

# Which teachers have influenced how you teach? ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 Someone wrote in wanting to know what teachers had influenced me and what sorts of things

00:00:16 I had in my background that have informed the way that I teach meditation.

00:00:24 There's an interesting story about Sir Isaac Newton.

00:00:29 He in some ways could be looked upon as the key figure in the history of Western science.

00:00:38 In a sense, although science of course had a long history before him, things really took

00:00:44 off after he published his Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy, where he was able to

00:00:52 link a new kind of mathematics calculus to a description of the natural world.

00:01:00 This caused a revolution and it was recognized in his lifetime how extraordinary his contribution

00:01:07 was, how this was a kind of quantum leap beyond anything that had occurred before.

00:01:15 And indeed, it did sort of create the soil, the fertile soil from which modern science

00:01:24 has grown.

00:01:27 So he was praised a lot in his lifetime and he would on occasion say, well, if I've seen

00:01:35 further than other people, it's because I stood on the shoulders of giants.

00:01:41 He was referring to people like Kepler, Galileo, Copernicus, and so forth.

00:01:48 As a teacher, I don't know if I've seen further than any other teacher, but I can say for

00:01:55 sure that I have been privileged to stand on the shoulders of giants.

00:02:04 On one hand, I have the spiritual teachers that have influenced me.

00:02:14 The strongest influences are from a man named Joshu Sasaki Roshi, who is at Mount Baldy's

00:02:23 Zen Center.

00:02:24 I've been associated with him for over two decades now, well over two decades.

00:02:33 You can find him very easily on the internet.

00:02:35 He is arguably at this point, at the age of 102 and still going strong, the senior living

00:02:45 Buddhist master in the world.

00:02:47 That's been a big influence on me.

00:02:50 Although I don't in any way think of myself as teaching within the Zen lineage, he was

00:02:55 the senior teacher available to me when I was living in Los Angeles, when I'd come back

00:03:02 from Asia.

00:03:04 Even though I'd had many, many years of practice when I came back, I knew I still needed somebody

00:03:09 with vastly more practice to kick me in the butt and inspire me and keep me on track.

00:03:17 So I associated with him, even though that way of practice, Rinzai Zen, Koan practice,

00:03:24 is not really to my personal proclivity.

00:03:28 But in any event, I needed the contact with somebody like that.

00:03:32 So I don't teach in a Zen way, but I would say that his paradigm, his model for how consciousness

00:03:41 works has had a profound influence on me.

00:03:46 His paradigm is essentially a reworking of the notion of impermanence as it was formulated

00:03:54 centrally in early Buddhism.

00:03:57 He's reworked that into a vastly larger and more general model for the nature of consciousness.

00:04:08 The name of his channel is based on the name of his approach.

00:04:14 It's all based on seeing impermanence in terms of expansion and contraction.

00:04:19 So that's one huge influence.

00:04:22 A second influence on me has been through the Vipassana tradition, the mindfulness tradition.

00:04:30 In specific, I have been influenced by two lineages of Vipassana practice.

00:04:36 Both come from 20th century Burma.

00:04:40 One is the Upa-Kin lineage, which puts an enormous emphasis on body sensation.

00:04:47 And I also emphasize body sensation, not to the exclusion of other things, but just understanding

00:04:53 how important body sensation is was something that I picked up from that tradition.

00:05:01 So that's an influence.

00:05:03 Another influence is from the Mahasi Sayadaw lineage of Burmese Vipassana.

00:05:08 I took from that the noting process.

00:05:12 However, I have modified the concept of noting and the implementation of noting.

00:05:20 I've changed it somewhat from the way that it is done in the traditional Mahasi method.

00:05:26 And I don't have time now to go into the details of that, but that has been an influence.

00:05:36 Because most of the techniques that I teach involve noting sensory phenomena.

00:05:43 I've also been influenced by my original school of ordination, Vajrayana, in the Japanese

00:05:48 form, which is called Shingon.

00:05:50 In Vajrayana practice, they put a lot of emphasis on visual experience, auditory experience,

00:05:59 and somatic experience.

00:06:01 You'll sometimes see the expression, body, speech, mind.

00:06:06 All body is body.

00:06:08 Speech is auditory.

00:06:10 And mind refers to mental images, in this case.

00:06:15 The particular word that's used refers to the visualization process.

00:06:21 That somatic visual auditory way of working, both with subject of experience and object

00:06:29 of experience, that's something I picked up from the Vajrayana tradition.

00:06:32 So I stand on the back of these various masters, stand on their shoulders.

00:06:40 I also, further back, stand on the shoulders of the prehistoric shamanic explorers of consciousness,

00:06:50 whose names we don't know, but whose rituals and ceremonies, ordeals, led to them entering

00:07:01 states of concentration and equanimity, which eventually developed, when civilizations arose,

00:07:08 into the meditation techniques of these various lineages.

00:07:15 But I'm fortunate to stand also on the shoulders of Sir Isaac Newton, and Euclid, and Francis

00:07:24 Bacon, and Richard Feynman, and Albert Einstein, and James Clerk Maxwell.

00:07:35 The whole science tradition, the whole Western mathematical, empirical, rigorous, skeptical

00:07:44 pragmatism has profoundly influenced me.

00:07:48 The way that I teach is my best attempt at a fully contemporary, fully modern, and as

00:08:03 close to science as can be at this point in history, version of what that other lineage

00:08:11 of masters and prehistoric shamans had developed.

00:08:17 So I get to stand on two sets of immense shoulders, and I am immensely, immensely grateful.