like inside your brain
00:01:01 in any given day as best you can.
00:01:05 Just in terms of your processing,
00:01:08 I know you've talked about meditating in the visual field.
00:01:13 I would just be, if you could just give me a taste of how you process your experience
00:01:21 and what's deliberate, applying a technique and what just happens.
00:01:26 If I were to give the big picture of what my days are like,
00:01:33 I would say that typically on any given day,
00:01:40 my experience ranges from a scattered and unconscious,
00:01:48 in a sense as though I had never meditated.
00:01:52 I'm choosing my words carefully.
00:01:55 In a sense as though I had never meditated.
00:01:58 It ranges from that to a direct contact with the spiritual source involving
00:02:10 literally seeing through this world as I'm bopping around within it,
00:02:17 which is also an experience of myself and the world arising from and returning to the source.
00:02:29 So my experience ranges between something like a person that has never meditated
00:02:38 and something like absolute oneness with absolute fulfillment.
00:02:48 It ranges between those.
00:02:53 The main feature, what the impact of the 40 years of practice is,
00:02:59 is I don't have much preference between those two states.
00:03:06 Someone once asked a Roshi in my presence what his definition of enlightenment is.
00:03:15 He said,
00:03:17 悟りと悟りでないとの区別がなくなることでしょう。
00:03:23 Which in Japanese means, I guess you could say enlightenment is the passing away
00:03:29 of the distinction between enlightenment and non-enlightenment.
00:03:34 That was Mayuzumi Roshi, a very famous Roshi in Los Angeles.

00:03:39 He has many students all over the world, great students that are doing great work.

00:03:45 So anyway, it ranges from completely deluded to quasi-enlightened without a preference between those.

00:03:56 And that's what's just naturally arising, that's not with an applied effort of any...

00:04:03 That's correct. If there's an applied effort,

00:04:05 then obviously it starts to valence towards that state of energy and emptiness.

00:04:14 But the main feature in daily life is there's not a preference,

00:04:18 which is in stark contrast to when I began my practice,

00:04:22 and probably in stark contrast to just about where everyone begins,

00:04:27 because when you begin, you want something.

00:04:29 You want to think you're getting somewhere.

00:04:31 You want certain experiences.

00:04:33 So my early years of practice were preoccupied with comparing maps

00:04:40 and finding every possible experience and every description,

00:04:45 and then needing to have all of those experiences,

00:04:47 and wanting to have this or that happen.

00:04:50 Which is what I think a lot of people...

00:04:53 You've got to start somewhere, so that's sort of natural.

00:04:56 So I would say the biggest change that has taken place is that

00:05:01 I don't have that big a preference between enlightenment and non-enlightenment.

00:05:07 That's sort of the big picture.

00:05:09 Then if I'm intending to meditate in action, in life,

00:05:17 like I'm talking to you now, okay.

00:05:19 So if I'm going to be intentionally meditating,

00:05:22 now I just started to intentionally meditate as we're talking.

00:05:25 I typically meditate in the external visual field,

00:05:30 and I typically am meditating on the process of simultaneous expansion and contraction,

00:05:37 causing the world in front of me to arise and then disappear.

00:05:41 So I'm now applying a formal technique.

00:05:44 So I'm arising and disappearing right now.

00:05:46 You're arising and disappearing from the source, moment by moment.

00:05:49 Therefore, you appear to me to be the source, and therefore very effortlessly lovable.

00:05:56 I'll take it.

00:06:02 But no more lovable than the flower next to you or the garbage can outside.

00:06:11 So that would be, now if I'm doing formal practice where I'm seated and my eyes are closed,

00:06:21 I will do any of the five ways that I teach.

00:06:24 I use all my own techniques, just sort of depending on interest, opportunity, and necessity.

00:06:31 Although recently I've been tending to default to the technique that I call do-nothing,

00:06:38 the do-nothing technique.

00:06:41 That's what I've been using recently for my own formal practice.

00:06:45 That's a version of focus on rest in terms of a five-way formulation that I use.

00:06:53 When you were talking about everything dissolving into and having no preference,

00:06:59 you could in a sense define it in light, because you said,

00:07:02 I now have no preference for enlightenment or not enlightenment,
00:07:06 but is enlightenment then this process of the having no preference?
00:07:11 That's a stage.
00:07:14 In other words, first when you start, enlightenment is a figure and the world is a ground.
00:07:21 You and the world are the ground and you have this fantasy of enlightenment that's a figure.
00:07:26 At some point there's a shift, a figure-ground reversal,
00:07:32 and you and your world are the figure, and the actual experience of enlightenment is the ground.
00:07:40 You may go through many years and in fact decades of preferring to be in that state,
00:07:49 but then that tends to pass away with time.
00:07:53 If you want to know what I'm preoccupied with, I am preoccupied just like anybody.
00:08:00 If somebody wakes up and they're preoccupied with money or their health or sex or drugs or whatever,
00:08:08 I'm preoccupied.
00:08:10 There's something I default to as a sort of obsession.
00:08:16 If you understand that's somewhat in quotes, but it would be my version of being obsessed.
00:08:22 What obsession is in my consciousness.
00:08:25 The obsession is, can I figure out better ways to bring masses of people to what I experience?
00:08:36 That's what I default to.
00:08:38 It's like, how smart can I be? How creative can I be in the service of the world?
00:08:47 Not a bad default.