

Being In Ceremony ~ Stephanie Nash

00:00:00 I'm going to do a really non-Dharma teacher thing right now.

00:00:13 I want a video of my view of all of you.

00:00:16 So just wave.

00:00:19 This is the first female Dharma talk.

00:00:23 Sorry, that was a little geek moment there.

00:00:37 Okay, so I would like to invite everyone right now to imagine that today is your birthday.

00:00:51 You can do that.

00:00:53 Alex's birthday was on Friday.

00:00:54 Does anyone else have a birthday that's actually happening while we're here?

00:00:58 No?

00:00:59 So just imagine that today is your birthday.

00:01:05 How would that change things?

00:01:08 Would you feel different about what goes on if today was your birthday?

00:01:13 How do you look at the day when it's your birthday?

00:01:17 You think about it a little differently, right?

00:01:19 It's a different kind of focus.

00:01:21 It's a special day.

00:01:25 I'm going to talk about that kind of focus.

00:01:29 I grew up in a tiny little town in Ohio, like 4,000 people, and our house was in the woods.

00:01:36 And I would go out, I loved to get away from what was going on in the house, I went out

00:01:41 into the woods.

00:01:42 That was my refuge with my dog.

00:01:43 I'm a dog person.

00:01:45 And on my birthday, when I was somewhere between 10 and 13, I can't remember anymore.

00:01:52 And by the way, we have no speaker system, so I'm projecting.

00:01:58 So if you can't hear me at any moment, just do this, and I won't assume you're saying

00:02:02 it's good.

00:02:03 Can you hear me okay now?

00:02:04 I don't know if I'm going to be able to look at you the whole time.

00:02:10 All right.

00:02:11 It is my birthday.

00:02:12 It is, it's your birthday.

00:02:18 So just imagine today's your birthday, and I'm going to tell a story about birthdays

00:02:22 and that feeling you get on your birthday.

00:02:25 So when I was somewhere between 10 and 13, it was my birthday, and what was going on

00:02:30 in our house was it was a special day that I especially wanted to not be in the house

00:02:36 for that day.

00:02:37 So for my birthday, I wanted to go in the woods and get lost.

00:02:43 Now in a small town, when you grow up, everyone knows everyone, and you know every inch of

00:02:49 the town.

00:02:50 So the idea of going somewhere in the woods, and we had like, there was a couple acres

00:02:55 of woods, and there were some woods over by a farm I'd never been over to by myself at

00:02:59 that age.

00:03:00 And the idea of being someplace where you didn't know where you were was beyond my imagination.

00:03:06 So on my birthday for this time, I went out with my dog, who was also thrilled to be out

00:03:11 of the house, and we went in the woods, and I deliberately, and if you hike, you know

00:03:16 to keep track of where you are, you always look back so you know what the view will be

00:03:19 going back.

00:03:20 I didn't.

00:03:21 I looked down, and I was twisting and turning because I wanted to get lost.

00:03:25 And I went all like this all the way, and I finally got over to a part of the woods

00:03:30 that I hadn't been before, and it was starting to get very exciting.

00:03:34 And I finally got to a place in the woods, and I stopped, and I looked in all directions,

00:03:39 and I had no idea where I was or what way to go.

00:03:45 There was a little moment of fear, but it was thrilling.

00:03:49 It was this, and everything stopped for a second.

00:03:54 I can't tell you what that was, because I was only 10 or 11 or 12, but I just kind of

00:04:02 basked in that moment of not knowing where I was.

00:04:07 And then I just picked a direction to go.

00:04:10 My dog was kind of happily beside me, and in about less than five minutes, I knew where

00:04:15 I was, and I went home.

00:04:19 Fifteen years later or so in my late 20s, I'm in New York City trying to be an actress,

00:04:25 which means I had no money, and it was my birthday, and I wanted to get lost in the

00:04:33 woods.

00:04:34 If you've ever been to Manhattan, there's Central Park, and it's a lovely park, and

00:04:42 I know every square inch of it, and I know the one place you can stand in the park and

00:04:47 not know, not see any building, but you're still not lost in the woods.

00:04:53 So I didn't have any money.

00:04:55 I had no way to get out of town, and New Yorkers don't have cars, so I called everyone I knew

00:05:00 to see if they knew some place I could go where I could get lost in the woods.

00:05:06 And my little brother had just graduated from Georgia Tech, and he had a friend whose dad

00:05:10 who had a cabin north of Jasper, Georgia, which is north of Atlanta, and they were going

00:05:16 to be gone for this 10-day period, and I could go down there for free if I could get myself

00:05:21 down there.

00:05:22 And so I was so excited, and I got myself down to Jasper, Georgia, and it's this little

00:05:27 town where everybody talks like that and says, Praise Jesus all the time, but they're happy,

00:05:32 and so I just saw these beaming beautiful people, and I'm going to get lost in the woods,

00:05:37 and I just praised Jesus with all of them because why not?

00:05:40 I was happy to be there.

00:05:42 And I finally got to my cabin in the woods, and there was orange shag carpeting.

00:05:49 There was a fireplace, and everything else was woods, and there was a little lake there.

00:05:55 It was away from everything else.

00:05:56 There was nothing else anywhere near it, and the lake didn't have a path around it, but

00:06:02 that's where I was going to get lost.

00:06:04 So I would go around the lake every day, and there was no path, so I'm climbing over things,

00:06:08 and it wasn't like my woods.

00:06:10 There was more brush and stuff, so I'm scraping and getting over, and at one point, I'm hanging
00:06:16 from this tree over a ravine that went down about as far down as that is high, and I was
00:06:23 hanging there for a minute, and I thought, You know, if I fall, no one will ever find
00:06:27 me.
00:06:28 No one knows I'm here.
00:06:30 No one on the planet knows I'm here.
00:06:32 It was very exciting, and I would make it around the lake and back.
00:06:38 It took me about three or four hours because, again, there was no path, and I'm scraped
00:06:41 and dirty and happy, and I get back, and I'm in the house, and I brought cassettes of James
00:06:47 Taylor, which tells you how long ago this was, and I had cassettes of Steve Martin,
00:06:53 Let's Get Small, but I just wasn't in the mood for that, and so I played James Taylor,
00:06:58 and I lit a fire and listened to James Taylor all night, and I did the same thing the second
00:07:02 day, and the third day, I just couldn't listen to any more James Taylor, and so I went around
00:07:08 the lake again, and I came back, and it's silent, and this is the first moment it occurs
00:07:15 to me that never in my life have I been alone.
00:07:19 I have lived with someone all of my life up until this point.
00:07:24 In New York City, I don't know if you've ever lived in New York City, but if you've seen
00:07:29 the movie The Matrix, and when Keanu Reeves' character wakes up, and he's in that thing,
00:07:34 and he sees, that's New York City.
00:07:37 Whoever did that obviously was a New Yorker.
00:07:40 Coming from the woods in New York City, even if you're alone in a room, there's someone
00:07:44 above you, there's an apartment above you, an apartment below you, there's someone to
00:07:48 that side, someone to that side, you are stacked upon stacked upon stacked upon stacked upon
00:07:52 stacked people, and you can't walk out without a human being somewhere.
00:07:57 I'd always lived with someone.
00:07:59 I had never, and we had lived in a house in the woods, but there was always someone else

00:08:02 in the house.

00:08:04 I had never been totally alone before, and it hit me this third day with no James Taylor,

00:08:11 and there's no TV, and there's no radio, and I'm alone in these, and so it's just quiet.

00:08:17 And so I came back from my hike in the woods, and I built my fire, and I sat there, and

00:08:23 then suddenly I started to get this pain in my chest, and it got worse and worse, and

00:08:29 I realized I was feeling this intense loneliness that I don't think I'd ever felt before, and

00:08:37 it was this pressure, it was this ache, and it just got worse and worse, and I thought

00:08:44 I had just never felt anything like this before, and then I started to cry, but then I thought,

00:08:49 well, that's stupid, why are you crying?

00:08:51 Lonely don't, you know, I like talked my, I judged myself out of crying, but crying still

00:08:56 happened, and then if you've ever seen The Wizard of Oz, I use that analogy for everything,

00:09:02 but this time I'll use it when the house spins, and everything's going around the cyclone,

00:09:06 and you see all the people going around as she's spinning in the house before she lands,

00:09:10 and everything, it's like I saw flashes of all these things from my life, none of which

00:09:16 were good, there was nobody I was longing for to be with, it was every fight, every

00:09:21 horrible thing, all the bad things that had happened to me, and they were all flashing

00:09:27 to me as I had this aching, oh my God, the loneliness, it hurts so bad, and I just ache

00:09:33 so bad, and I didn't think you could ache that bad, and it just, it just got more and

00:09:39 more, and yes, peacocks, it was like that, it was like a dying cat, but it was just,

00:09:48 I just didn't know, you know, I didn't know what to do, I'm alone in this house, I'd planned

00:09:53 to be there for five days, I'm only on the third day, and then I looked over at the fire,

00:09:59 and it's moving, and it's alive, and I kind of walked over to the fire, and I looked at

00:10:06 it, and it was like this living creature, and I started to get mesmerized by the fire,
00:10:12 and I was looking at it, and I'd spent a lot of time with fires, we had five fireplaces
00:10:17 in my house growing up, and I was looking at the fire, and you know, on the top was
00:10:22 the most massive part of the fire, and down below, as I was looking, were these, like
00:10:27 down around one log, when a little individual flame would come up, and then another individual
00:10:34 flame, and there were like these little individuals that weren't part of the mass of the whole,
00:10:39 and I don't know if you've ever watched fires, but they're happy, fires aren't sad, and I
00:10:45 was looking at this fire as I was feeling this ache, and the more I just kind of went
00:10:50 into watching this fire, I became kind of hypnotized by it, I was kind of entranced
00:10:55 by this fire, and I started looking at these little individual fires that were separate,
00:11:01 they were their own thing, and I'd watch them, and I'd watch them move, and how they were
00:11:05 happy and moving around, and they were kind of like these living creatures to me, and
00:11:11 then I noticed these little creatures, and they had their own life, and their own dance,
00:11:16 and then if they had any opportunity at all, they'd try to join the big fire, even though
00:11:23 if they joined that big fire, they'd disappear, they are annihilated, they don't exist anymore,
00:11:30 it's this individual little event, and suddenly it's just part of the big, it disappeared,
00:11:37 for me, hell was like someone said, oh, just like being a drop in the water, to me that
00:11:41 would be hell, I was in New York trying to be an actress, right?
00:11:44 It was like, and the fact that these little flames were seeking out other flames, and
00:11:50 they had this life, and they were sacrificing their life happily to become part of the big
00:11:54 happy, and I just kept watching this fire, this later, years later, I refer to this as
00:12:00 a fire meditation that I did years later, but this was a decade before I

meditated,

00:12:07 and I was watching this fire, and later on in the fire, I noticed that I had become quite

00:12:13 calm as I was watching this fire, and then the fire started to get less and less, and

00:12:19 the fire had been my friend, it was like this living creature, and I was watching it live

00:12:23 and die, and be born, little ones get born, and then they would join the other, and give

00:12:28 up their lives to be part of this whole, and then as the fire got less and less, I realized

00:12:34 that I was feeling quite peaceful, and happy, and instead of going in the bedroom to sleep

00:12:40 that night, I slept in front of the fire, and we went to sleep together, and I woke

00:12:46 up the next morning, and it was a fascinating thing, the loneliness was gone, and I have

00:12:53 never for an instant since that moment experienced loneliness, it was gone, and I, in the last

00:13:04 forty years of my life, I have lived alone for thirty of them, and I've never been lonely,

00:13:12 in fact I take vacations to be alone, because I don't get enough alone time, okay, maybe

00:13:18 it's because I teach and act, and when I'm with people, I'm really with people, and I

00:13:23 call these things, I call it my people fast, and I go camping, and I go, and when I came

00:13:28 to California in ninety two is when I really started doing it, and I go camping by myself,

00:13:34 in total solitude, usually on top of a mountain, although for the last fifteen years I have

00:13:39 a nice little spot up on the coast of California, where I get to watch the sun and moon set

00:13:44 into the ocean from my sleeping bag, and it's an environmental site, there's no one anywhere,

00:13:50 and I go up for anywhere from four to twelve days, by myself, at least twice a year, never

00:13:57 lonely for an instant, okay, and people, when I tell them I do these camping trips, I usually

00:14:05 get three questions, the first one is, are too afraid, and of course, don't be silly,

00:14:14 this is my refuge, nature is my, that's my womb, right, the second question

for some

00:14:20 reason, I don't know why everyone asks it, but what do you eat?

00:14:25 I have no idea why people ask that question, and I used to just take whatever food I could

00:14:30 have, but after I did a vision quest years later, which I'll tell you about in a minute,

00:14:34 but a vision quest is a Native American ceremony, we spend four days and nights alone on a mountain

00:14:40 with no food or water, and of course, the alone on the mountain part is what they think

00:14:45 of as a sacrifice, I'm good with that, no food, I could go, no water, you know, you

00:14:51 lose your mind a little bit on the third night, or I did, anyway, but the reason I'm bringing

00:14:57 that up in terms of what do you eat, on your vision quest, you have no food, so your relationship

00:15:03 to animals is quite different when you have no food, right?

00:15:09 Animals just want to know, are you going to eat them, or can they eat something you have,

00:15:14 right?

00:15:15 And I remember when I went on my vision quest, you know, you're in a small six by six foot

00:15:22 space with no tent, you don't have a tent there, and you're out in the open, and it's

00:15:27 surrounded by prayer ties, which are, you pray with tobacco, and you put it in a little

00:15:32 piece of cloth, and you wrap it up, and you make a prayer with it, and they're your prayers,

00:15:37 and there's 200 prayer ties, so your prayers, you're surrounded by your prayers in this

00:15:41 little open exposed spot, and they say, animals will not cross your boundary, the walluta

00:15:50 will protect you, I think the animals just smell the tobacco, but in any event, when

00:15:54 I did my vision quest, it just so happened that I put my sight in the middle of what

00:16:00 turned out to be a four lane animal highway.

00:16:04 It was the only spot where two bridges joined, so at night, when it got night, you know,

00:16:09 in the day, I'm going, isn't this wonderful, and at night, I'd hear the animals come in,

00:16:13 and they go, stop, you know, like, what's there, some big animal made a nest

in the

00:16:18 middle of their path, right?

00:16:21 And then I heard them all kind of gathering around, going, what do we do, I don't know,

00:16:24 do we go around with it?

00:16:26 And then I kind of made sounds like, you know, I wanted them to go about their business,

00:16:31 but I wanted to go about mine, and they just realized there was an animal in their path

00:16:35 that made a nest, what do they do?

00:16:38 And so I just started making sounds because I thought that I wanted them to know that

00:16:43 I'm staying, but I'm not interested in them, so I, you know, and they kind of, you know,

00:16:52 just kind of did it and settled, and then slowly, then little ones would just kind of

00:16:56 go by, and little ones would go by, and I went to sleep with animals just kind of moving

00:16:59 around me during the course of the night.

00:17:02 And I loved that relationship with animals during my whole vision quest, once someone

00:17:06 would just kind of come up and sniff and go by.

00:17:09 So people ask me back to my camping trips, what do I eat?

00:17:14 And I take very little food for that reason, I like that relationship with animals.

00:17:18 There's a third question I get when people say, you know, you're going up for 12 days

00:17:23 alone on a hill, is what do you do?

00:17:28 And in fact, Shenzhen asked me, what do you do?

00:17:34 And I said, really?

00:17:35 You don't know what I do?

00:17:36 And he went, no, I really don't.

00:17:41 But I think maybe he couldn't imagine being alone on a mountain, and maybe that was part

00:17:45 of it.

00:17:46 But one thing I do say when everyone asks me, what do you do?

00:17:54 I say, I don't know, but that 12 days goes by like four hours.

00:17:59 It just goes by like that, it's gone.

00:18:02 Now I have different techniques I do, usually when I'm on the hill, I'm sitting here and

00:18:07 I'm looking at the ocean, and I'm on a little jet of wind that goes out into the ocean on

00:18:11 the California coast, so it's kind of like I'm at sea, like whales will be out there,
00:18:16 and I've got sky moving all around, and I've got the grass right here blowing in the wind,
00:18:23 and I can see it right now, and the trees are right here, and so there's this flow everywhere.
00:18:29 And I know I just sit there and watch flow until there is just flow, and I'm not really
00:18:35 there anymore.
00:18:37 And I also know that when I get there, climbing up, because to get to this site that is away
00:18:43 from other people, you've got to hike in, and I take stuff, right?
00:18:48 So it takes me four hours of going back and forth, and the hill is about 45 degree angle,
00:18:53 so I get this little cart behind me, and I don't weigh a lot, and I put a lot back there,
00:19:01 so the cart sometimes is a little heavier than I am, because I want to get stuff up
00:19:05 there, and so I'll have the cart behind me, and so I'm bent over forward at a 45 degree
00:19:11 angle, so my face, the dirt is here, and my face is here.
00:19:15 Sorry, my Madonna thing is moving.
00:19:18 And so I will literally go up the hill that way, and I used to go into meditation, you
00:19:24 know, and do see rest, or see out, or something like that, but what I now do when I'm carrying
00:19:30 my cart, who is seeing?
00:19:33 Who is pulling?
00:19:34 I just do a couple questions of self inquiry, and then there is just activity happening,
00:19:39 and I'm not really there, right?
00:19:41 And so that's kind of, so when I'm on the hill, everyone says, what do you do?
00:19:44 It's like, I don't know, because I'm not there.
00:19:48 I'm not there.
00:19:51 So anyway, the other thing I wanted to say is, what I noticed started to happen, these
00:19:56 trips started as my gift to myself for my birthday.
00:20:01 Then they became something I had to do.
00:20:03 It's like if I didn't do it that year, it was like, I forgot, it's like saying you forgot
00:20:08 to eat, or sleep, or breathe, or you know, it was an essential thing I

needed.

00:20:13 In fact, I'm going on a trip after this retreat for a week.

00:20:20 But I noticed something started happening.

00:20:23 When I'm getting ready to go, I'm packing up to go for camping, I noticed the minute

00:20:31 I'm done fixing everything I have to do in my life, you know, you had to come on retreat,

00:20:35 the minute I start packing, something would click, and I was in ceremony.

00:20:41 It was like, I got it from my birthday ceremony.

00:20:44 It was like, ah, it was my birthday.

00:20:46 There was something about the packing and everything that it didn't matter if I was

00:20:51 there or not.

00:20:52 In fact, I've been there so many times, I know every rock and thing.

00:20:55 I don't even have to go, it's here, it's inside me, you know, but every, the packing itself,

00:21:01 everything clicked in, and I was in ceremony, and I was just happy, driving up, and it didn't

00:21:07 matter if I was doing a meditation technique or not, this kind of in ceremony thing would

00:21:12 click in and happen, and I didn't have the word in ceremony until after I did Native

00:21:17 American ceremonies, that's where I learned that.

00:21:21 Then I'm going to shift for a moment to, so I was doing that here from 92 to 98, and I

00:21:30 was having all sorts of interesting experiences from 92 to 98, some, what I guess we would

00:21:36 call mystical or spiritual experiences were happening, but I didn't know anyone to talk

00:21:40 to about that.

00:21:41 I was a New Yorker, and if anyone said mystical or spiritual, I'd leave the room.

00:21:46 Usually I was a very cynical New Yorker, so I hadn't cultivated friends to talk to, and

00:21:51 in fact, as soon as this stuff happened is when I left New York, so I didn't even know

00:21:55 anybody out here.

00:21:57 So I spent six years with these things happening, kind of creating my own system of what to

00:22:02 do with them, and then I thought, you know, I really want to talk to somebody about this,

00:22:07 and I just didn't know who knew about this, and so I'd kind of go, and this

was before

00:22:12 Google and internet, and you know, you could call operators and ask them questions about

00:22:17 things, but they don't really know, and I'd go in the phone book and look at centers and

00:22:22 kind of put my head in the door, and they'd say, no, you have to bow to this person, or

00:22:26 you have to do this over here, and I knew that wasn't the direct route I wanted, because

00:22:31 I knew where it was.

00:22:33 I just wanted to talk to someone, and finally I said, you know, I don't think I'm going

00:22:36 to find anybody, so maybe I'll meditate.

00:22:39 The idea of sitting still for five minutes I thought was one of the most ridiculous concepts

00:22:44 you could have, but I thought, you know, maybe I'll do that, and there's something there,

00:22:51 so I went down to the Bodhi Tree, which is this spiritual bookstore that doesn't exist

00:22:55 anymore in LA, and I asked the young guy behind the counter who had a Walkman, again, I'm

00:23:00 dating myself, and I looked at all the books, and it was just overwhelming, and I said,

00:23:06 I like to experience things.

00:23:07 I said, is there any kind of tape or recording, and he said, oh, yeah, over here, there's

00:23:13 a five meditations by this guy named Shinzen Young, and I said, perfect.

00:23:18 He said, there's five different kinds, and it went perfect.

00:23:21 I got an appetizer platter.

00:23:23 I can pick which one I like.

00:23:25 And so I went, I was house sitting for someone in Mar Vista, so I lit candles, and I made

00:23:31 a bath, because that's what I thought you had to do to meditate, and then I got stoned,

00:23:36 because I thought that's what you had to do to meditate.

00:23:40 And so every night I did one of these meditations, and there was karma yoga, and mantra, and loving

00:23:46 kindness, and Kabbalah.

00:23:47 I thought it was Kabbalah, but it's not.

00:23:50 It's Kabbalah.

00:23:51 And then Vipassana was one of them, and I really went, oh, each one, I was like, yeah,

00:23:58 that works so well, until I got to that Vipassana one.

00:24:01 I thought, that is just a little too technical, that one, but the other four were great, right?

00:24:07 And then I thought, you know, but I come from a family of teachers.

00:24:10 My mom's a teacher.

00:24:11 My sisters are teachers.

00:24:13 They're all like famous teachers in their worlds.

00:24:17 And so I thought, you know, that guy explains things really well.

00:24:21 Let me see if I can find him.

00:24:22 But I tried to find LA Meditation Center, and the operator was not helping me at all,

00:24:27 because it didn't exist anymore.

00:24:29 And I went, oh, well.

00:24:30 And then about a month later, some guy called me and said, you know that guy that you were

00:24:35 looking for?

00:24:36 He's on KPFK now.

00:24:38 And I turned on KPFK, and I heard him.

00:24:40 He sounded older.

00:24:41 He still sounded like a woman, but he sounded older.

00:24:42 And I listened to him, and they said, this is Shinzen Young, Vipassana Support Institute.

00:24:50 And I went, oh, man.

00:24:52 Of all those cool meditations, he chose Vipassana?

00:24:55 That was the technical one, you know?

00:25:00 But he was the teacher.

00:25:01 You know, when I went to college, I said, what should I learn?

00:25:04 And my mom and her mom both said, just go to what the good teachers are teaching.

00:25:07 And I thought, I'm not listening to you.

00:25:08 I'm not going to learn just what the good teachers are teaching.

00:25:11 But now I wanted a good teacher, and he explained things well.

00:25:15 So I find myself at a first retreat.

00:25:18 I've never sat for longer than five minutes in my life, and I'm at a meditation retreat.

00:25:23 And everyone's got these mats, and we said, Holy Spirit up in Encino.

00:25:27 And everybody's at the beginning going around, and it's a long hall.

00:25:30 Like he would be up here, and it's a long hall.

00:25:32 And everybody wants to get up close, and they're all sitting around and getting their little

00:25:36 what I thought were campsites.

00:25:37 And they get their little campsites here, and everyone had their campsites.

00:25:41 And they wanted to real quick get there, and it really depended on where they were.

00:25:45 And then they sit and close their eyes.

00:25:47 And they're closing their eyes facing a blank wall.

00:25:49 There's nobody here.

00:25:50 And I thought, what does it matter where you are in the room if your eyes are closed?

00:25:54 I didn't understand this.

00:25:56 And then Shunzhen came in, and I then talked and was eloquent, and I went, that's the guy.

00:26:01 Oh, wow.

00:26:02 Listening to him was so inspiring.

00:26:04 He was talking about things I knew, but with clarity and shining light on it in a different

00:26:10 way.

00:26:11 But then they talked about, you know, you talk about the za.

00:26:13 There was a zabutan, and a zafu, and yaza.

00:26:17 And so I assumed this was zabo.

00:26:23 I thought there was a za for everything, right?

00:26:27 And so on this retreat, everybody's walking around, and when they're talking, up to this

00:26:34 retreat, he had been teaching is his meditation technique.

00:26:37 Apparently, and by the way, since then I've done a seven-hour video interview with him

00:26:41 of his beginning all the way up through the five ways.

00:26:45 And for 20 years, he taught nothing but noting location of body sensation, where you just

00:26:51 sit there, go knee, elbow, nose, you know, shoulder.

00:26:56 That was it.

00:26:57 And at this retreat, he was doing talk, image, feel, and everyone was freaking the F out.

00:27:02 They were like, what are you doing?

00:27:06 Can we just please go back to noting location of body sensation?

00:27:09 And I didn't know what any of it was, right?

00:27:12 But first timers, we had to go in a room and count one to 10, and you had to visualize

00:27:18 the number one, say the number one, and then do it on your breath.

00:27:22 So you're feeling a breath, seeing and hearing the number one.

00:27:26 And we had to go one to 10, and I thought that was the stupidest thing anyone had ever

00:27:31 asked anyone to do.

00:27:32 And I looked around, and everyone's like, oh, yeah, this is interesting.

00:27:35 And I thought, I need to leave this room now.

00:27:38 Okay?

00:27:39 I thought, you know, I'm just going to listen to him when he talks.

00:27:42 You know, I have something I can do with my eyes closed that's good.

00:27:45 And then I'm walking down, and everyone's fluttering to sign up for something called

00:27:50 an online, where they go in some room and talk on the telephone.

00:27:54 No, thank you.

00:27:56 And I'm going down the hall, and there was only one man I talked to the first day, Michael,

00:28:00 Michael Basler, you might know.

00:28:03 And I was walking down the hall, and he was going in one of those rooms, and he pulled

00:28:07 me aside, and he said, did you sign up for one of these?

00:28:09 And I went, no.

00:28:12 And he said, you really need to do this.

00:28:14 And I went, it's okay, I'm good.

00:28:16 And he went, he said, no, you take mine.

00:28:21 And he just kind of thrust me into that room.

00:28:24 Well, that moment kind of changed my life.

00:28:29 So I'm going in this room, I'm putting on a headset going, this is so weird.

00:28:34 This is so weird.

00:28:35 And I'm sitting there looking around, what are we supposed to do?

00:28:39 And then Shinzen comes on and goes, Michael?

00:28:41 And I said, no, this is Stephanie.

00:28:44 Michael had me come in instead of him.

00:28:47 And he went, ah, so how was your practice?

00:28:50 I've never meditated.

00:28:52 I said, I'm a new person.

00:28:54 And he went, oh, so do you have any questions?

00:28:58 And I said, you know, actually, I do.

00:29:02 You know, this whole talk image feel thing, you know, I teach people how to juggle.

00:29:07 I know how to do it.

00:29:08 I know how to get three things going.

00:29:09 I can do that.

00:29:10 So it's not that I can't do it.

00:29:12 But what is the point?

00:29:14 I mean, it feels, plus it's so technical.

00:29:17 It feels like playing scales.

00:29:19 I was an oboe player.

00:29:20 I stopped because I hated playing scales.

00:29:22 I just wanted to play the music.
00:29:24 And he said, you know, it is playing scales.
00:29:29 But the music is your life.
00:29:34 Good answer.
00:29:35 Good answer.
00:29:36 Music is your life.
00:29:37 I stood in one minute.
00:29:38 I shouldn't want to do it.
00:29:39 But that was a good answer.
00:29:40 He impressed me with that.
00:29:41 And then I said, but, you know, I can close my eyes.
00:29:49 I had a spontaneous experience about a year earlier that happened to me.
00:29:53 And ever since then, all I had to do was close my eyes.
00:29:56 Everything dissolves into this light that is everything.
00:30:01 There is no me.
00:30:02 There is no anything.
00:30:04 And I can just go to that.
00:30:05 And when I open my eyes, I'm barely beaming down.
00:30:09 Everyone's beaming down.
00:30:10 And I see how that light is really all that's here too.
00:30:14 And it fills me with love and everything for the world.
00:30:16 I said, I can do that.
00:30:18 You still think I need talking much feel?
00:30:21 And he said, and people, whenever I told that to people, they go, oh, you're going to a
00:30:25 blissy place.
00:30:27 And I thought, that seems kind of condescending.
00:30:29 I go, can you close your eyes and do you?
00:30:31 But either way, and I said, this is what I do.
00:30:34 People have told me it's a blissy place.
00:30:36 And I said, you still think I need talking much feel?
00:30:38 And he said, there's going to come a time when the doo-doo hits the AC and you're not
00:30:46 going to be able to go to that blissy place.
00:30:49 And I said, oh, yes, I am.
00:30:52 I said, I can do this anytime I want.
00:30:55 I've never not been able to go to a blissy place.
00:30:58 And he said, no, there's going to come a time when things happen, circumstances in your
00:31:03 life, and that will not be available to you.
00:31:07 And then what do you do?
00:31:09 He said, I'm teaching you techniques to be able to work with your sensory

experience

00:31:13 in a way so that you can optimize anything that happens in your life.

00:31:18 Another good answer.

00:31:20 And I said, okay, all right.

00:31:22 And so he said, so try it and I'll get back to you in 25 minutes.

00:31:28 He had five people in a room then.

00:31:32 So I went, okay, that was a good answer.

00:31:34 All right, I'll try it.

00:31:36 And I started doing it and about four minutes later, he comes back online and he says, can

00:31:42 you teach anyone how to juggle?

00:31:46 And I said, yeah, pretty much.

00:31:48 He said, can you teach me how to juggle?

00:31:51 And I said, well, have you ever played a ball sport?

00:31:54 And he said, what's that?

00:31:58 And I said, have you ever had to take a ball and aim it, throw it and aim where it goes?

00:32:03 And he went, oh no, and I'm really spastic.

00:32:07 And I said, okay, well then it'll take longer, but you know about that.

00:32:12 So after that retreat, over the next three months, about five or six times, I am over

00:32:20 at Shirley Fenton's house.

00:32:22 She's in bed, Shinsun's here and I am teaching him how to juggle.

00:32:27 And I'm saying, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

00:32:29 Put your hand here, put your hand here.

00:32:30 No, no, just into my hand.

00:32:32 So if I'm here beside you, put it here.

00:32:34 So I'm in a teacher mode to him and he's going, oh, okay.

00:32:38 And then one time he got like a flash where you just kind of throw three and catch them.

00:32:43 And I said, that's a flash.

00:32:44 And Shinsun went, oh, I did a flash, I did a flash.

00:32:48 And I thought, wow, this is the same man who gives those amazing Dharma talks.

00:32:54 And so I had a different relationship with him from the first moment.

00:32:59 So anyway, because of this relationship with him, and oh, when he asked me to teach him

00:33:05 to juggle, he said, then I will mentor you in your meditation practice.

00:33:09 So he would call me on the phone all the time and say, so how's your practice?

00:33:13 And I go, well, I'm doing this and this.

00:33:15 And I ended up marrying the man I sat next to at the first retreat.

00:33:19 And he'd been with Shinsun seven years.

00:33:20 And he said, you know, Shinsun has never once called me to ask me about my practice.

00:33:25 And I said, yeah, but you're not teaching him how to juggle.

00:33:28 So then Shinsun takes me to a sweat lodge ceremony.

00:33:33 And we're going to go to a sweat lodge ceremony, talk about it a lot.

00:33:37 And they talk about how hot it's going to be.

00:33:39 And I'm really good with heat.

00:33:40 And I'm in the backseat of the car with him and another man, Bill.

00:33:43 And Shinsun's in the front seat, pounding, like, so loud on a drum and howling in Yakuta.

00:33:50 You know, the song's going, isn't this great?

00:33:52 And he's just going on and on and on.

00:33:54 The whole car is rambling with this.

00:33:57 And then they stop.

00:33:58 And they turn to each other and go, oh, yeah, wasn't that one hot?

00:34:01 And yeah, that one's hot.

00:34:02 Yeah, we really purified on that one, you know.

00:34:05 And they were just talking about this heat.

00:34:06 And I'm getting kind of nervous, you know.

00:34:09 Like, I just want to know if I'm going to survive, little things like that.

00:34:14 And so I kind of mention, I go, you know, how long actually are we in there?

00:34:19 And you know, I'm getting a little nervous about this.

00:34:22 And Shinsun turns around and goes, ah, you're nervous.

00:34:26 Then your ceremony has begun.

00:34:29 The ceremony has reached forward in time and grabbed you by the belly button.

00:34:35 And I said, excuse me?

00:34:37 And he said, if you're focusing on it, you're connected to the ceremony already.

00:34:43 And in that moment, I remembered what happened before I went camping.

00:34:47 When I kind of went in ceremony, before I went camping, I was there.

00:34:50 Except this was more of a sense of dread and fear and that kind of stuff.

00:34:54 Well finally, we get to the sweat lodge.

00:34:57 And I love, there's a fire.

00:34:58 It's around a fire.

00:35:00 I'm happy.

00:35:01 I like fires.

00:35:02 And there was a fire there.

00:35:03 And there's sage.

00:35:04 And it all smells good.

00:35:05 And we go inside a lodge.

00:35:08 And I'm behind him.
00:35:09 And then they come in.
00:35:10 And these red hot rocks come in.
00:35:13 And it's, oh, it's like primal.
00:35:15 It's so cool.
00:35:16 And they put them in the center.
00:35:17 And they bring them with antlers, you know.
00:35:18 And then they bring in the wakhan, the water, the big bucket of water.
00:35:22 And they close the door.
00:35:24 And then the rock glows.
00:35:26 And then they take the water.
00:35:28 And then they start to, they sing.
00:35:30 He's singing a song.
00:35:31 And he throws it on the rocks.
00:35:33 And wherever he throws the water on the rocks, it goes black there.
00:35:35 So the light starts going out.
00:35:38 And then he throws it on three times.
00:35:39 And you hear this pshh, pshh, as the water hits the rocks.
00:35:45 And then suddenly it occurs to me that water and rocks will be steam.
00:35:52 I'm great with heat.
00:35:53 I'm great in saunas.
00:35:55 I can't breathe in the steam room.
00:35:56 I don't do well with steam.
00:35:58 No one ever said the word steam.
00:36:00 For some reason, it never occurred to me that we were going to be sitting in steam.
00:36:04 Heat, yes, good.
00:36:05 Steam, no.
00:36:06 I am panicking.
00:36:07 And I'm going, oh shoot, this is going to be steam.
00:36:09 This is going to be steam.
00:36:10 Internal talk, just running amok.
00:36:13 And then suddenly this big wall of steam hits me and envelops me.
00:36:17 And you're just going, and I think I didn't breathe for a moment.
00:36:20 And then there's a little hysteria in my head.
00:36:23 But the steam kind of kept me going for a while.
00:36:26 And Shinzen warned me, whatever you do, don't you get out of this law, Julie, because you're
00:36:31 representing me.
00:36:34 And he's right here in front of me.
00:36:38 Like I'm right here with the rocks and he's right there.
00:36:39 And I'm like, why am I doing this?

00:36:42 I'm going to die.
00:36:43 This is the end of my life as I know it.
00:36:45 And you think you can't breathe.
00:36:47 So I make it through the first round.
00:36:49 And then they lift the flap.
00:36:51 And I know there's going to be three more of these.
00:36:54 So I went, OK, I survived that one.
00:36:55 I can survive three more.
00:36:58 The third round is one where they don't sing.
00:37:00 And all they do is sit there and put the water on the rocks and all you hear is the sound
00:37:05 of the water and the psh, psh going on the rocks.
00:37:10 And they do it.
00:37:11 And that's the purify round where it gets so hot that I sat there, my ears were singeing.
00:37:19 And then it literally, I started getting goosebumps all over my skin as if I was cold.
00:37:25 And I literally sat there and then suddenly my mind stopped.
00:37:31 It was so hot.
00:37:33 My, it just like, the heat just went, wha.
00:37:37 And I was in a suspended period of no thinking for the first time in my life.
00:37:43 It was amazing.
00:37:45 And so after that, I thought, OK, that was interesting.
00:37:49 We had another round.
00:37:50 We came out.
00:37:51 Xin Zhen and Bill and I are getting in the car and I just feel euphoric.
00:37:55 I'm just like, wow, that was really great.
00:37:58 And Xin Zhen said, yes, that's the taste of purification.
00:38:02 And I went, OK.
00:38:03 And he said, yes, it's in Anipi.
00:38:05 It's a purification lodge.
00:38:07 And I love this ceremony they had where everyone came with this focus and they had a way of
00:38:12 talking when you're in the lodge.
00:38:14 They had a way they do activities.
00:38:17 Everyone's focus comes in and creates this ceremony and this purification.
00:38:22 And in that lodge, if you cry in that lodge, that's a blessing to the ceremony.
00:38:27 I thought, this is so friggin cool.
00:38:29 I fell in love with it and I did sweat lodge every week for the next six years, except

00:38:34 on nights that women can't go.
00:38:37 You can't go on your moon time.
00:38:39 But other than that, I was there every night for the next six years.
00:38:43 I thought that was kind of the greatest thing in the world.
00:38:46 And then after that, then I did a vision quest that I told you about a little bit.
00:38:53 And one thing I want to say about the vision quest is that Xin Zhen kind of tricked, well,
00:39:00 anyway, how I did the vision quest is another thing.
00:39:03 But one thing about a vision quest and being out in nature and that ceremony, and that's
00:39:07 another ceremony where people come and they support you and they have that kind of special
00:39:10 focus on it.
00:39:12 You're sitting in one spot in nature, watching the sun rise, go across the sky and down,
00:39:22 all the stars come and it comes up again.
00:39:26 By the time you're 60, you will have spent about 22,000 days on this planet.
00:39:34 And rarely do you ever stop to just watch one of them.
00:39:40 So the vision quest is where I learned that time would shift.
00:39:45 It was three days, but it was like time opened up and there was more time.
00:39:50 So my camping trips after the vision quest, I stopped moving.
00:39:54 Before that I was hiking.
00:39:56 After my vision quest, I just sit there.
00:39:58 And I don't move for 12 days and I don't need much food when I'm not moving.
00:40:03 But that ceremony, so the sacred ceremony of the sweat lodge, and that's when I started
00:40:08 calling my camping in ceremony, and this notion of being in ceremony.
00:40:12 I started using it in my life, going, ah, I'm going in ceremony now.
00:40:16 Everything I do now will be sacred.
00:40:18 There's a certain kind of focus in on it.
00:40:20 And I used to light a candle to remind me I'm in ceremony.
00:40:25 One thing though, I will say, when I camp alone, there were maybe four occasions in
00:40:31 20 years where I did call shenzhen.
00:40:34 And one time I called shenzhen, I was out on the hill looking over everything, and I
00:40:40 decided I wanted to hold all of visual, auditory, and somatic experience at the same time, but
00:40:47 keep them separate and distinct.
00:40:50 And this was before see, hear, feel, this is the five ways, what we were rocking and

00:40:54 rolling on at that time.

00:40:55 And so I said, I want to spatially hold them all.

00:40:58 I was a very ambitious meditator.

00:41:01 So I went, okay, feel is easy.

00:41:03 It's in the body.

00:41:04 It's in the sense of that.

00:41:05 See, it was before seeing, so visual was easy, because it's here and it's all forward.

00:41:11 Here was a little tricky, because it's here and it goes out to the side.

00:41:14 So that space of here to hold both here in and here out was a little trickier, because

00:41:19 it went out in here and see kind of crossed over a little bit here.

00:41:24 But I did it and I got to where I held all of them at the same time.

00:41:28 And then I treated it like a three dimensional pizza and I wanted to cut the cheese.

00:41:33 I wanted to really draw a line between it.

00:41:36 So I had distinct lines between all of them and cutting around the body was easy between

00:41:42 see and here was a little gnarly.

00:41:46 And I would just, and I was really, I was in deep concentration and I was really, and

00:41:49 I finally, and I was just at the edge of cutting the cheese on seeing in here.

00:41:54 And then I did it.

00:41:55 I cut the cheese and then all three of them flew out.

00:41:59 See flew out there, here flew out here, body flew out here, leaving nothing in the center.

00:42:07 I mean, I'd experienced the source before, but not that way.

00:42:10 And I went, that is so cool.

00:42:14 I have to call Shenzhen.

00:42:15 I have to tell him, this is what we should teach everyone.

00:42:19 All you have to do is a three slice pizza, you know, visual, auditory, somatic, and then

00:42:24 cut the cheese.

00:42:25 And so I call Shenzhen on the phone and I say, this is it.

00:42:28 We're going to do this and cut the cheese.

00:42:30 And he went, well, here's what I see is an issue with that.

00:42:37 He said, everyone's not going to be able to hold all three spaces.

00:42:43 And some people are going to find it difficult to, as you say it, cut the cheese.

00:42:49 He said, and I'm quite happy with the five ways right now.

00:42:54 I really think that is the way we're going to go.

00:42:57 And I said, but this is just three things.
00:42:58 It could take them a week.
00:43:00 And he's like, thank you, but I think I'm good with the five ways.
00:43:09 And I was disappointed and I watched my sensations, but I went back and I thought that was the
00:43:13 most novel thing in the world.
00:43:14 So what, four years later, five years later, when he came up with See, Hear, Feel, I was
00:43:20 like, see?
00:43:21 Because at that time, feel was just emotional.
00:43:22 So I called it seeing, hearing, body is what I called it.
00:43:26 But basically it was called the three slice cut the cheese.
00:43:28 Anyway, that's an example of that ceremony.
00:43:32 Then after doing my ceremony and doing the sweat lodge ceremonies for a long time, I
00:43:38 started seeing retreats as the ceremony.
00:43:42 And I thought, you know, it's really interesting.
00:43:46 We all kind of come, it's sacred.
00:43:48 Everyone's bringing their focus.
00:43:49 It's one thing about the Native American ceremony, everyone brings their focus, but everyone's
00:43:54 working on their own thing.
00:43:57 You cry for you, we all get blessed by that.
00:44:01 And here I thought, everyone's coming, everyone's working on their own thing, but yet we're
00:44:05 supported by the group.
00:44:08 And there was something kind of sacred about that.
00:44:10 And I started seeing retreats as a kind of ceremony.
00:44:14 And then I started to see how the ceremony held us, like in the sweat lodge ceremonies,
00:44:20 you know, the drumming's there and everybody.
00:44:22 The whole ceremony itself kind of supports you, kind of in the way Shinzen was talking
00:44:26 about the Zen, you do that and then that kind of movement supports you in that way.
00:44:31 And I started seeing how this kind of supported us.
00:44:33 And everyone has a time on retreat when you're, you know, you can't get focused or you're
00:44:39 getting emotional or your knees or butt hurt or, you know, you think you're doing the technique
00:44:47 wrong or someone in the Zen Do is moving or eating a sandwich or something, right?

00:44:52 And there's just something going on that's a challenge and there's always somebody who's

00:44:56 doing their own practice, but it's inspiring, right?

00:45:01 So everybody's own practice contributes to this kind of whole ceremony that we come to.

00:45:09 And as I started seeing that as a ceremony, when I came, I started packing for retreats

00:45:13 in the way I did for when I was camping.

00:45:16 It's like I'm the ceremony now.

00:45:18 And I'd come and I'd listen to a Dharma talk and even if it was like, oh, I'm too busy,

00:45:23 it didn't stop your life to come.

00:45:26 And then after the second day, I'd listen and I'd go, this is the most important work

00:45:31 we can do.

00:45:33 You know, all that other stuff I had to do that's really, really important.

00:45:37 I have all these lists that are going to do when I get back.

00:45:41 This has to happen first.

00:45:43 If everyone on the planet was doing this, there would be no problems, right?

00:45:48 I thought, wow, this work is sacred, you know, what we're doing.

00:45:52 And we're not coming here and gathering around a fire.

00:45:55 We're gathering around this brilliant man who's created a vocabulary and terminology

00:46:07 for sensory experience so we can talk about the most subtle and deep aspects of anything

00:46:14 and communicate about it.

00:46:16 And we can tell him what's happening and as teachers, we know what's going on with somebody

00:46:21 and we can share this language and be able to help people.

00:46:25 And I'll just say as a teacher on this retreat, I've been getting a good workout.

00:46:30 But I will say the joy as a teacher, to use his system as a teacher, the effective result

00:46:39 of it is unlike anything.

00:46:41 I mean, that newcomer group that didn't just have newcomers, I mean, you guys rock.

00:46:46 You know it, right?

00:46:47 I mean, the reports of what they were doing were things that most people I know weren't

00:46:51 doing until their third retreat.

00:46:52 They're processing, oh yeah, I had this huge feeling and I let it go through and then I

00:46:56 felt peace.

00:46:57 I mean, it's just like rock and roll.

00:46:59 We do high fives for that stuff.

00:47:00 But it was, I really, like at this retreat, I appreciated having this to work with to

00:47:07 help people, honoring it.

00:47:10 But I also, and in my life, I work with people who don't know Shenzhen system.

00:47:15 I'm using his system to help people rewire habit patterns of thinking, feeling, behaving

00:47:21 to help them suffer less and be happier, you know, but they don't know the system.

00:47:26 So here people are coming in with these advanced questions of depths of the system.

00:47:30 So I got a good workout I haven't had in a long time.

00:47:34 And I thought, wow, it just made me feel so like I'm doing something I'm supposed to be

00:47:41 doing.

00:47:42 And then I thought I'm not, I could meditate here.

00:47:45 I can teach here.

00:47:47 They're kind of the same thing except one I'm talking more, right?

00:47:52 Like the fulfillment, the mudita, oh my gosh, this is mudita city here at the moment.

00:47:57 And you know what that is.

00:48:00 And so anyway, I was just feeling this gratitude for this, this man who has created this vocabulary

00:48:08 and this system of categorizing sensory experience and giving us strategies and techniques that

00:48:17 are the yellow brick road to the source and happiness.

00:48:23 And there's an infinite variety of ways within the system you can take.

00:48:29 You can go whichever way feels good for you.

00:48:32 All roads lead to the source.

00:48:36 And I just always, every time I'm teaching it, every time I'm working with someone who's

00:48:41 getting a haas and shifting, I feel this thrilling kind of excitement and gratitude.

00:48:49 It's kind of like how I felt on my birthday ceremonies, right?

00:48:54 With this, that we're all kind of coming together.

00:48:58 And also the other thing that he developed is this interactive meditation.

00:49:02 Who else does that?

00:49:03 That's like exploratory surgery.

00:49:06 Someone's meditating.

00:49:07 You can meditate with them and interactively whatever's happening, they've got an expert

00:49:12 guiding them where to go, which is what he does on online.

00:49:15 But as teachers, we learn how to do that.

00:49:17 What a tool for helping the planet.

00:49:21 So sometimes we're challenged and we can get inspiration from those that are sitting longer.

00:49:27 And other times we're sitting here inspired with gratitude.

00:49:32 We can come here and get insight into how we are born in each moment.

00:49:48 The waves come in and go out and between them the foam is created and that's us.

00:49:55 To quote him, we are born in the cleft of expansion and contraction in each moment.

00:50:03 And we come here in this ceremony to share this.

00:50:07 And if we're born in each moment, then today is your birthday.

00:50:15 Today is our birthday.

00:50:21 And I wish that your, I hope that your birthday ceremony contributes to you becoming a better

00:50:33 person and experiencing happiness independent of condition.

00:50:44 Happy birthday.

00:50:45 Happy birthday.

00:50:46 Thank you.

00:50:47 Thank you.

00:50:48 Thank you.