

Shinzen Young describes Mindfulness Meditation – as only he can.

00:00:00 Meditation and the Other

00:00:05 The way you teach meditation is different than how other people teach.

00:00:11 Right now, you've said things that I've not heard from other teachers

00:00:14 about focusing on all these different places.

00:00:17 I've heard people talk about focusing on the breath

00:00:20 and a few things that I said before,

00:00:22 but you've now brought up all these different objects of meditation.

00:00:25 Is that how what you teach is different than what others teach?

00:00:29 If I were to describe ...

00:00:31 I think first I'd want to emphasize how what I teach

00:00:34 is similar to what the other people teach.

00:00:38 But of course, there's lumpers and there's splitters, right?

00:00:42 The world is expansion and contraction.

00:00:44 Am I asking you to split or lump?

00:00:46 Well, you asked me to split,

00:00:48 but I would prefer to initially lump, and then I'll split.

00:00:54 So I would say that ...

00:01:01 Well, I teach people to elevate their base level of concentration.

00:01:05 So from that perspective,

00:01:08 I would be identical to any other competent meditation teacher.

00:01:14 I work within the mindfulness tradition.

00:01:17 Mindfulness can be called a kind of meditation, if you want to,

00:01:22 in that one of the things that it does

00:01:25 is dramatically elevate your base level of concentration.

00:01:29 But mindfulness has two other components.

00:01:32 Mindful awareness has ...

00:01:34 I think of mindful awareness as a threefold attentional skill set.

00:01:41 So one of the components we've already talked about at some length,

00:01:45 that's your base level of concentration power,

00:01:48 which I define as the ability to focus on what is deemed relevant at any given moment.

00:01:55 However, in addition to that,

00:01:57 which any form of meditation, mindful meditation,

00:02:02 or Christian Centering Prayer, or TM,

00:02:06 they would all achieve that.

00:02:08 Mindfulness, in addition to that,

00:02:10 has two other components or features
00:02:13 that are strongly emphasized and are distinctive to it.
00:02:18 One I call sensory clarity,
00:02:21 which you can think of as the ability to keep track
00:02:25 of the components of your sensory experience.
00:02:28 For example, to make that tangible,
00:02:31 when you're having an emotional experience,
00:02:35 what part of that emotion is mental image?
00:02:39 What part of that emotion is internal talk?
00:02:42 And what part of that emotion is emotional feelings in your body?
00:02:48 To keep track of the feel-image-talk components
00:02:53 of emotion specifically and subjective experience in general,
00:02:59 that would be an example of sensory clarity.
00:03:02 Or to know when you have an external sound.
00:03:06 The sound is one thing,
00:03:08 but your feel-image-talk reactions to the sound are something else.
00:03:13 And it's those feel-image-talk reactions
00:03:16 that create the sense of an eye listening to an it called the sound.
00:03:21 To be able to keep track of what part is sound,
00:03:24 what part is my reaction,
00:03:26 what part is sight, what part is my reaction.
00:03:29 Things like that are what I call sensory clarity.
00:03:32 And just as we give people exercises
00:03:35 that specifically develop their concentration power,
00:03:39 we also give people exercises that develop their sensory clarity.
00:03:44 So that's sort of distinctive to the mindfulness tradition.
00:03:48 Then another thing that's distinctive to the mindfulness tradition
00:03:51 is a conscious development of what we call equanimity,
00:03:55 which is a little bit of a strange word.
00:03:57 It's not ordinarily used.
00:03:59 And in fact, that's why we use it.
00:04:02 To be strange?
00:04:04 Not to create an aura of mystical schmistical,
00:04:08 but to give people a heads up,
00:04:10 hey, this is a technical term,
00:04:12 and it means something very specific,
00:04:14 and it's defined in a certain way.
00:04:17 So equanimity sounds like being cooled out and detached,
00:04:21 but actually, as we would define it in the mindfulness tradition,
00:04:25 it's radical non-interference
00:04:29 with the natural flow of sensory experience.
00:04:32 So if you have emotions in the body,

00:04:35 you don't push them down,
00:04:37 but you don't latch on to them inappropriately either.
00:04:40 It's a sort of non-pushing and pulling,
00:04:43 a hands-off with regards to the flow of your senses,
00:04:47 which does not for a moment imply a hands-off
00:04:50 with regards to the flow of events in the world.
00:04:53 You can be very proactive and even pushy
00:04:57 with regards to circumstances and conditions,
00:05:02 but equanimity means that you're not pushing and pulling
00:05:06 on the natural operation of your senses,
00:05:10 your senses defined as external sight, external sound,
00:05:14 physical type body sensations,
00:05:16 your mental images, your internal talk,
00:05:19 and your emotional body sensations.
00:05:21 You let touch, sight, sound, feel, image, talk,
00:05:25 expand and contract as they wish without interference.
00:05:29 Let me just make sure I get that right.
00:05:31 So equanimity is my experience, thoughts and feelings,
00:05:37 and body sensation,
00:05:39 and how I'm experiencing the world in terms of sight and sound.
00:05:42 I'm just letting that happen and watching that kind of flow,
00:05:47 I don't know, like waves or something,
00:05:49 but that's separate from my wanting to do an action in the world
00:05:54 to change things.
00:05:55 Yes. In other words, as you become passive in a sense,
00:06:00 with regards to, in the sense that you're passive
00:06:04 in the sense that you don't fight yourself.
00:06:07 You train, another way to look at equanimity is
00:06:10 it's training your sensory circuits not to interfere with themselves.
00:06:15 So you could compare it to,
00:06:18 if your sensory experience is the engine of a car,
00:06:22 equanimity is oiling the engine
00:06:25 so the parts don't grind against each other.
00:06:28 And that's being in the Tao or that's that flow that we're going for?
00:06:33 It can lead to an experience of fluidity,
00:06:37 but sometimes it can lead to an experience of solidity
00:06:40 because you're willing to let things melt and freeze.
00:06:43 There's another TS, this is going to be TS Eliot time,
00:06:46 there's another TS Eliot line,
00:06:50 midwinter spring is its own season,
00:06:54 between melting and freezing the soul's sap quivers.
00:06:59 You have to be willing to melt and freeze.

00:07:03 The equanimity is equanimity with whatever form the senses take.
00:07:09 But what equanimity does is, it's a skill.
00:07:14 Yeah, so it's, another way to look at it is
00:07:17 it's learning to love every sensory experience as it arises,
00:07:24 but not to hold on to it inappropriately as it passes.
00:07:28 How do you develop that skill? I'd like that one.
00:07:31 Everyone would, because ...
00:07:34 That's a good skill. Equanimity. Let's all have some equanimity.
00:07:39 I concur.
00:07:41 And why it's a good skill is,
00:07:43 you'll discover that when you have equanimity with pain,
00:07:46 it still hurts, but it doesn't bother you.
00:07:49 And when you have equanimity with pleasure,
00:07:52 it not only feels good, it satisfies you.
00:07:56 People think they want to be free from pain and to have pleasure,
00:08:00 but what they really want is to be free from pain being a problem
00:08:04 and to have pleasure that gives satisfaction.
00:08:08 And it turns out that the quality of equanimity does that.
00:08:12 So when you say, yeah, I'd like ...
00:08:14 It's like that joke, I'd like to have what she's having.
00:08:17 What she's having, yeah, I've heard some of that.
00:08:19 That's right.
00:08:21 The equanimity is definitely something.
00:08:24 And how do you ...
00:08:26 Desirable. Highly desirable.
00:08:29 In fact, more than desirable, maybe absolutely essential.
00:08:34 If you have some physical and or emotional pain
00:08:39 that cannot be gotten rid of by changing circumstances or by analgesia
00:08:45 or psychotropics or whatever,
00:08:49 then you've got a choice of either developing equanimity
00:08:52 or being mired in abject suffering.
00:08:57 So definitely, equanimity is not only desirable,
00:09:00 but maybe pivotal to making life worth living under certain circumstances.