

Shinzen Young - BATGAP Interview # 246

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{BATGAP theme music plays}

>>**Rick:** Welcome to Buddha at the Gas Pump. My name is Rick Archer and my guest this week is Shinzen Young. We'll have Shinzen tell his whole story in greater detail but in essence, Shinzen is a well-known and respected teacher of Buddhist meditation. He is known for his interactive algorithmic approach to mindfulness ...

>>**Shinzen:** Yep! You got it!

>>**Rick:** I'm reading it here, so ...☺

>>**Shinzen:** Interactive algorithmic approach.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, to mindfulness. It is a system designed specifically for use in pain management, recovery support, and is an adjunct to psychotherapy. He leads meditation retreats throughout North America and has helped establish numerous mindfulness centers and programs. He also consults widely on meditation-related research, in both the clinical and science-based domains.

And there are a lot of things I want to talk to you about today: your personal story, the whole science and spirituality interface, the mechanics of Buddhist practice - and perhaps juxtaposing that with what the Buddha might have actually been teaching, and the whole idea of 'God,' which I heard you discuss very nicely in one of your audio recordings.

But I thought I might kick-start the conversation with a question about Robin Williams, who died this week. If you had known him, if you had been his friend, what might you have said to him, or to anyone suffering from depression, substance abuse, suicidal tendencies and even early-stage Parkinson's, what might you have said to him or to such a person that could have made a difference?

>>**Shinzen:** Umm, actually, you mentioned that I work on an algorithm, which is a systematic procedure, so I might treat each of those different cases that you mentioned a little bit differently. But I think if you want me to answer it in the most general way, I would say that I would tell a person who is in so much distress that they don't want to live anymore that there are two kinds of dying. And it's understandable that when life gets very uncomfortable, our thoughts turn to ending it.

So there are two kinds of "ending it" – two kinds of dying. There is the physical dying, which if possible we should avoid, and then there's another kind of dying which is the dying of the suffering-self, which allows us to remain physically alive and functional, vibrant, and happy, actually, even if the source of the discomfort that was driving us to suicide doesn't go away; even if you still have Parkinson's or whatever

else the life situation is, if the suffering-self dies then you've solved the problem. So there is sort of what might be called "physical suicide," which in general is to be avoided if at all possible, and then there is what might be called "spiritual suicide," which doesn't mean killing your spiritual life, but rather, killing that which gets in the way of your spiritual life.

And I counsel people, I mean it's ... I long ago stopped counting, in terms of the number of people that have come to me saying, "I want to commit suicide, do you think it's okay?" I mean, I've had a long career and that kind of thing has come up a lot and this is what I tell them, I say, "I can't really comment ... I can't tell you "kill yourself" or "don't kill yourself," but I can tell you there is an alternative. It requires a lot of work, I'm sure it is *incomparable* better than suicide, here's how we do it, here's what you have to invest in terms of time and energy, and that deep desire for it to be over, for the misery to end, can be realized."

So there are two radical solutions when life become untenable: the physical radical solution and the spiritual radical solution. So I counsel for the spiritual radical, explain to them what's needed, what their probabilities of success are, and so forth. We should also say however, that depression is a special deal. If someone is depressed, the *very* first thing I do, if they come to me, is determine whether they're in contact with a competent healthcare professional.

I don't know what the situation was in his (Robin William's) case; I haven't really been following the story. But my first job, if they have a clinical situation, is to make sure they're getting competent medical treatment and as I'm sure everyone knows at this point, maybe because of the notoriety of this story, depression is one of the biggest killer diseases on the planet. And people will sometimes say, "Should I take meds or whatever," and it's like ... better talk to a healthcare professional, and do what it takes not to have to kill yourself.

I had one case where one woman was *severely*, severely depressed, and they tried everything. They tried all the medications and I actually suggested ... okay, she sounds *so* depressed, so desperate, why don't you look into electroconvulsive? And it's like, whoa! That's way over the top, but look into it, at least think about it. Six months later I get a letter from her saying, "You don't know but you saved my life ... I absolutely [would have] killed myself."

So that's why I say I handle the cases a little bit differently. If it is depression, that's a medical thing and I want to make sure that I'm part of a team that involves a competent healthcare professional.

>>**Rick:** Hmm, Carrie Fisher gets that electroconvulsive thing on a fairly regular basis, you know ... the actress who played Princess Leah in Star Wars, and it seems to help her, in her case.

Well, I know when I was 18 I was a fairly troubled kid and I had a realization at that stage – that was also the age at which I learned to meditate – but I had a realization that there was only one way out, and that was up.

>>**Shinzen:** Or in! Or down!

>>**Rick:** Or in, yeah.

>>**Shinzen:** Pick your vector.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, but you can't blot out your life because it continues, regardless of what you do, and you're only going to make it worse – at least according to now several years of study of the Scriptures, and all the Scriptures say you're going to make; you need to evolve, spiritually, and then things are going to get better.

>>**Shinzen:** Yeah. So I guess the upshot is, for people that are desperate I would say, use that desperation to fuel a radical, intense liberation practice; that would be the soundbite.

>>**Rick:** Yeah. What would you say to somebody suffering terribly of a terminal illness? Would you condone euthanasia? Or just no opinion, kind of thing?

>>**Shinzen:** I don't have a strong opinion on that but once again, I tend to look at dying – even the physical and emotional parts of dying – as a natural process. And so before you do that there is a lot that you can do to train consciousness to experience physical and emotional distress as more of a purification and less as a problem. You'll either be able to do that or not. If it gets too extreme then well, okay, that's a different issue, I don't really have an opinion.

>>**Rick:** Okay. So I didn't really mean to start the interview on a morbid tone but ...

>>**Shinzen:** Why not! 😊 I mean, Buddhism is like the biggest downer of all! 😊 Guess what? You are a soulless robot, designed to suffer and too stupid to know that fact. The Four Noble truths are incredibly powerful and liberating, but there is a sort of downer take on it, so hey, why not?!

>>**Rick:** Yeah, so let's loop back and talk about your life. You grew up in L.A., you befriended a Japanese kid and ended up studying Japanese, going to a Japanese school. And so carry it on from there, give us some details, because people always like to know someone's background and many people may not have known anything about you prior to this interview.

>>**Shinzen:** Well, I'm old, I guess that's the first thing. When I was born, World War 2 was still going on; I was born in 1944. So I was born into a very different world than now, and if someone had said to me, "Guess what? By the time you're 70 the world is going to look this way, specifically American culture is going to look the way it now looks," I would have said, "No way in the world is that going to happen."

I was indoctrinated into the American culture of the 1950s - that was my experience as a little boy. Eisenhower was president and the world looked a certain way. And Asia was not "cool," particularly Japan was not cool. We were still fighting the Japanese, my *dad* was off fighting the Japanese when I was born! He was off in the Pacific.

>>**Rick:** So was mine, actually mine had fought in the Pacific in the air force ... shot down a couple of Japanese Zeroes and so on.

>>**Shinzen:** So I guess we have a comparable cultural perspective. Where were you born?

>>**Rick:** Norwalk, Connecticut in 1949.

>>**Shinzen:** Yeah, well, I was born in L.A. and my family of origin is Jewish with a fairly good sense of that cultural identity, you know, I went to synagogue, things like that ... I went to Hebrew school. But when I was in what was then called junior high but now would be called middle school, my best friend was third generation Japanese-American, as you mentioned.

So his family used to go see Japanese movies, which was not cool or popular at *all*, it's just because they had a certain cultural heritage and so forth. So they took me to see Japanese movies and I was just *mesmerized*, just entranced by the culture of pre-modern Japan. So I went on this whole adventure, I wanted to know everything I could possibly know about that culture. You know how when you're a kid you could get on to something, it could be anything but, it used to be cars or maybe a stamp collection ...

>>**Rick:** Or playing the guitar or whatever.

>>**Shinzen:** So I just got on this Japanese thing. I was 14 years old, I wanted to know everything about this "weird" world. And throughout my life I've been fortunate to have sort of epiphanies or insights that came to me, and the insight that came to me about this is: if you want to know a culture, language is key. You have to master the written and spoken language.

So I found out they had a Japanese school that met in the afternoons, after the American public school, and met all day Saturday - sort of like Hebrew school for Japanese-American kids. So I enrolled in Japanese school and by the time I had graduated from high school, I had had the *incredible* privilege of growing up bilingual and bicultural without leaving Los Angeles.

I graduated from Venice High, you may have heard of it ... Venice, California, where I was a nerdy nobody, and the same week I graduated from Sawtelle Japanese Language Institute, where I was the class valedictorian, because I was the only non-Asian person that had *ever* gone through the Japanese education system in Los Angeles, and they wanted to show off this weird white guy that was pretty good in Japanese.

But I realized that I'd never really be able to understand the Japan unless I knew the classical background of Japan. So the main cultural influence on Japan of course is China, so I said, "Okay, better learn Chinese too," and my parents dutifully got me a Mandarin Chinese tutor – still in high school.

Then it's like, "Well, you know, I'll never understand China unless I understand the Buddhist stuff, and that came from India, so once again the key is the language." The classical language of India is Sanskrit ... my parents *dutifully* got me a Sanskrit tutor – still in high school. So I had this incredible privilege of [being] in L.A. [and yet having] this rich Asian background at a fairly early age.

So that led to my going to Japan, and that led to encounters with actual Buddhists who were practitioners, and that led to a perception that ... "Well maybe there's something to this stuff." So when I came back to the United States I decided to do my graduate study not in Asian languages but in Buddhist studies.

So I went to the University of Wisconsin. It was the late 60s and *big* cultural shifts were happening and Madison was one of the centers, as you may know. I mean, we had a socialist mayor, who I knew, there were a lot of radical things going on, a lot of drug use. It was a really exciting time and here I was getting a PhD in Buddhist studies, but I was still an academic.

But then a couple of things happened that got me more interested in the notion of practicing, rather than just academically *studying* Buddhism. One thing was, like most people of that time, I used a lot of drugs, had some altered experiences and it was like, "Oh, okay, maybe there are some possibilities of experiences of other forms of consciousness." And that was, sort of, the pleasant side.

We were talking about how in Buddhism there are four Noble Truths and the first one is of suffering, so on the *unpleasant* side, my life-idol, my mentor, my graduate advisor at the University of Wisconsin – Richard Robinson, he was the guy like ... when I grow up I want to be this guy. I knew a few Asian languages, he knew a dozen, he could pun in three Asian languages, simultaneously, and his specialty was logic – the classical Buddhist logic and then also of course, modern symbolic logic. So this guy was like an intellectual *giant* - Richard Robinson, but you never heard of him because he died horribly and tragically. He had a fire in his home and his whole body was burned, but he didn't die quickly. They thought they could save him, he was in agony for a month, and then he died.

So it was like, okay, so what is all that knowledge and what is all that intelligence going to do when you're entire mind-body is a shard of fiery agony? It's like, okay ... the first Noble Truth got really real for me. And I knew there was something called Buddhist practice and I knew that there were possibilities of altered states from the drug experiences, so that sort of shunted me away from academic Buddhism although I had this incredible background, but I didn't become a professor.

Most of my friends in that program are now the retiring professors, the first generation of professional Buddhist scholars. Most of us were trained at the University of Wisconsin in that golden age, that magic time. So in any event, my interest then shifted to practice and I was ordained in 1970 as a Buddhist monk in the Shingon, which is Japanese Vajrayana. And then just to finish it off, at a Zen retreat in Japan – I did some Zen too – I met an Irish Catholic priest named Father William Johnston. You can find his books ... his first and probably most famous book was called *Christian Zen*. So he was part of this Christian Buddhist dialogue that had been started where the meditators, both Christian – primarily Catholic; Roman Catholic, and Buddhist – primarily Zen, were dialoguing.

And of course, if you get theologians from opposite religions together in the room, what you get is a huge contentious argument, but if you get contemplative *practitioners* from two very different traditions together in a room, what you get is a sense of, "Oh yeah, I know what you're into," kind of thing.

>>**Rick:** I've always thought that. I've always thought that if you could get Jesus and Buddha and Krishna and Mohamed and Zoroaster and so on all in one room, they would just have a grand old time, you know? Talking to each other with no friction or disagreement whatsoever. It is just their followers who lost what they were teaching, originally, who have a problem with one another.

>>**Shinzen:** I think in the long run there would be a consensus, there might be some initial disagreements though.

>>**Rick:** But those would be enriching rather than conflicting, it's like, "Oh, you see it that way...? I don't understand ... how is it you say that."

>>**Shinzen:** Yeah, well that was a contemplative dialogue and that was going on, and Johnston was part of that and that *really* opened my eyes. Because I remember, I was at this Zen retreat and as usual, I'm the only foreigner there, and it's Zen and as I'm sure you're aware, Japanese Zen can be on the rigorous side, shall we say. So I'm sitting there and I see this other foreigner walk in and I'm going, "Wow, there's another foreigner here." But he's not just foreigner, he is a Roman Catholic priest! He's got a Roman collar on, he's got reddish hair – a real gaijin, so a *real* foreigner.

And I thought to myself, "Wow, this is weird. A Catholic priest at a Zen retreat?" Because I didn't know about all this; I didn't have a broad view of mediation at the time. My view of practice at the time was limited to what I knew of Buddhism. So it was like, "Wow, a Catholic priest."

Now mind you, I came from a Jewish family and I'd never in my life talked to a Catholic priest, not even once. So it was like, "A Catholic priest? This guy doesn't know what he's getting into." That was the self talk ... like, "This poor guy doesn't know what he's getting into, coming to a Zen retreat," right?

And he sits down in this perfect lotus and I thought, "Whoa, the guy sits like a Zen master, what's going on?" So at the break I struck up a conversation, found out that he is William Johnston SJ – Society of Jesus, Irish Catholic priest, and he's been doing Zen for 10, 20 years, something like that. And I found out that in fact *all* the Jesuits in Japan do Zen.

So my thing was: I'll never understand this culture unless I master the language, the Jesuit thing in Japan was: you'll never understand this culture unless you do Zen. Christian Zen - whoa, that's really interesting. So we became friends. And he lived at the Jesuit house in Tokyo, he had a room there with the other Jesuits.

And he travelled a lot and when he was away he let me stay in his room in Tokyo. And he had a library on comparative mysticism, all of the meditators of the main traditions: the standard textbooks – Christian and Jewish -in Christian [he had] Catholic and Eastern Orthodox - all the yoga, the three vehicles of Buddhism, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. So I started to read and I realized, "Whoa, what I'm doing in Buddhist practice is actually a subset of a *much* larger worldwide contemplative experience that is a universal core in all the cultures, in all the ages. Regardless of the theologies, most of the major religions have had a meditating practice, and they sort of line up across – even though the doctrines and cultural practices are very different, there is a remarkable basic similarity in them."

**Suddenly I had a periodic table of spiritual elements** and it was like, "Oh my God, this all falls into place." And one of the most surprising things was to discover that there was a Jewish mediation tradition – no one ever told me about that when I was in Hebrew school! It's like, whoa. So that broadened my perspective on Buddhist practice from, "I'm doing Buddhist practice," to, "Oh, I'm doing a particular

form of something that has been all over the entire world,” so I have to thank the Catholic Church for that. And one other huge thank is that just before I left Japan, ran into Father Johnston and he was showing me this article. The article appears in a book by a friend of mine – we weren’t friends at the time but later on we became friends ... do you know Charles Tart?

>>**Rick:** Yeah, sure.

>>**Shinzen:** So Charlie spread the phrase “altered states of consciousness;” that’s his thing. And he wrote a classic book called *Altered States of Consciousness*. In that book you’ll find a piece of research by two scientists at Tokyo University – Hirai and Kasamatsu – *Brain Waves of Zen Meditators*. It’s a classic piece of scientific research, actually, a very elegant piece of research.

So Johnston was all excited about this because he was a Jesuit, he was an academic, he was an intellectual, and it was like, “Whoa, look at this. These scientists are using objective means to look at a subjective spiritual experience and are in fact affirming that it is plausible that what these meditators report is actually happening, based on the physiology that we see here.”

And he thought that was exciting and I thought that was exciting. So I decided – and this is like ... I don’t know, 1972; I’m making a guess here – so I’m thinking, “Okay, I started out wanting to be as Asian as anybody could be.” I became a Buddhist monk in Japan, okay! That’s like being Japanese, right? It was like I *lived* in that Samurai movie for those years, in a temple. I did this, I’ve ascended the mountain of Asia, and **I’ve come to the peak of what this civilization has achieved, which is the internal technology of meditation.** Now I’m looking out ...

>>**Rick:** Well, had you actually realized the pinnacle of possibilities of meditation in that tradition? Had you become fully enlightened or had you just given it a good shot so far? ... that you’d immersed yourself in the culture that way?

>>**Shinzen:** Well, I had immersed myself in the technology, fully enlightened? Well, that’s a whole other conversation.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, we’ll get into that.

>>**Shinzen:** Not even yet the first experience, which is usually called Stream-entry or kensho - hadn’t had that yet. But was a meditator and a committed meditator, and I knew I was going to spend my whole life meditating and that this is the pinnacle of Asia in terms of ... okay, what did these people do better than anyone else? - number one, but that is also *important* to everyone else – number two. Okay, two things.

Then when I look out, do I see a comparable peak somewhere? Is there something that some other civilization has done better than anyone else – number one, and number two – is important for everyone else? And the answer is yes, there is only one and it is Western science, specifically what happened after the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Newton and so forth, that whole explosion that we’re now living with – the scientific method, Francis Bacon, you know ... the whole thing. Europe did that better than anyone else and it is important to everyone else.

So what if somehow the best of the East and the West, the two sciences could find a common ground? Well Father Johnston was already showing me the *inkling* that that could happen. So I thought, “Well, I know I’m going to just meditate my whole life; that’s all I’m really interested in now. But on the side I’ll study math and quantified science, and maybe someday it will happen that there will be a cross-fertilization movement of East and West. If so, I’ll be in an ideal position as a professional meditator and as a paraprofessional scientist, I’ll be in an ideal position to participate in that cross-fertilization, and would you believe it? It has happened, and it has happened big time! So I’m just *amazed!*”

So the short story of me is that I’m a Jewish-American-Buddhist that was turned onto science by an Irish-Catholic priest.

>>**Rick:** Great. ☺ When you were being interviewed by Tami Simon I heard you tell some story about how you had the week from hell in a Buddhist - I guess it was a Zen retreat – mosquitos the size of crows and it was just like this horrible, intense thing, but you had this profound awakening at the end of it. Was that a real important watershed moment that we want to touch on?

>>**Shinzen:** I’ve had a lot of watershed moments, that was certainly one of them, although I wouldn’t call it an awakening, not technically. And yeah, I talk about that a lot because it’s hard to forget. That was my first full-on meditation retreat and it was within the context of Japanese Zen, done *in* Japan. And yeah, it was rough ... yeah, it was rough. I was on the verge of crying.

>>**Rick:** It’s like the navy seal training for Zen guys.

>>**Shinzen:** Yeah, it’s in that category. So by the end, I was at the end of my rope. My whole body was shaking, my mental state was actually shifting towards paranoia and delusion. I was emotionally, like I said, I was *just* on the verge of crying, terrified and just in shaking, almost pass-out kind of pain. And the retreat was going to end soon, so I started to just *scream* in my head to myself at the top of my voice, “You’re not a baby, don’t cry. You’re not a baby, don’t cry,” because I was going to lose it. And I guess that became a mantra, without me realizing it, that sort of put me in a concentrated state.

And then suddenly, just out of nowhere, my whole body relaxed and my mind stopped. The pain was still there but instead of it being like a red-hot rock, it was like lava. It was red-hot but it was like ... with glacial velocity, *slowly* circulating through my whole body. And even though it was red-hot, the fact that it was circulating caused it to not bother me and I just was there. And that was the first experience ... the first time something like that happens to a human being, that’s a watershed experience.

What happened? Well, in retrospect I can tell you what happened. I spontaneously fell into a state of what I would now technically call “equanimity.” Equanimity is an intentional skill, it is the ability to allow sensory experience to come and go without push and pull, it is, in a sense, analogous to “oiling” your sensory circuits. There are different ways that people achieve equanimity and there are of course many levels of equanimity, but one of the main ways that people learn equanimity - and probably most of your viewers have actually had this experience – you’re in some situation and it’s really horrible, and at some point you just stop fighting with that sensory experience and it starts to flow. The intensity level is the same but the bother drops. What has happened at that moment is that you have spontaneously



fallen into equanimity. And if you remember what that's like, the more you remember what that's like, the more it's likely to happen to you, until you can access that on demand, anytime you want. And then your relationship with physical pain changes forever - that's a watershed moment for any human being. And from that time on you realize, "Okay, I don't exactly want physical discomfort, but if I have to go through it, I know where this is going." So that was a spontaneous experience of equanimity, I would say.

>>**Rick:** And perhaps we might say that not only can you access that at any time you want, but that becomes your baseline ... not something you have to willfully evoke; it's just there regardless, whatever is going on.

>>**Shinzen:** That's how I would define mindfulness. Mindfulness practice elevates the baseline of concentration power, sensory clarity, and equanimity – those three things.

>>**Rick:** Okay. So what are some other watersheds ... however many you think are important to mention, and perhaps leading up to whatever you would consider to have been the most profound and lasting breakthrough that you've had?

>>**Shinzen:** Well, I would say there are a lot of watershed moments. The first time I realized that I could treat emotional discomfort the same way as physical discomfort and that it *would* break up into a flow. Because it's hard to drop into deep equanimity with a physical discomfort such as pain, but it is even harder to drop into equanimity with an emotional discomfort, by that I mean, the body experience of anger, fear, sadness, shame, humiliation, helplessness, impatience; those kinds of body sensations.

When you're going through a difficult emotion there are potentially three sensory components: one visual, one auditory, one somatic. You've got, possibly mental images, you've got, possibly, mental talk, and then you've got different shades of emotional distress *in* the body. And you meditate for a while and it may be that you've practiced long enough, so that you have an experience where significant pain just flows effortlessly - the hurt is the same but the suffering is way down. That's a watershed moment. And you might say that it's watershed in the sense that it makes you into a different kind of person. If you didn't know that that could happen with physical pain, then you're always in a certain kind of fear of physical pain, once you know that that can happen, you still fear, but it's not the same.

However, even after you've experienced physical discomfort breakup into a kind of purifying, empowering flow of energy, it's hard to believe that the sensations of anger or fear or helplessness or humiliation, that *those* kinds of sensations could become maximally intense, fill your entire body, reach the point where you're almost going to faint and you don't fight, and then it turns into the same kind of flowing energy. It's hard to believe that that could happen with *those* kinds of emotional sensations.

The first time that that does, that's a *big* watershed moment. I remember the first time that happened and that was *long* after the first time I broke physical pain up. It's like something happened, I was humiliated in public, I was experiencing rage and humiliation and it just turned into a breeze that was blowing through my whole body, just purifying and empowering. So, that's a watershed moment, and I would say to anyone listening to this, it is possible to do that, and then *that* becomes your baseline. So

now you're becoming thing, a human of full-feeling, a human that can escape into fear or shame; you don't necessarily need to escape from it. If you can't escape from it, there's another direction. So that's a watershed moment, and those are both body.

>>**Rick:** I guess what I'm getting at is that a lot of times people talk to me or they give feedback on certain interviews, and some people have actually said, "I just want you to interview the people who are actually awakened, who are enlightened," and I'm always a little squeamish about that term because it has to be more nuanced than that, in most cases. And even my wife, who schedules the interviews, when I suggest somebody she says, "Well, is he awakened?" And I say, "Well, I don't know. He's really interesting."

And you know, awakening is this sort of ill-defined term, and even if you study Eastern cultures there are so many different flavors and variations and gradations and all. So just to ask you point blank ... well, here's another guy, Daniel Ingram, whom I interviewed a couple of months ago, is a little bold about saying, "Yeah, I've attained such and such level." And he feels like, "Why should we be coy about that? If we're throwing our blood, sweat, and tears into this, then we'd like to see some examples of people who have actually achieved what we're trying to do, and whatever I've achieved I'm going to say." So what do you think about that? And what would you say regarding your own level of attainment, just to be, again, point blank?

>>**Shinzen:** Well why not? I like the effect that Dan has had on the Buddhist world by sort of putting this out, because it's something that people have tended to be sort of coy about, for a *gazillion* good reasons.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, because there's all kinds of ... "premature emmaculation," we call it, when people get up on a soapbox proclaiming themselves to be the be-all and end-all.

>>**Shinzen:** Premature emmaculation! Ahhh! 😊

>>**Rick:** You like that?

>>**Shinzen:** Yeah, I totally do. Did you make that up?

>>**Rick:** No, I heard it from someplace.

>>**Shinzen:** Really? Do you know the source?

>>**Rick:** No, but you can use it.

>>**Shinzen:** I will *definitely* use that. 😊 (Laughing) ... premature emmaculation! Yes!

>>**Rick:** Might have been Mariana Caplan, but I don't remember for sure.

>>**Shinzen:** Okay, yeah, I'm going to have to remember that. Okay, so usually I would begin this discussion by, "Hey, let's list a half-dozen *really* good reasons not to talk about this," because I think it's important to realize that there's not just one or two good reasons, but there are *a lot* of good reasons

*not* to explicitly talk about attainments, and you really don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out what they are. First of all, anyone can claim anything – there's that, but then there's the inherent ambiguity, like you say. Apparently attainment is not a scalar (meaning one-dimensional)... awakening is not a one-dimensional object; it's a vector. It has many dimensions to it and those dimensions are independent.

And there is, at this point, no universal agreement among the masters and adepts and advanced practitioners of the world, there is no agreement as to exactly what those dimensions are, how we're going to measure them, and how we're going to put a norm on this vector. A 'norm' is the ascribing of a single value that says how big this vector is.

So, I'm sorry for using this geek-speak but a vector is just a quantity that has many dimensions, potentially, not just one dimension. And the norm of a vector is how you put a single number to that vector. So there is general agreement, sort of, big-picture wise, but there's not the kind of agreement that would allow us to say, at this point in history, that there's a true science of enlightenment.

I think humanity is working *towards* a true science of enlightenment, where at some point, probably in the not too distant future, a combination of frank and patient dialogue among adepts and masters combined with the object of evidence of science, neuroscience specifically, all of that coming together, that cross-fertilization that I've been talking about - probably within a century or so, hard to predict, but certainly within a couple of centuries, which isn't all that long - will actually be able to say with confidence what enlightenment is, will be able to measure it and speak about it.

**>>Rick:** Do you think that siddhis can be any kind of measure?

**>>Shinzen:** Of enlightenment?

**>>Rick:** Yeah, or are they a special case? Like you know, if you can levitate then you have achieved "x" level of realization, or do you think that those are just freaks of nature situations that have happened?

**>>Shinzen:** I think it's highly contentious whether siddhis actually occur in the physical world. One can certainly have ...

**>>Rick:** There are all sorts of historical accounts, but nothing contemporary that we can really see.

**>>Shinzen:** Well, so siddhis are like paranormal powers, etcetera, etcetera. So it is certainly the case that people can have a very compelling sensory experience of what seems to be paranormal powers. However, having a compelling sensory experience is not the same as something that exists in the objective world and can be verified by science. So the problem with the siddhis or paranormal powers is, firstly, it is *highly* contentious as to whether these actually do exist.

**>>Rick:** Yeah, unless somebody could demonstrate the objectively observable ones.

**>>Shinzen:** Right, and no one has been able to do that, not in any compelling way.

**>>Rick:** And even if they could, we'd have to really think about what it meant and what it signifies.

>>Shinzen: Right, so I would say that siddhis are not the first thing I would think of and they're not even the hundredth thing I would think of, actually, to be honest. What the first thing I would think of is: has one experienced a paradigm shift, that is to say, a fundamental shift in one's understanding of self? And that shift would be a paradigm shift meaning that it is permanent; there's no going back.

If you look at, let's say, a lunar eclipse and you don't have any knowledge of astronomy, what's your sensory experience? What does it seem is happening to the moon?

>>Rick: It seems like it's disappearing.

>>Shinzen: Particularly if, let's say, you've never seen a lunar eclipse. And so the first time you see it, well, first of all, you're going to be very disturbed, and if it's a solar eclipse even worse, maybe. So what does it look like? Well one thing it could look like is that there is a monster in the sky that is bite by bite eating up the moon, or the sun, which would be very disturbing, but once you know modern astronomy, you have a paradigm shift. You see the lunar eclipse, it looks the same to your senses but your understanding is different. No way do you believe that a monster is eating up the moon; you believe the earth is casting its shadow on the surface of the moon. There's no way you could *poetically* think of it as a monster, and there's no way you're really going to believe there's a monster, and there's no way that you're really going to be bent out of shape about what's going on, because you know something about the eclipse, and you're never the same again.

So the lowest level of enlightenment, the first step, if we're even going to use that word, the first step is that something like that takes place with regards to the phenomenon of self. So the metaphor I'm making is: there's an eclipse, and that's a phenomenon - a sensory phenomenon - and we see it, but there's our understanding of what that eclipse is, and that can change, and there's no going back.

So everyone has the sense of their own limited identity, a sense of "I am this mind, I am this body, I am these thoughts, I am these feelings, I am these sensations, I am these memories, plans, fantasies, this will, this desire" - everyone has a sensory experience of self. The first step in enlightenment, the sort of watershed that shifts from being like most people to being fundamentally different, is that there's a change in that paradigm.

And in Buddhism, a change is called a realization into the fact that there never was a "thing" inside there called 'the self,' but in other traditions it might be called something almost the opposite, like realizing that the true self, who you really are and what God is, are the same thing, or ... there are a lot of other paradigms. But it's not an idea, it's not a belief; it's a change in one's relationship, 24-7, to the sensory experience of self. After that time and until the time you physically die, no matter what arises in your mind and body experience, some part of you knows, "My identity is not limited to this." So you might say that it's a shift from the mind-body being a prison where you're confined, to the mind-body experience being a house that you live in and can leave anytime you want, so that your identity has now become flexible, it has become unfixated. You can be anything, everything, and the nothing that is the Source of everything and anything ... all of the above.

>>**Rick:** And there are degrees of that, aren't there? I mean, there's a ratio kind of thing where you might get an inkling of it, a scent of it, initially, and then it can grow and grow. But I'm skeptical as to whether you could, or would ever *want* to be *completely* oblivious to having any sort of sense of individual self, because you wouldn't be able to walk through a door or feed yourself, I should think.

>>**Shinzen:** Um, doesn't quite work that way. First of all, I would say that ... remember, I didn't say that the sensory experience of self doesn't arise; I said that the belief that "this is a "thing" and I am it" goes [away] forever. So the senses operate just fine, both inner and outer. You still have mental images, you still have mental talk, you still have emotional sensations in your body, you still see physical sights, you still hear physical sounds, you still have the physical impact on your body, but the notion that that makes a "thing" called "you," that's gone for good and will never come back. So if you just get an inkling of it but then it doesn't latch, I don't call that enlightenment.

Now we have to be really careful of enlightenment, and we'll get to that in a second. So the other thing I should say is that some people have this experience - this change takes place *suddenly* in some people, but it can also take place gradually in some people, so it's not necessarily that that paradigm shift happens instantly. When it does it's very dramatic, but sometimes it can sort of sneak up on you over many years, and indeed decades.

So I would say that the first watershed is: is there a permanent shift in your perception of the nature of your identity? Has your identity become unfixated? Is the mind and body no longer a place you're confined to? Can you, at any time, become what you're looking at, or become the nothingness from whence it comes and to which it returns? That's the *beginning* of enlightenment.

Now I don't know what the end of enlightenment is, but I can tell you that whatever it is, if indeed there even is an end, I can tell you that everyone I have ever met is still working towards that.

>>**Rick:** I would say the same, incidentally having interviewed almost 250 people and some of them well-known and supposedly very enlightened. I think everybody is still a work in progress, and even some of the really well-known ones, like Adyashanti and so on, say that very emphatically; they say, "I'm a beginner, relative to what might be possible."

>>**Shinzen:** I would say exactly the same thing. Actually, I would say *exactly* the same thing. In other words, I don't know that there is an "end" to this but let's just hypothetically say there is an end - just for a moment - then what Adyashanti just said would be *exactly* what I would say. The jump from "not enlightened" to "initial enlightenment" is tiny compared to the jump of where after "initial enlightenment" how far you can go.

>>**Rick:** Yeah. Now I do have some people say to me that there is a kind of a final stage in the sense that the mind completely dissolves, you just rest in the self, in pure being, in silence, and you're there – solid as a rock, and that just goes on and on and on. And after that there's relative *refinement* but that's sort of like icing on the cake; it's not really that significant by contrast with this establishment in the self, or whatever you want to call it. So what would you say to that?

>>**Shinzen:** Well, everyone has their own experience. I would say, there is that and it's significant, but I would repeat that I think even if you have that, there's still a lot to learn. Because first of all, there's the liberation dimension, which could be called the "freedom from the mind-body" or in these very advanced states, "the ability to *abide* at the Source" 24-7.

So **there's the liberation aspect and then there's the behavior aspect; how do you carry yourself** in the world? How effectively do you serve your fellow beings? And what do the people close to you have to say about how you conduct yourself, and so forth?

Now I know individuals that pretty much, 24-7, abide in what you're describing, whose behavior is despicable! So in my way of thinking there's an important dimension of enlightenment that they're not developing and **in fact, their freedom is allowing them to *not* have to develop that dimension.**

>>**Rick:** Good point, like they're taking refuge in that freedom and perhaps even in the notion that "the world is an illusion and I can do with it what I will," you know? "It doesn't matter if I sleep with my disciple's wife because all the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players," you know?

>>**Shinzen:** And what's important to realize about that is that perception is not entirely bullshit, okay? You have to be *really* deep ... I mean, you could be a psychopath and believe that, but these people that are that way, they have deep, deep liberation dimension - they're not just bullshitting. But how they have chosen to interpret it and manifest in the world is *just plain wrong*.

>>**Rick:** I'm glad you're saying this. I agree.

>>**Shinzen:** So there's that. There's a behavioral dimension that is related to your liberation but is not the same thing. Your liberation should be the place that allows you to optimize how you carry yourself in the world as a person, and to optimize your ability to serve others; that's the *use* of your liberation. And if it's *not* that, then well, you just have some of the dimensions of enlightenment but not others.

Furthermore, even the liberation dimension ... okay, so you know that I have training in the sciences and so I tend to think the way a physicist or a mathematician thinks. So there's a quantity called "C," and it's in our current known physics that nothing can be accelerated beyond "C."

>>**Rick:** speed of light?

>>**Shinzen:** Speed of light, that's right. So there's sort of an absolute physical constant called "C." So then any other speed is less than "C," so there's a cap on "C." So people like to talk about, "Well, okay, there's a cap on liberation," and that may be the case. However, if there's a cap then it's got to be the cap, then we have to take out the dimensions.

I'm saying that enlightenment has many dimensions and the breaking of the identification with the mind-body is just one of those dimensions, behavior is another one. But let's just look at one dimension called "the breaking of the identity with the small identity" – let's just look at that; let's just tease out that one dimension, and let us say that there is theoretically an ultimate to that. Then that means there's going to be the ultimate to that. That means that no matter what happens to your mind and

body there is no suffering whatsoever. Now let's just think of the consequences of what that would mean.

>>**Rick:** It would mean Christ didn't suffer, for one.

>>**Shinzen:** Yeah, for sure. But remember, He experienced pain. And I don't think that if we take the archetypal view of Christ ... I don't think it was just the pain of nails for a few hours; I think it's, from a Christian point of view, perhaps it was all the pain of all the sin of all beings in all conceivable worlds – so that's a little bigger pain!

So I would caution anyone who likes to think of themselves as having reached the ultimate of liberation. I don't have a way of testing that, remembering that liberation, breaking of the mind-body identity, is just one dimension of enlightenment, as I'm choosing to use the "e" word here.

>>**Rick:** Well here's one way of testing it ... I heard you give a talk about maintaining awareness 24-7, including during sleep. And just the other day a discussion came up and I pulled up a file I have of quotes from all sorts of well-known spiritual teachers and saints from throughout history. And you quoted, in your talk, the Song of Solomon, which says, "I sleep though my heart waketh." So if you lose consciousness during sleep, not waking consciousness - that's gone because you're asleep – but pure consciousness, then you haven't reached that certain stage of development. So that might be a litmus test and there might be neurological correlates to that which would be distinctive ...

>>**Shinzen:** But the problem is that all of these tests don't prove you've reached the ultimate; they prove you *haven't* reached the ultimate. These are all exclusionary tests: if you can't do this ...

>>**Rick:** Well I'm not saying that that stage of development would be ultimate, I'm just saying it might be a milestone.

>>**Shinzen:** I think it is ... it's a good milestone. The point I'm making is that I don't know of any way to confirm if people have reached the ultimate in liberation, but I know many, many easy tests to confirm that you haven't. So the exclusionary tests are easy. So if there's an absolute then there's an absolute, and what that means is ... here's a thought experiment: you have to imagine that we turn you over for six months or so to professional torturers in Damascus, and can they make you suffer in that six months, at all? With anything? Understanding that we're talking about the proverbial blowtorch and a pair of pliers, or 24-7 water boarding or whatever .... Well, well, don't interrupt me yet. If that is a cause of any fear, any suffering whatsoever, if that isn't just the same as tea with the queen, then you haven't reached whatever the ultimate liberation is.

>>**Rick:** Do you think there's anybody on earth who could pass that test?

>>**Shinzen:** Probably.

>>**Rick:** You think? Hm. What if you took that person and began injecting them with methamphetamine every day in large doses and systematically destroyed their brain ...

>>**Shinzen:** Yeah, it's all the same, or Alzheimer's; it's all the same, what if that person goes through Alzheimer's?

>>**Rick:** So you're saying that the consciousness is so liberated that even though the physical basis is being destroyed and can no longer reflect it observably to others, from the subjective perspective nothing is touched?

>>**Shinzen:** Yeah, pretty much. And the reason to say all of this is just to realize what the consequence of the claim that "there's an absolute or a cap on liberation and I'm there" is. And I think it's totally doable, actually I think it's doable by me, not *now*, and hey, I don't *want* to have to do that, *believe* me, but I think it is doable ... if I had to.

>>**Rick:** When you say it's doable by you, you mean you think you could pass the Damascus test?

>>**Shinzen:** No! But I would give it a good try. ☺

>>**Rick:** Or not.

>>**Shinzen:** No, I can't pass it now, but maybe after the first three months I'd be there, maybe. In other words, I'm trying to give people a ballpark of what we're talking about. It would probably take me a *long*, long time, if I could do it at all, and I'm not sure I could do it all. I'm absolutely sure I couldn't do it right now.

>>**Rick:** And people would see you screaming and freaking out, but you're saying that *subjectively* there would be a dimension that was untouched by the apparent suffering that was taking place.

>>**Shinzen:** Exactly, that's correct. So what the difference is ... and we don't have to get so dramatic and talk about Syria, but I could be in an accident, like Richard Robinson, my mentor. It could happen to anyone, life is, you know ... I mean, he just went into his basement, the fuse was out, he couldn't see, he lit a match, but gas from a leak ... and he just went up like a torch.

So it could happen to anyone and boy, I would *not* want that to happen to me, but deep down I know what I'd have to do, I'd know what the program was. If that were to happen I would just have to learn how to do 40 years of meditation in 40 days. I just don't want to have to work that hard.

>>**Rick:** So we're talking about criteria of enlightenment and possible litmus tests. Ken Wilber's "lines of development" idea comes to mind, where you could have very dissimilarly developed lines of behavior, compassion, consciousness, you know, various things. So I guess the question there is how tightly or loosely correlated do you feel the lines of development are - I'm sure you're probably familiar with Ken's model - and do you feel that inevitably, if one has a lopsided development, that the other lines are going to get dragged along? Or could one easily spend a lifetime with a very lopsided sort of development and actually mistakenly assume that you were fully developed?

>>**Shinzen:** That is a very interesting question. It's actually a statistical question and because it's a statistical question and we don't have good data, I don't feel that I can give a confident answer.



Essentially what you're saying is, what are the probabilities that a person could develop strongly in certain dimensions and be undeveloped in other dimensions, and that not be corrected?

>>**Rick:** Yeah, do the dimensions "bleed" into one another? Is it possible to cordon them off and have them not be influenced by one another, or do they inevitably carry one another along, whichever one gets out ahead?

>>**Shinzen:** Yeah, I would say that there is a tendency for the dimensions to carry each other, there is that tendency but it is not guaranteed. And so the answer is, I don't know what the relative proportions are here, I don't know ... yeah, I can't comment on that. But I think the important thing to keep in mind is, since if you grow in some you're likely to grow in others, but not inevitably. I think the real issue is, what can we do to make sure that people *do* grow in all the dimensions.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, well put.

>>**Shinzen:** I think that's the central issue. And I would say that there are certain factors that we can put in place that will make it likely that a person will grow in all the dimensions, not just some. So if those factors are in place then one will likely grow evenly, and alternatively, if they're not in place, there is the danger that one may *not* grow evenly, because there's actually a sort of dialectic to it.

The main contrast that we're talking about is the degree of liberation versus the degree to which you're a good person, by ordinary standards. I would say those are the main two dimensions to deal with here – liberation has its sub-dimensions, no doubt, and being a good person by ordinary standards has its sub-dimensions.

But I think the basic question that would be asked is: can you become enormously free from your mind-body identity and not necessarily be a good person? The answer is yes. Will the fact that you do become free from your mind-body identity tend to make you into a good person? The answer is yes, but it is a two-edged sword because it can also make you okay with not being a good person.

So I know that that sounds like a mixed message and I'm afraid it is. So what we need here is statistics, averaged over many, many people, long periods of time [of studying] how things tend to come out. But I tend to think that on average, liberation makes you a better and better person, on average. But I can't give you hard statistics on these things, so I can't be confident on that. I can be confident about a list of things that if they are in place will likely end up with what we want, and what we want is someone who is beyond the norms of society and very admirable by the norms of society; that's what we want.

So I can list things that if they're in place, that will likely happen: one is [to have] some sort of general behavioral guidelines. In Buddhism we call it "shila," and there are four major ones: not taking life, not taking what's not given, not speaking falsehood, and not doing things in the sexual domain that would be nonconsensual or harmful in some way, and so forth.

So I think it's good to state general guidelines, on the other hand we don't want to get all legalistic and spend *all* our time and energy trying to figure out the minutia of morality. But yeah, have some general guidelines that are acknowledged...

>>**Rick:** And these guidelines aren't just useful in and of themselves are they, but they're also conducive to enlightenment. I mean, if you're violating all these guidelines, aren't you kind of hamstringing yourself? And Patanjali has his thing too, with the yamas and niyamas – certain behavioral guidelines which if adhered are going to make you a better candidate for enlightenment.

>>**Shinzen:** Yes, and that's also, not surprisingly, the Buddhist take on things. Basically, shila is the Buddhist version of yama and niyama, and you also see in St. Teresa of Avila and the Christian tradition. When you read *Your Interior Castle*, you see where she starts with these ethical behavior guidelines and this kind of stuff.

So then you've got that, but then there's a couple of other things. I think that one should use one's practice to try to deconstruct negative urges when they arise, and you can apply techniques to doing that, you can break them into their component parts and so forth. And so you're using the liberation practice not just to be happy independent of conditions, but you're using the liberation practice to actually modify your behavior. And the way that you do that, the central insight in that, is to realize that objective behaviors, which in the Buddhist tradition are what we say, what we think, what we do, intentionally – body, speech, mind – objective behaviors are controlled by sensory experiences. If you're trying to stop smoking, what is the urge to smoke? Well, there's a mental picture of smoking, there's mental talk about smoking, and there are physical and emotional sensations in the body. If you can untangle those and then experience each one of them with equanimity until they become just a flow of energy, the urge to smoke will go away.

So you can apply your practice, and if your practice is advanced you can apply your liberation to actually deconstructing the sensory experiences that might drive and distort unproductive behaviors, or maladapted behaviors. So an actual intention to use the practice, not just to be happy independent of conditions, but to use the practice, the techniques, or maybe even [to use] your state of liberation as a place to work on behavior.

So you have the guidelines for the behavior, you have a way of working with the behavior with your practice, that is well-defined for you, and the other thing is you take feedback from everyone – everyone in your environment; the feedback loops are open. Typically where the wheels come off on a guru trip is that the feedback mechanism is broken. Either the students are afraid to give feedback or the teacher doesn't want to have to *deal* with feedback or some combination of that, but somehow, the teacher is not treated just like how you would treat anyone else and they're not told when they're doing things that are inappropriate, and they're not continuously told, and they're not confronted.

So I think that throughout one's entire life, if one is into this practice, even if one becomes a great master with an immense following and has done incredibly good work in the world, and made even, perhaps, spiritual innovations, even in that case, to keep the feedback loops from everyone, including people that *don't* meditate, ordinary people, children, certainly your students. Listen to a lot of people telling you what they see. Keep those feedback loops open, know that there will be forces both within you and within others that will tend to close them down, make considered effort to keep those loops open.

So the combination of your general guidelines plus the openness to feedback from everyone, not just from your peers, other masters and adepts, but ordinary people and your students. The general guidelines, plus the feedback loops, plus knowing how to apply your practice to actual behavior change, if those are lined up then you should end up in a balanced liberation situation, assuming that someone is also pushing you in the dimension of breaking the identification with the mind-body ... that whole dimension.

If you find that you're applying your practice, you agree with the ethical guidelines, you're listening to feedback, but your behavior is still off, then there's one more thing that has to be brought online, and that's what I call "a behaviorally oriented accountability and support structure." So what does that mean - "accountability and support behaviorally oriented?" Okay, so I have a drinking problem, I join a 12-step program, they support me in sobriety and the sobriety is a behavior – you either drank today or you *didn't*, but there's accountability. My sponsor gives me assignments in the Steps; I have to work the steps. So that is an example of what I call a behaviorally oriented accountability and support structure.

A therapist is not necessarily behaviorally oriented. They're going to support you, but some therapists, if they're behaviorists, they are actually another example of a behaviorally oriented accountability and support structure, and that may be needed even if you're a great master.

I would say that if you have all of these factors lined up and you have at least one teacher who has had at least initial experience of liberation and believes that you can achieve that, pushing you, and you have all of this other stuff lined up and you keep that up for the duration ... for your whole life, I would say there's a pretty good probability you will become ... at least you will achieve the first levels of liberation, *and*, that will be a balanced liberation for you.

**>>Rick:** Nice. What you were saying about smoking and drinking reminded me of something you said in your interview with Tami Simon which was that some breakthrough you had had – some awakening, some realization – cured you instantly of a 10-year addiction to marijuana. And that surprised me a little bit because in my own case, I'd been doing drugs for about a year and then I learned to meditate, and I almost immediately found that the way I began to feel *all* the time once I had begun to meditate, was better, by far, than the way drugs had made me feel temporarily, and therefore I totally lost the taste for drugs from day one, pretty much. So I was wondering how you could have been a dedicated practitioner for a decade and still found marijuana to be enjoyable or desirable?

**>>Shinzen:** Well, I don't know exactly how but it happens. I mean, there are plenty of highly-liberated people that are alcoholics.

**>>Rick:** I know, that always puzzles me.

**>>Shinzen:** Yeah! Well, I don't know, it happens. People have different genes, different makeup, they face different challenges, so what might be a relatively easy dimension for one person might be a very difficult dimension for some other person. It's just individual variation.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, but you know, one of the characteristics of - you know the phrase “sat, chit, ananda” – one of the characteristics of this realization is supposed to be bliss, ananda. So if the bliss is lively, wouldn't substance abuse of any sort detract from it and be an immediate sort of disincentive to continue with it?

>>**Shinzen:** Apparently not.

>>**Rick:** Apparently not, yeah, I'm just scratching my head. It's just something I've never figured out.

>>**Shinzen:** Well, I mean, liberated people still enjoy sex.

>>**Rick:** Yeah?

>>**Shinzen:** So you might say, if you've got enough ananda, why bother?

>>**Rick:** Okay, I see your point. Yeah, like you still enjoy eating a good meal or something.

>>**Shinzen:** Yeah, so it's probably in that category.

>>**Rick:** Okay, so let's shift now. I know that you have a fondness, an enthusiasm for the science-spirituality interface. And I'd like to bring out a point which might be a little different than you usually emphasize when you talk about that and see what you think, about this point, which is that ... I like to think that the human nervous system is the ultimate scientific instrument and that spiritual practices can be pursued in a way that conforms with the scientific method – you know ... theory and then experientially verifying that theory, if possible, and then new theory and so on. And when you think of it as the ultimate scientific instrument, when you consider other scientific instruments – telescopes, microscopes, large hadron collider – they're all pretty fancy and they extend our senses in certain ways that they would never be able to experience otherwise, but when you actually look at their physical construction, they're nowhere *near* the sophistication of the human nervous system, the brain, or even a single cell.

And so it's interesting to consider realms of possibility of what can be explored and what can be experienced **using the human nervous system as your instrument for exploration**. And like you mentioned, some areas where the Buddha talked about things like gods and reincarnation and psychic powers and all, and you were saying, “Well, maybe, maybe not; hard to say,” **but he may have used his scientific instrument in such a way as to actually have experientially verified those things**. And maybe, well, you could take any number of other things like **angels or whatever, perhaps these are all realities which we could agree upon as a culture if enough of us conducted the necessary experiments**. So go with that, what do you have to say?

>>**Shinzen:** Well, the problem with that is that ... let's see here, what would be the best way to address that?

>>**Rick:** Uniformity of use of that instrument?

>>Shinzen: Um ... yeah. I'm trying to think of what would be a clear way of explaining the problems inherent in that approach.

>>Rick: I think I know what you might be trying to get at.

>>Shinzen: Yeah, go ahead.

>>Rick: Well, it's like when scientists conduct it, they have to explain exactly how they're using a particular instrument and all the variables and possible corrupting influences in the experiment. And they lay it all out and they publish their results in such a way that anybody else can replicate the experiment, using the very same apparatus, under the same conditions, to see if they get the same outcome.

And when you get into spiritual practice, it's such a messy field in terms of so many possible practices and influences that it's really hard to have it be so cut and dry, as it is in ordinary scientific research.

>>Shinzen: Yes, I think that would perhaps sum it up. In other words, if everyone that looked within, who had comparable degrees of concentration and clarity and equanimity skills, gave the exact same detailed, quantified picture, *that* might be one thing. In other words, if everyone that looked into the realm of gods saw exactly the same gods, *that* would be one thing, but they don't. Then that brings the entire endeavor into question because we also know that you can hallucinate, you can become intoxicated and you can experience all sorts of stuff really vividly.

Certain general patterns tend to come up within certain cultures, but there is not quantifiable agreement from introspection. And I don't even have a scintilla about whether someone like Meister Eckhart or St. John of the Cross experienced no-self in the Buddhist sense, but they never talked about psychic powers or reincarnation or the Hindu god realms, the way they put that and so forth.

And the Zen masters *very* seldom talk about these things. There is probably more liberation per capita on this planet in the Zen tradition than anywhere else, and they are silent about those kinds of things. And you could say, "Well, that's because they don't people to be attached," etcetera, etcetera, but if these things *really* existed and they knew that, I think they would talk about it.

And I've asked great Zen masters if they've ever had any paranormal experiences and they said, no, and they're liberated. So there's not a uniformity [of experiences] and so *that's* the problem. Some people have certain kinds of experiences that are *vaguely* similar, but for one person God is going to have eight arms, and for another He's going to have four, and for another person She's black. So that would be equivalent of our getting one reading on our spectrometer when we were in Paris and another one in Kampala, which would make us think that maybe our physics is off.

>>Rick: Well it was interesting, in one of your writings you said, "As far as the scientific means to enlightenment, we're at the Galileo stage, not the Hubble stage" – and you were speaking perhaps pretty broadly and encompassing and including all the traditions. I also heard you say that we shouldn't necessarily assume that some tradition as it was founded 2,000 years ago or even as it is practiced today is the be-all and end-all, and so as we were saying earlier, just as a spiritually enlightened person may be

in a fledgling stage of development compared to what's ultimately possible, the same could be said of a whole tradition.

And it might be that a tradition has the capacity to bring people to a certain stage, provide certain levels or types of experience, and another tradition has a different flavor of that, where they're going to result in different experiences, but none of them – it's the blind men and the elephant thing – none of them has the whole elephant, and maybe there will never be a tradition that has the whole elephant, so to speak, in its perspective. Anyway, something interesting to play with.

>>Shinzen: You want my response?

>>Rick: Yeah, yeah, please.

>>Shinzen: Well, when I said we were in the Galileo stage I was referring to something pretty specific, which is the attempt of hard science – by 'hard science' I don't mean it's hard to learn it; I mean that it is quantified science – the attempt of quantified science, physical science, to look into the process of liberation, we're just starting with that.

>>Rick: I see.

>>Shinzen: And you sometimes hear people claiming that, "Oh yeah, we understand the neuroscience of enlightenment," or something like that ...

>>Rick: They're just scratching the surface.

>>Shinzen: ... because they want to sell books, basically. You know, the reason most books are written is so that someone can sell that book. So you always have to distrust, or not distrust but just bear in mind that that's basically why people write books, it's to sell them. So if I claim, "Hey! We've discovered the neuroscience of enlightenment," well, I'm going to be able to maybe sell a book if I can get the right jacket cover and make it look right and make a few quasi-science-sounding claims.

So the reason I use that metaphor of the Galileo versus the Hubble telescope is because we're at a delicious stage. Galileo, he knew he was onto something, he had an awareness extending to him where it didn't distort anything, it didn't change anything, all it did is resolve and magnify - made something look larger and it showed detail. He had an awareness extending to him and he applied that tool to looking at the moon and other celestial objects. And he discovered that it's not like what everyone believed! It's *not* like what Aristotle said it had to be like, it just isn't.

And I'm sure he must have thought, "Who knows the consequences of this right now? Obviously things aren't the way we thought they are and this is probably going to really go somewhere," and in fact it really did. It ended up in Newtonian physics and then in Relativistic quantum physics and modern Cosmology. And the Hubble and similar telescopes are sent up based on the modern science of Cosmology, but Galileo could not even imagine the specifics of where it was going, but he *knew* he was onto something important.

So we have relatively crude ways of imaging brain function, we have massive array EEG, we've got MEG – magneto encephalography, and we've got the current, sexiest approach which is fMRI, which is functional magnetic resonance imaging. So we have these tools and now we're looking at meditators and we're looking at liberated people and we're getting a hint that there's something. We know we're onto something and this is probably going to lead to *stunning* breakthroughs in the future.

So that's the exciting part, but the frustrating part is that we don't *quite* know what we're onto yet, in specific. But I would suspect that barring a catastrophic collapse of human civilization in the next 100 years or so, I would suspect that those neuro-imaging technologies will grow to the point where we actually do have a picture of enlightenment. And when we do, we will be able to talk about the subject in a way that none of the great masters of the past could have.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, and I heard you say that with the marriage of sufficiently sophisticated science and spiritual practice, the two together could come up with means of attaining enlightenment which are far more efficient and effective and universally applicable than we've seen so far.

>>**Shinzen:** That would be the Holy Grail, wouldn't it?

>>**Rick:** Yeah. I mean, it could be something that you get by the time you're graduating from high school – you're enlightened, you know? ☺ Or at least 90% of the people, or whatever.

>>**Shinzen:** Yeah, soon as I bring that up I'm aware of a raft of "yeah-but's" in people's minds. "Yeah, but have you thought about this? Yeah, but have you thought about that?" And my answer is, "Yes, I have certainly thought about every positive and negative consequence that I can imagine that might happen if we were able to accelerate enlightenment." But my take is that enlightenment is a natural process.

I described that breakthrough where I said that I was sitting there and I was in so much pain, and then suddenly I wasn't finding the pain; that just happened, and I would say that that's just waiting to happen inside anyone; that's just a natural response. And even the paradigm shift of liberation, I believe is waiting to happen. So it's not like, "Oh, we're going to figure out some Franken-food, kind of weird thing that we're going to do to make humans into enlightened cyborgs or something, by modifying them in an unnatural way." Presumably, all we have to do is eliminate something that's getting in the way and then the liberation will just happen. So that's sort of how I see it.

>>**Rick:** But it could be more than one little thing getting in the way. I mean, the brain is vastly complex and it could be that a thorough restructuring of the brain over decades is what's called for to bring about full realization, and you're not going to do that by taking a pill or doing some little technique for a day or two.

>>**Shinzen:** Well, no, who knows what the science of the future will be? We just *don't* know. But I would suspect that if we had a scientific view of the brain changes associated with liberation, then based on that we could probably figure out ways to accelerate a natural process, and therefore make enlightened consciousness spread virally over the planet, fairly quickly.

>>**Rick:** I kind of think it's happening in a very grass-roots sort of way. And I think that if we had technologies to accelerate it, I think there's always going to be the safety factor because **we've all seen people who went too far too fast and couldn't handle it, freaked out, and had psychotic episodes, and so there has to be an integration process and a stabilization process.** But I do think there's a quickening taking place on the planet, from my observation. It's like the "membrane" that blocks people from enlightenment - in which you had to have a superman like the Buddha to pierce through before, because it was so thick - **has become quite thin and a lot more people are breaking through it.**

>>**Shinzen:** Um, yeah, I think even if there wasn't this science-technology acceleration, **if we can make it through a few more centuries without a catastrophic collapse,** then I think you're right. Because what's happening essentially is that **there are no barriers to the spread of knowledge of how to meditate, there are no essential barriers to it as there were in the past.** I mean, if you were Chinese living in the Han Dynasty and you wanted to learn how to meditate, you had to *risk* your life to travel to India, to go through the deserts of central Asia. And then you'd get to India and find someone that knew their stuff, and you'd have to deal with language differences, and you'd have to deal with ... I mean, it would be a *big deal!*

Now you're one-click away from literally *thousands* of teachers, many of whom have had at least those initial experiences. It's just popping up all over the place. If someone tells me, "Her, there's this 23-year old kid that has a website that claims he's enlightened and has had these experiences," I have to be honest, the first thought that goes through my head is not, "Oh yeah, right, bullshit;" the first thought that goes through my head is, "Hmm, probably," and "Wow, it's great."

But now, we're talking about the *initial* experience right, that's pretty available; that stream-entry or Kensho kind of thing.

>>**Rick:** And when you're 23 you might well think that your initial experience is the full enchilada.

>>**Shinzen:** That could happen, that's why you need those feedback loops.

>>**Rick:** Right. You know, you've said several times that if we survive the next 100, 200, or 300 years, personally I think that the upwelling spiritual awakening that's taking place in the world is, you could say, **God's response or nature's response to the dilemma we face and is providing just the antidote to get us through the next few hundred years with flying colors.** In other words, science alone without spirituality is a dangerous thing, and the spirituality that's rising up to counterbalance it and to complement it - and *it* can complement spirituality - is proving to be a beautiful possibility for solving the problems which human minds, in their more deranged conditions, have created.

A lot of times my questions are like comments and you can just comment back.

>>**Shinzen:** Well, um, I don't know if I can ascribe causality but I think what you're describing makes sense; it seems to be what is happening, but we don't know. I always like to quote Yogi Berra, who would make these weird, strange ... logically strange comments. One of those Yogi Berra-isms is: "I never make predictions, especially about the future," so I have *no* idea whatsoever what's going to happen.



But what I would say is, on the assumption that we're able to avoid a catastrophic collapse for a century or two, under that assumption, if things continue the way they're continuing, I think what you're describing will happen, that **spirituality and science will evolve into a single, powerful human thing that represents our next step in evolution**. I guess I wouldn't say that I would say that would happen; I'm going to say that **it is not unreasonable, it is not ridiculous thought that that would happen**. And since the consequences of that would be more or less everything ... I mean, how do you put a dollar value on that? Is that a 100- trillion dollars? Is that a trillion-trillion dollars? It's like, if most humans were integrated, liberated - that **ideal I was just describing of being free but at the same time nice** – if most human beings had that combination going for them ...

>>**Rick**: Yeah, a vastly different world.

>>**Shinzen**: Yeah, what's it worth? How many trillions of dollars is that worth? **So when you think about what research you should invest in**, what you do is **you look at the probability of success and then you multiply that by the positive consequences**. So the probability of science and contemplative spirituality coming together and coming up with something new, I don't know what that probability is, but even if the probability were only 5%, okay ... you have to multiply that by a payoff of a trillion-trillion dollars. Now, how valuable is this research? Where should the money be going, big-picture wise? Sorry, I interrupted you.

>>**Rick**: Oh that's okay, I was about to take you off on another tangent, so I'm glad; it's good you finished.

I interviewed Dan Harris a couple of weeks ago, the ABC News guy who wrote *Ten Percent Happier*, and he mentioned during the interview that he had just meditated doing the interview and that it had been really unpleasant, that he just had to sit there and suffer for half an hour. And my heart kind of went out to him because in my experience, the way I went about it or learned it, it was always enjoyable and something I looked forward to, not something that took serious discipline to sit down and do because it was so gratifying. And I said, "Maybe you could just go easier on yourself, maybe you're straining, struggling."

So after all your decades of experience and practice and teaching, do you still regard meditation as necessarily often being an ordeal, or has your teaching evolved to the point where ... or no, that's sort of a judgmental way of stating it. I don't mean to say that what I've been doing is more evolved but, has your understanding of meditation changed in such a way that when you teach people now, they don't have to go through as much difficulty as you went through in your earlier days?

>>**Shinzen**: That's a very interesting question. I would say that how difficult meditation is at a given time is going to be a function of basically two things: how big the challenge is that you're experiencing from the outside world – so that's factor number one, because I don't care how practiced you are, if you're facing a *big* challenge in the world then *hey* ... when you sit down to meditate there may be some uncomfortable content there.

Another factor is that there is a natural rhythm of release of what we technically call “the samskaras” – I’m pretty sure you’re familiar with this term ... in the Pali language it is “samkara,” in Sanskrit it is “samskara.” And those are the, in general, the habit forces deep within; it is one of the Indian words for what the West calls “the unconscious. And there’s a little bit of an implication, often, that these are limiting forces, although technically, samskaras are *any* kind of habit forces, positive or negative.

But there are limiting forces within us, negative samskaras, and they’re deep, deep down. And when they release, our surface sensory experience might be uncomfortable. So through a combination of the external challenges from situations, some combination of that plus this sort of natural rhythm of release of these samskaras, sometimes practice is going to be easier, sometimes it’s going to be harder, and I think we just have to accept that that’s the way it goes. If you run in nature, sometimes you’re going to encounter hills sometimes you’ll encounter valleys, and you shouldn’t stop running just because you have a hill.

Now to get to your question though, which is a very interesting and meaty question, with regards to how my teaching has evolved over the years, I *definitely* have something I can say, which is a paraphrase: one might say that all problems have solutions - that’s a phrase that a person might use. Now I’m going to modify that phrase in a little bit of a strange way. I’m going to say: all problems are solutions, they are solutions to some other problem but you don’t realize it. So I understand that that sounds very abstract and a little weird, but it goes to the heart of the way that I like to teach practice.

When a person is encountering something that is perceived as problematic, my main job is to find a way to make that an optimal growth experience for that person. And I don’t mean an optimal growth experience in the sense of, “Well, everything is just another f-ing growth opportunity” – I don’t mean *that*. I mean that the structure of each specific challenge as it comes up, when you analyze it carefully, will have within it features that if you work with them will optimize your growth.

So when a person is having a hard time, this is where the interactive algorithm comes in. I start asking them questions, getting a lot of very specific information about the sensory makeup of the challenge that they’re going through. And then based on that information I’ll be able to show them, often, that what they thought was a problem has associated with it a very specific window of opportunity. If you work with it this particular way, you’re going to get something that you couldn’t get if you weren’t having this so-called “problem.”

So one of my main jobs is to show people the optimal way to work with each challenge as it comes up. So if Dan were my student and he said, “I had this terrible meditation ... this uncomfortable experience,” I would start a detailed probing process to try to get a sense of exactly what that was sensorially. And there’s a high probability that something would come up there that I’ll be able to say, “Oh, okay, that aspect of it is actually going to give you a payoff that you couldn’t get otherwise. It’s a really good thing but you have to work with it this way, and I’ll show you how to do that.”

>>**Rick:** Hmm. Do what extent do you think that what is being taught today in terms of Buddhist practices - and I know there are a whole lot of flavors in different parts of the world – corresponds to what the Buddha was actually teaching? I guess we don’t know what he was actually teaching, do we, in

terms of a practice? Or do you have a pretty good idea and you feel that what you're doing conforms to that?

>>**Shinzen:** Umm, that's pretty tricky. We don't have solid written records where we can, with confidence, know how the Buddha taught exactly; we have some general principles. In general it's thought that what we find in the Pali literature is *closest* to what the Buddha taught, but that doesn't mean it's exactly what he taught.

And we know that what we find in the later Mahayana may represent important *extensions* of what the Buddha taught but is *less* like what he taught. That doesn't mean it doesn't bring you to liberation, it just means it has features that objective scholars don't think were present in early Buddhism. And then the next step after that, Vajrayana, seems to be, in some ways, the most divergent from what the Buddha taught. Once again, that doesn't mean it doesn't bring liberation because there's such a thing as evolution, new things are discovered.

So these things that we find in Mahayana that we don't find in Hinayana (the small vehicle) or in the Pali Cannon, or the things we find in Vajrayana that we don't find in Mahayana, some of them may be improvements and some of them may be the opposite of improvements. But in terms of general picture - there's a sort of big picture view - what I just said is shared by most objective scholars of Buddhist history. But the criterion is not, "Oh, we need to just teach what the Buddha taught," because we would need to dialogue with the Buddha to really understand what he taught, and we can't do that. Yeah, so I think that's what I have to say about that.

I will say this in terms of what you asked me about my teaching, now I am sure that there are a *gazillion* things about the way that I teach and go about things that would pretty much horrify the Buddha, but that's because he's a person of twenty-five hundred years ago ... a very different world. It would take him a while to get used to our world, so there's that.

But I will say this, there's one central discovery that he made that I don't think gets emphasized enough in practice, in *any* of the three vehicles actually, and it's the 'divide and conquer,' the fact that you can untangle the sensory strands of self and the "somethingness" goes away. Now I am very aware that all of the Buddhist traditions talk about this, I'm not saying they don't; they *absolutely* talk about it, but what I'm saying is, for me, that's the centerpiece of practice. That's *it*. That's basically what I teach people. I don't use the 5 Skandhas Model because it is too ambiguous and inaccessible to a beginner, but I use something like that. The 5 Skandhas Model essentially says that there are these five components, if you untangle them and break the grasping around them, the somethingness of self goes away.

So I offer an alternate taxonomy but it's still the same basic principle: you have mental image, you have mental talk, you have physical and emotional body sensations, and if you can untangle that and break the congealing and grasping around it, the somethingness of self goes away. And when the somethingness of self goes away, that's your initial liberation experience. I make that the centerpiece of my teaching. And sometimes that sort of gets *lost* in the way people teach.

So if you ask me specifically how I see my relationship to the Buddha I would say, I take that seriously and I really emphasize it, and my techniques are built primarily around *that*. Culturally though and in a lot of other ways, I'm sure that the Buddha would have a lot of difficulty adjusting to me.

>>**Rick:** Yeah. I just thought of a follow-up question to the Dan Harris question, which I think relates to what you just said about the untangling ... and you answered the Dan Harris question in terms of the releasing of samskaras [that could be] making you uncomfortable. I guess my question would be: if you're having a crappy experience in meditation, if it's an ordeal, not just occasionally but often, is it really the release of samskaras that's making it unpleasant or is there something about your practice that's straining or unnatural or just making it harder on yourself than it needs to be?

>>**Shinzen:** Highly likely, it is highly likely that that's the case. And that's *exactly* what you go to a competent teacher to find out, and they will analyze. There's a place in this practice for bearing down and there's a place in this practice for easing up, and there's just no way around that. And so there is a kind of dialectic ... even the Buddha talked about that *a lot*, about tightening the strings of a lute – you don't make it too tight, you don't make it too loose, so a teacher can help you with that dialectic.

But someone struggling with practice is a multidimensional problem and I like to analyze each dimension, but you're right, if it's a schlep every day, if it's an aversive experience, then it may be that it's just something you have to deal with and there's no way around it. But before you resign to that, I would get several qualified opinions by competent teachers, just like you'd go to several competent doctors to see what they have to say.

>>**Rick:** Yea, that's a good point. I mean, Dan made the point of, "Well, I want to give people realistic expectations. I don't want them to think this is going to be a cake-walk because then they're just going to give up if it's unpleasant." But the flipside of that is, well, if this whole trip is about becoming a happier person, a better person, do we really need to sort of flagellate ourselves in order to achieve that? Because that's not very appealing, you know?

>>**Shinzen:** That's right, I think you want to ... well, here would be my metaphor, and once again, the geek comes out. So let's say there's some chemical reaction - it's natural, but you want to speed it up. Well one way you could speed it up is by heating it up, but the problem with that is that sometimes that can mess with the reaction. So it's true, if you can deal with the discomfort in your practice, expose yourself to big challenges, that's analogous to heating things up, and that could speed up the reaction. I mean, when I talked about that first breakthrough, I was in hell on wheels and I couldn't get out of it, other than to just run screaming from the Zendo. So I was trapped and there was a lot of heat, and in that particular case it speeded up a reaction, so it worked out! But sometimes it doesn't work out that way. Sometimes in a reaction, if you try to speed up a reaction by putting more heat, it causes the reaction to go askew.

>>**Rick:** Have you seen people go psychotic and all under intense practice?

>>**Shinzen:** Very occasionally, but it's always under intense practice and it's almost always someone that has had those tendencies before. So I would not say, "Oh my God, people are going to flip out,

statistically.” I can’t say I haven’t seen it happen, but more common is the dark night – that’s more common than psychosis, but that’s a whole other conversation, which I’ve spoken a lot about. But let me just complete the metaphor and then maybe we need to be winding up.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, we do.

>>**Shinzen:** So how can you speed up the reaction without adding heat? Or how can you even reduce the heat because it’s messing with the reaction, and still speed it up? Well the analogy in chemistry is a catalyst, and a biological catalyst is called an enzyme. So in this case, the trick is to talk to a teacher who knows how to give you the approach that’s going to bring maximal growth with minimal heat.

I can’t say that you might not have to sometimes go through some heat, but I can also say that what I’ve spent the last 40 years trying to figure out is the flowchart, the algorithm: given a particular kind of challenge, what is the optimal procedure that will allow the maximal reaction speed with the minimum heat?

>>**Rick:** Hmm, good. Let me ask you one final question to wrap it up and we’ll conclude after this. You mentioned “transcending the world to improve the world,” and you also said, “The three characteristics of someone who could save the world might be: meditation practice, scientific mentality, and thinking outside the box.” Weave those together into a response.

>>**Shinzen:** Response to... ?

>>**Rick:** Well, you know, transcending the world to improve the world and the three characteristics of someone who could save the world, and presumably, lots of someones, if we could multiply this ... meditation practice, scientific mentality, and thinking outside the box.

>>**Shinzen:** Well, I’d like to talk about the goals of this practice in different ways. There are a lot of ways of classifying the goals of a practice, but one way to think about it is that mindfulness practice allows you to appreciate the self in the world sensorially, just as they are, it gives you an experience of transcending the self in the world, and it motivates you and makes you effective in improving the self in the world.

Now I would say what would be the ultimate improvement of the world that I can imagine ... so if it is about appreciating, transcending, improving, and seeing that these reinforce each other, they’re part of one process, if that’s what it is, then what is the ultimate thing that I can imagine that would improve the world? It would be what we were talking about before: to come up with a way that accelerates this process.

So the question is: what kind of people could come up with something like that? Who is likely to be able to figure that out? And what I came up with is that it is likely going to be people that have three things going for them, and each of those three things is no small thing, so to have all *three* of them going for you is a really *big* thing. So, one is deep practice, so that means you actually *have* experienced what’s beyond self and world; you’re not just a meditator, you’ve had at least stream-entry or kensho-type experience, and that’s integrated.

So you've actually experienced transcendence of self of world – you're that, and you have a scientific mentality. You're trained to think quantitatively, you can design experiments, and you can do the levels of mathematics needed for that kind of work, so that's the scientific training.

And the third is out of the box thinking, which means that although you've been trained in a certain tradition, you see things in a larger light, you don't necessarily just accept it on face-value. And, you've been trained in certain scientific paradigms but you realize that there may be other ways of looking at things. So that's an out of the box, highly creative person.

So if you have someone that's had a fair degree of contemplative attainment, a good scientific education and is a highly creative figure, and then they put their mind ... probably combined in a team of other people, these people put their minds to the question of, "We live in this world of freedom, we live three times as large as we ever imagined we could, how can we make this available to more-or-less everyone on the planet?"

A team like that, putting their efforts together, maybe not in this decade, maybe not in the next decade, but in one of these decades in the next century or two, they could probably *solve* that problem. And that would be the biggest thing that you could do to improve the world because you would basically, fundamentally reengineer human beings into spiritual beings.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, well you've just described yourself actually.

>>**Shinzen:** Yeah, that's why I'm not *that* guy, because first of all I'm too old and secondly, science probably isn't ready ... I was too soon.

>>**Rick:** Well, you know, you're a forerunner.

>>**Shinzen:** Yeah, but I think it's cool ... okay, so this is my "sane" form of grandiosity, I hope you understand the joke here, right? Not taking this too seriously. So people are grandiose, you know, we are, and I have grandiosity but I like to think it's sane. So my sane grandiosity is: "*No*, I'm not the guy that's going to save the world but, if someone does, they'd probably be *something* like me and that's kind of cool."

>>**Rick:** Yeah, you're the avant-garde, and actually, it seems to be happening. There are more and more teams of research at Harvard and other universities, some of whom you've collaborated with, who are getting into serious work on this stuff. So compared to what it was four decades ago it's really gone *somewhat* mainstream, and actually can go a lot farther, but it's picking up the pace, it's gaining momentum.

>>**Shinzen:** Who knows? Fifty years from now someone watches this program and says, "Wow! Way back then they were already talking about this stuff."

>>**Rick:** Yeah, you and I, we'll be teenagers watching this thing... "Oh, cool man, I'm going to get into this." 😊

Alright, well great. I really appreciate having had this conversation with you. I'll wrap it up now. Are there any final words you want to say before I wrap it up?

>>**Shinzen:** Oh no, I'm completely talked out.

>>**Rick:** Okay, good. So I've been talking with Shinzen Young. As always, I'll be linking to his websites, his books, anything else of relevance ... and he has a lot of good stuff too. Your Facebook channel is fantastic the way it's organized, with all these playlists all categorized in different ...

>>**Shinzen:** Actually, that's the YouTubes.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, that's what I meant to say ... the YouTubes.

>>**Shinzen:** Yeah, the one-stop shopping for me is [www.basicmindfulness.org](http://www.basicmindfulness.org) , and then that has all the other links right on that page.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, and I'll be linking to all your stuff and to your books, and so on. So you can go to [www.basicmindfulness.org](http://www.basicmindfulness.org) , you can also go to [www.batgap.com](http://www.batgap.com) to see more about Shinzen and about all the other people I've interviewed and will interview. They are indexed under 'Past Interviews' in about four different ways, so check that out.

Under 'Future Interviews' you can see people who are upcoming. There's a place to sign up to be notified by email each time a new interview is posted. There's a donut ... I mean 'Donate' button ... 😊 ... so we can buy donuts! 😊 Actually, I haven't had a donut in years. But we appreciate that, when people donate. BATGAP is a 501C-3, if you're in the U.S. you know what that means.

There is a link to an audio Podcast on every interview, so you can sign up on iTunes or one of those other Podcast things and listen in audio. Also, there is a little discussion group that crops up around each interview. Sometimes it gets pretty lively and there will be one for this interview, which you'll see a link to on Shinzen's page.

So thanks for listening or watching and we'll see you next week with Sally Kempton. Thank *you*, Shinzen.

>>**Shinzen:** Excellent, thanks.

>>**Rick:** Yep, very good.

>>**Shinzen:** Bye-bye.

>>**Rick:** Bye.

{BATGAP theme music plays}