

# 2008-03-02 Difficult Events As Teachers

Sat, 8/1 11:05PM • 27:31

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

retreat, monastery, teacher, world, deep, shindo, people, life, medicine, practice, mindfulness, abbot, days, pull, stronger, happen, mud, noticing, understand, feel

## SPEAKERS

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So in the Zen tradition, they have a saying, medicine and sickness heal each other. All the world is medicine. So that's repeated in very variety of places. Medicine and sickness heal each other. The whole world isn't medicine. Then there's a story when secret named sudano, came to the great Bodhisattva Manjushri Manjushri said, Go out the gate of the monastery. If there's something that is not medicine, bring it to me. If there's something that's not medicine, bring it to me. So Donna went out the gate and searched all over. But there was nothing that was not medicine. Coming back to my judiciary, he said, all over the world. There's nothing that is not Medicine Manjushri said, then bring me something that is medicine. Sedona Sedona brought back a stock of grass and handed it to my juicery and usually held it up and said, This single stock of grass can kill or give life.

Medicine and sickness heal each other. Very subtle indeed. So all the world is medicine. So here's a different story. Many people arrived at the monastery hoping to be to be admitted to the monastic order. Most were sent back since what they were searching for was not to be found in the monastery. Shindo was one such person When he arrived at the monastery, he was exhausted and discouraged. He felt that he was no longer capable of living a worldly life. Perhaps he hoped the monastery would at least provide him with some degree of relief from the pressures he'd been living under. It was the birth of a second child, that it pushed Shindo over the edge. He can no longer manage to live with the frustration and the demands. On his time that family life had become. Also he was worn down by his older child's constant pushing limits of acceptable behavior.

They came to the monastery he asked that he be put under the care of the abbot or another great teacher who could help him find peace, real peace. He felt a hope. He felt hope, when he was told that this could be arranged however, First, he would have to prepare himself and prove himself to be worthy by sitting alone in meditation for seven days. In the small waiting room next to the main entrance to the monastery. Shindo cried the first two days. During the third day, he was washed with alternating waves of nausea and fear. The force which was the fourth was spent reviewing his life. For the thick fifth and six days, he seemed to question every belief he had. By the seventh day, he was beginning to feel calmer, and certainly more rested than when he had arrived seven days earlier. At the end of the seventh day, he was eagerly waiting his admission to the monastery and finding out who would be his teacher. When the seven days were over, the abbot himself came for Shinto. The Abbot congratulated him on completing him complete The solitary retreat comes to the abbot and I will introduce you to your new teacher, your new teachers. It took a while, but we have found the ideal people who can help you to find both your spiritual strength and freedom. The habit then led Shindo out to the front gate of the monastery waiting for him. There was his wife and two kids.

Happy to see them Shindo raced out to embrace them. Then the abbot declared, your wife and two children are your ideal chill teacher teachers nowhere else but in your own family. We find what you're looking for. With that the abbot close the monastery gates. Okay, one more reading here. This is Gary Snyder through a work of his called the practice of the wild All of us are apprenticed to the same teacher that their religious institutions originally worked with reality. Reality insights, insights says, master the 24 hours, do it well, without self pity. It is as hard to get the children herded into the carpool and down the road to the bus as it is to chant sutras in the Buddha Hall on a cold morning. One move is not better than the other. Each can be quite boring. And they both had the virtuous quality of repetition, repetition and ritual and the good results come in many forms, changing the filter, wiping noses, going to meetings, picking up around the house, washing dishes, checking the dipstick. Don't let yourself think these are distracting you from your more serious pursuits. Such a round of chores is not a set of difficulties we hope to escape from so we can do our practice, which will put us on a path. It is our path. So the whole world is medicine. So how do we meet our life? How do we meet the challenges of our life or situation? So we find a path there. So we find the practice there. And certainly one of the things is to understand, be willing to understand that anything that happens, anything we encounter, that is a place of practice, that's that's where medicine is found. And how is it medicine? Our difficulties or struggles, the in Justices of life? How can it be medicine for us, and when sometimes it's causing us so much harm? So I want to tell you a phenomenon that I began noticing after I was a teacher for some Time. One of the things I do is I teach retreats, meditation retreats. And we design these retreats to be silent and to be somewhat protected, so people step out of the normal life. Sometimes it's helpful to leave after normal life for a period of time. So to get a different perspective to have something else happen, that can't happen if we stay in the middle middle of the middle busyness of our life. So in the story of Shindo, before he was introduced to his teachers, he did spend seven days alone meditating, going through some deep inner process that couldn't have happened, perhaps if he stayed in his normal life. And so on these retreats, we also designed them to be within reason, a safe environment as we can because when people sit in meditation and kind of open up and drop 30 defenses. It's really good to be in a protected environment where someone's not going to suddenly yell at you or, or steal from you or do something that was difficult. But then every once in a while something happens on these retreats that shouldn't have happened. It does happen. And remember there was once we had rented a facility in in Marin County, on a campus Dominican college up there, and there was the building of the campus was quite far away. So we were safe, but there was a fire. And so the fire agents came and they also came with helicopters. And it was pretty close right over us to helicopters. It was pretty noisy and loud. Like we smelled the blue smoke. And there was a woman on the retreat who had gone through World War Two in Germany. And the sounds that she heard, triggers or reminded her of all that. So we tried to make a safeplace but, you know, what could you do? It turned out that this was very meaningful for her. And even though it's very painful and traumatic to have this relived, at the same time, something about the retreat practice allowed her to go through it in a different way than she'd ever been through something like this before. Another time, when I was a new and naive teacher, and still not new anymore, but don't they? So it was one of the first retreats I taught.

And it was a 10 day retreat. And people after five days, people are pretty silent, pretty still the hardest, pretty open with all this stillness. And a lot of kind of usual concerns, people have fallen away. And we try to keep it that way. We don't want to suddenly get the newspaper and read what's going on in the world or a phone call from someone who sort of left alone to kind of do this inner process. Then this woman on the retreat came to me and explained that a man on the retreat was stalking her. And it turns out he wasn't. It was pretty everyone understood after a while that he wasn't, but it was just maybe a series of coincidences. And in the retreat environment, people are pretty sensitive and open and some of their fears maybe kind of stand on the forefront for a while. And, you know, he'd opened the door for her one time when she was booking out he was walking in, and that kind of did something to her and

variety of things. And so the question for me as a teacher was what do I do? You know, this is a pretty big charged, you know, issue. So, I went and talked to the guy. I talked to you, please. And, you know, this woman says you're, you're stalking her well, therefore guy, you know, he'd been sitting for, you know, five days by now and filing suit.

So it was pretty, I'm sure there was a better way to handle it. And so it was a mistake. And so we processed this. At the end of the retreat, the fellow said, that was really helpful. That was really good. He was the best thing that happened on the retreat was having to deal with this thing. And so I can feel a whole series of stories like this were things that happen that shouldn't happen just once more someone she haven't get. Now it's no longer now but she had a really hard time breathing. I think she thought she was having a heart attack or something. And so I took her directly to the emergency and just got her in the car and took her to the emergency. I spent, you know, again was this was a two week retreat. And so I was middle the retreat and right in the middle I spent I spent the whole late into the night with her emergency is a very different place to be and then retreat. And it was kind of unfortunate for her. And it turned out she was fine. I think she was having a panic attack. And it was fine. She came back. But she also said, Well, that was, you know, I thought I thought it was taking out of the retreat that was really distraction in really, you know, setting my retreat. And when I first came back, it was all stirred up, for sure. But it turned out that the issues that came up and what I had to meet and confront, made the really valuable retreat for me. So this is a pattern I see regularly, that things happen in Crete. That shouldn't happen. But we try not to we try to protect it. It's kind of rare, but things do happen. And after a while, I noticed how regularly it was that people would say that was the best thing that could have happened. What's the connection? And the connection, I believe is that, explain it this way. There are two things that are happening. There's the event. And then it's our relationship to it, how we are in relationship to it. And in the environment of the retreat, that's a time when we're not involved in social interactions usually, except for stupid teachers. And the, the we are, you know, basically starting with you with yourself a lot. And you're doing a mindfulness practice where you're paying careful attention to what's going on for you, here and now in the present moment. And so, whereas there's something happening in the world, the practice is encouraging you to look at yourself in a deeper way you normally would. So you can't get caught up, caught up in blame, or anxiety about the future. You can't get caught up in the world and things of the world. It's very hard and retreat, because you're, there's this you're encouraged or reinforced this. You see the conditions are up. So you're looking at your half of the equation. There's two half of the equations, right? So in the world out there, and sometimes we're often looking at the external equation, and how to fix things and make things better and blame or do whatever we need to do. And in the world that we live in often, it's not so often that people look at this half of the equation, look really deeply what's going on was triggered in me. And what seems to happen is a stronger person is triggered stronger the reaction is, the more it's a symptom, that some deep attachment, some deep beliefs and deep resistance or fear has been touched. And sometimes the biggest challenge, the biggest win, the stronger the reaction, the more represents that something really deep inside of us has been touched. And so there's an unparalleled opportunity to look at this deep stuff. Now, in some Buddhist traditions, the teacher intentionally will do These kinds of things. And, you know, really kind of lay into you. I read one account over now is a renowned Zen teacher, who when his son was five, his son had brain cancer. And he went to his teacher kind of asked, hoping for sympathy and support and pity and his teacher laid into him. That's a hard thing to do, you know, your son says, you know, probably be dying of brain cancer. And, and, but he said, he claimed, that was the best thing that could have happened after that situation. He entered into the situation into his son's illness with great courage, great ability and compassion, for sure. And it was helpful not to be so somebody situations, teachers do that, in our tradition to me. That's usually not my mode. So we just wait for reality to catch up to

you. And sometimes, I do waited a while. And so it's kind of hard for me to kind of lay into people now because we don't always do that. That was my usual mode. Everybody understand it? 10 of you that would come with understanding Oh, that's, that's, that's what you can expect. And, and so you feel good about it. Listen, that's not you know, therefore the custom custom. So, anyways, this principle that the more strongly, more strongly we react to the events of the world, what's going on, the more actually that's an opportunity for that situation to be our teacher that we can learn from it. And so what does it require of us? One of the things requires, I suggest is requires us to some degree, whether it's literal or not, depends on you, to be still. To Be still and look, investigate what's going on here to study the situation. And that does two important things. One is you get to start studying, understanding more deeply what's going on understanding what's going on externally better, but also understand what's going on inside of you. And there's a lot you can learn. And if you try to keep try to keep in a sense in a healthy way, the mind still not react and act on all the feelings and reactions you have. You'll start noticing all the momentum agitation and movement in the mind of wanting and not wanting and pushing away and God do something and all that were stirred up. And it's really good to feel all that as opposed to blindly giving into it, letting it have the free run of your mind. So start seeing all that all this we start seeing and the more still you can be, the deeper you can go to see where the attachments that clinging and to the deeper values are that you have. Sometimes being still allows you to see the beauty that you want to live by not just the attachments you're struggling with. So there's an investigation that goes on. There's something else which is also even, I don't know if it's more important, but I put a lot of value in it. And they say it this way that if you're caught up in your reactions that's one world. If you step out of that world in order to look at it, to investigate it, you're not in meshed in that reactive world. It's kind of like there's a road and half the road is in the mud. And the other half of the road a little bit higher is dry. And you decide you can walk in deep knee deep mud, and you're kind of so hard to get your feet out and you walk along and you complain about the mud and you're afraid of the mud and you know, it's just a big deal you be careful you step because might be some bigger pockets that are six feet deep. You might pull down and you know should going on in mud. Then if you pull yourself out, it's a lot of effort to push that out and put, you know, first one foot on the dry part of the road or both feet. And then you can walk slightly easier. But it's so you know, so alluring, so beautiful at night and so much fun. It's squishy and, and so you kind of be forgetting, you put a foot back in. And then I forgot when I did all the work to pull out again, and you're lucky to pull one foot out, and then kind of going along lopsided, and then you forget, you step both feet in. And so investigating is part of the dry ground and pull you out of that world of thinking, world of feelings, worlds of feeling like you're a victim or need to blame or need to fix or need to, you know, make something happen. Of course, sometimes we do anything needs to make something happen, but we can get lost in that world. It simply is simply to ask the question What's going on here? pulls you a little bit out of being caught, what's going on? It's look around what's happening here. It's like in the middle of a complicated social party that's complicated or angry or whatever. And you're caught in the middle of the complicated and angry discussion. And suddenly you kind of take a deep breath, what's going on here and you look around, wow, there's a lot of people here upset. And that's a whole different, you're in a very different mode. When you look around, see, oh, people are upset and I'm upset, as opposed to getting in there and slugging it out. understand the difference. So when you start to investigate, two things are going on, you're learning about the situation learning about yourself. And in the investigation, you're pulling yourself out. And it seems to get a more overview, a better perspective. And that movement of pulling yourself out is very, very important one in Buddhist practice.

And the function of one of the functions of mindfulness is to create That sense of being being independent from what it is you're paying attention to. So you have an overview you're not in meshed in it. It doesn't mean that you're aloof or indifferent. But it means you're not caught up in the middle of it. And so when we practice mindfulness, one of the things we're trying to do is to practice mindfulness, so

that we mindfulness becomes stronger. Then our investment. So I had to be reminded of this yesterday, because yesterday I was doing some garden work at our house. So I was putting in a new bed, we live in a kind of Hill. So it was kind of putting in new new terrorists with a big, you know, retaining wall and stuff. And generally I kind of liked doing that kind of stuff. And for a while I enjoyed it. After a while I didn't there was a variety of circumstances that added to not enjoying it, including You know, kids who are kind of not trying to help the variety of things, and I was kind of feeling a little disoriented, started noticing myself feeling a bit grumpy about doing this. So then, okay, where do I live? Do I live in the grumpiness? You know, when I gets my score I get myself into or do I live someplace else? So the healthy thing to do, I felt was, okay, let's, let's, let's bring more mindfulness to this. Rather than being in the mode. Let me strengthen my mindfulness. So that mindfulness is stronger that mode of being, of being mindful is stronger than motor being grumpy. So it didn't take much, but they're just kind of doing a little more mindful and being aware of what's going on in my feelings and my body and my mind, like what was going on, and in doing that mindfulness Very quickly, it's like I pulled myself out of the mud and then I was there doing it. I still had a little bit grumpiness wasn't like the company just went away. But I was not living in the grumpiness. I was living in such a place of clarity and more alert and energized and it was easy, much easier to go do the job and enjoy myself while I was doing it. Then the grumpiness faded away. So, to practice mindfulness has these two important functions, helps understand what's going on, but also helps the mind the heart or sense of presence being to be free from what it is we know. And that counts for a lot. It's very important. So it'd be still enough in our life. To take the difficulties of our life, as our teachers as a place where we practice can be, sometimes strategically. It's very valuable to Retreat. We we physically retreat by going and retreat. Maybe that's why it's called retreats. I give up. And I go on retreat for a day or a week or something, an hour. And then and then but, you know, we're not trying to escape. We're trying them to be able to come back in a way that we can really address this life and be present for life and be wise in it. And the suggestion here, one more, one thing I want you to take today from here is that the stronger your reaction is, to events to the world, whether it's your health, inside of you, you know, something going on with your physical health or some something going on outside. The stronger your personal reaction is, the more that can be your It doesn't mean that you, you know, don't try to fix what's going on out there. But you if you only fix what's out there to successfully fix what's out there, you've lost an opportunity to use that situation as your teacher. And so everything's your teacher. So in other monastery story, is the focus is not about that today. Once a monk made a request of joshu, I have just entered the monastery. He said, Please give me instructions master. This guy got in. Give me just entered mastery. So Joshua was the abbot said, Have you had breakfast? Yes, I have replied the monk. Then said Joshua, wash your balls.

And the monk had an insight. The monk was a little bit awakened was asking for instructions, right? something profound and deep about the subtlety of meditation or the fecundity of Buddhist doctrine. Go wash your balls.

Finally, there's a Japanese Buddhist nun Zuni Hebrew from the 10th century. She wrote this beautiful poem. Although the wind blows terribly here, the moonlight also leaks between the roof planks of this ruined house. Japanese poetry is quite stiff like this is quite symbolic. Moonlight represents enlightenment. The ruined house is herself. The wind is the World Wind of the world. Although the wind blows terribly here, the moonlight also leaks between the roof planks of this ruined house.

So may you find the practice your practice your path in your life and your life as it as it as it appears for you. So thank you very much