

Towards a Balanced Enlightenment ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 Deep, deep practice is no guarantee against bad decisions. It's not a guarantee that people won't make seriously bad decisions.

00:00:27 But there's a tendency to think if a person is really deep and is obviously really deep, that they won't make horribly bad decisions or have opinions that are horribly wrong.

00:00:42 Right, because they're close to something like perfection.

00:00:45 Yeah. See, what we want to think is that there's this thing called enlightenment, and when you get there, everything's perfect as far as your life goes, and everything you do is perfect.

00:00:59 Wouldn't that be nice?

00:01:01 Yeah, but we want it to be that way. Something in us as humans says, that's the way it's got to be. It's like if you find this thing, you've now found the panacea, and both in terms of your experience and in terms of what you do, it's like perfection.

00:01:22 I can tell you that it does not work that way, in my experience. It is so not that way. First of all, it's both better than and worse than, not nearly as good as everybody thinks it is.

00:01:42 And secondly, you can definitely be empty of moment-by-moment ego, truly loving of each thing that appears in front of you, unswerving in your service 24-7, never-ending service.

00:02:06 You can have all of these characteristics and still make horribly bad judgments that have horrible consequences.

00:02:18 And then, just because you have all of the three characteristics I just said, doesn't mean that you're necessarily the best person to set up some sort of social structure.

00:02:33 The West is just growing up now. It's like, okay, it's like when you grow up, at some point you realize mommy and daddy aren't quite as good as you thought they were, or something. That's sort of part of the maturing process.

00:02:52 They're not the face of God.

00:02:54 Yeah.

00:02:55 How do you deal with the fact that you're not the face of God?

00:02:59 Making a lot out of the teacher, making, you know, imputing a lot to the teacher, making the teacher in some ways central, is a temptation, a tendency.

00:03:21 Yeah.

00:03:22 And I think it's good to try to resist that tendency so that it's more like, what is teacher?

00:03:32 Teacher is just an old student, basically, and there's more of a peer communication kind of thing.

00:03:42 So when we see the diametric opposite of that, those are the situations where the scandals have arisen, those are the situations where the problems have arisen.

00:03:56 So making a big thing about the teacher, imputing more to a teacher than any human teacher has, I think is one lesson we learn, okay, let's not do that.

00:04:14 My point is that you can be a master's master with regards to certain components and be like hugely imbalanced in other areas.

00:04:26 So it's a proof of principle, a principle that I've always held, that the components are independent, that there's not one package called enlightenment.

00:04:42 It's a vector, it's not a scalar, it's not one thing.

00:04:46 It's got these components, and what we want is what I call classical enlightenment.

00:04:51 Now that's, of course, my private language.

00:04:54 That's an idiolect, my own way of talking.

00:04:59 There's no official definition of classical enlightenment.

00:05:03 But classical enlightenment in my private language for myself, it means balanced enlightenment.

00:05:11 It means all the components are balanced.

00:05:14 The way the Buddha was described was vidya-cārāṇa-sampanno.

00:05:22 It means, sampanno means it's all there in Pali.

00:05:26 Vidya means the knowledge, cārāṇa means the behavior.

00:05:31 It's all there, the knowledge, the behavior.

00:05:36 Classical enlightenment is this balanced enlightenment.

00:05:46 Okay, you have guidelines.

00:05:47 We know that that's called the shila, you have the fourfold, fivefold shila and so forth.

00:05:53 You've got these guidelines, these precepts.

00:05:56 Then you have techniques for deconstructing the negatives, the negative urges.

00:06:03 That's my focus and technique.

00:06:06 You've got techniques for constructing positive directions.

00:06:11 That's the nurture positive.

00:06:14 Then you set up your life so that you get feedback from everyone.

00:06:21 From everyone, not just your peers or your teachers, but from everyone.

00:06:27 You make sure that that's always there.

00:06:36 If need be, you don't hesitate to use structures that are outside of Buddhist practice.

00:06:46 Psychotherapy, 12-step program, these behaviorally oriented accountability and support structures.

00:06:58 If this stuff doesn't work, the things that I just mentioned, if that's not enough, then that's not enough.

00:07:07 The Buddhist practice isn't enough, and you need this other stuff.
00:07:12 Even I myself had 18 months of therapy once over a behavior issue, not some sexual problem,
00:07:21 but it was a behavior issue that was very problematic for me.
00:07:26 I remember.
00:07:28 It sounds trivial, but it was highly non-trivial in terms of the effect in my life, which is habitual procrastination.
00:07:38 The practice wasn't cutting it, and it was showing in irresponsible acts.
00:07:46 I just knew I needed something else.
00:07:50 Actually, that's one thing that I found very helpful and moving in your teaching,
00:07:58 is that you were actually willing to share that in public.
00:08:01 I have that on YouTube, you talking about what your issue was and going through it and all that.
00:08:08 I don't know that many teachers that would share that kind of, from a vulnerable place like that,
00:08:20 an issue that they were working on or had worked on like that.
00:08:26 I actually don't hear very many examples like that.
00:08:29 Did you ever hear something like that from Sasaki Roshi?
00:08:33 Yeah, see, there's the answer, your expression.
00:08:37 Are you kidding?
00:08:41 I know one teacher, a Zen teacher, that went through a 12-step program.
00:08:46 He was intervened on, went through the 12-step program, and I guess that it worked.
00:08:52 There's an example of having to outsource it outside of Buddhism.
00:08:55 Here's a bona fide Zen master, and he was willing to go through that,
00:09:02 but there was a huge intervention done on him to make that happen.
00:09:14 What are these meetings where we have, quote, the Western teachers?
00:09:18 Western teachers means the people teaching in the West.
00:09:21 It doesn't mean you're of Western origin.
00:09:24 In this case, Buddhist Western teachers.
00:09:26 Yeah, we call them Western teachers, Buddhist Western teachers.
00:09:30 So we have these professional meetings where we get together,
00:09:33 but there are a lot of people that never come to those meetings.
00:09:39 They are just conspicuously absent.
00:09:42 Right, right.
00:09:43 They tend to be the real high-level Asian teachers like Sasaki Roshi.
00:09:52 It's like a lot of them.
00:09:56 They just don't come.
00:09:58 They don't socially interact with their peers.
00:10:02 Are they invited to come, first of all?
00:10:04 You know, that is a really interesting question because there's just the

assumption they won't,

00:10:13 but, you know, that is a great question,

00:10:16 and I'm going to put that to the committee that is organizing our next meeting in 2015.

00:10:28 I don't know that they're invited.

00:10:31 I suspect that at least their students are invited.

00:10:35 Maybe they're invited, but I'm going to make sure they're invited.

00:10:39 That's a great point.

00:10:40 But the point is they don't even send their students.

00:10:43 Right.

00:10:44 I never remember anyone from Edo Roshi's group or Sasaki Roshi's group or, you know,

00:10:53 I mean, there's no scandal, but even Mr. Goenka, his people don't show up.

00:10:58 I know they're invited.

00:11:00 He's never going to show up.

00:11:02 Once they become high-tier,

00:11:06 they're just independent kings that don't want to be with their peers in a social way,

00:11:15 and they don't want to be with their near peers in a social way.

00:11:19 Maybe that plus, you know, because then you're in a normal situation.

00:11:25 I mean—

00:11:26 Where there's more accountability if you're held accountable.

00:11:30 And there's more confraternity, you know, where you're just like—

00:11:37 you're not just an isolated king that has all this power,

00:11:42 and you're so extraordinary that none of your peers can criticize you or comment,

00:11:55 well, maybe you could teach a little different way.

00:11:58 So one thing that no one seems to be talking about is the fact that many of the top-tier teachers

00:12:08 just don't interact either with their tier or with us lesser, you know, teachers and so forth.

00:12:22 And so there's this isolation.

00:12:34 I'd always known sort of what to look for, okay, in terms of how gurus fall.

00:12:45 I used to think in my head there's this book that's called The Guru's Guide to Survival.

00:12:53 I mean, there isn't, but I imagined this book.

00:12:57 And this book has three chapters.

00:13:00 One chapter is called Sex, one chapter is called Power, and one chapter is called Finances.

00:13:10 Because if you look around, this is where—these are the areas.

00:13:14 Some people add the fourth, Addictions, but that can be covered in the first three,

00:13:19 depending on how you think about it.

00:13:21 Addictions on the part of the guru.

00:13:23 This is the guru being addicted.

00:13:26 Yes.

00:13:27 Okay.

00:13:28 Like there's been some pretty famous examples of—

00:13:30 You mean alcoholic?

00:13:31 Yes.

00:13:32 Yeah, yeah.

00:13:33 Yeah, actually, that is a separate category.

00:13:35 I think that chapter has to be in there.

00:13:38 Those are my four favorites.

00:13:40 As far as talking about it.

00:13:44 The four horsemen of the guru apocalypse.

00:13:46 Well, everything kind of fits if you think about all the teachers who have gone through what they've gone through.

00:13:50 That's good, that addiction thing.

00:13:51 Yeah.

00:13:57 There's this Guru's Guide to Survival, and I think you're right.

00:14:02 The fourth one is addiction, so there's these four chapters.

00:14:07 I sort of read that book, and I said, okay, it looks like I'm going to be a meditation teacher,

00:14:17 so I better just be constantly watching for this stuff.

00:14:25 Because I've seen, okay—the Chinese have an expression,

00:14:28 if you see the chariot in front of you crash because of a pothole,

00:14:34 then you're going to know, watch out for that pothole.

00:14:38 So, okay, let's say there's these four potholes.

00:14:41 So I'm watching for all of this, but there's some minor chapters that weren't in the book.

00:14:52 Things that I now see in retrospect also can become a source of a teacher's downfall.

00:15:01 Right.

00:15:02 But that weren't in the book that I had read.

00:15:07 And one of them is codependent relationships.

00:15:11 Right.

00:15:12 You get in a coda relationship with someone who is not a teacher

00:15:23 but wants to have the authority and the cachet of a teacher,

00:15:28 and you're in some sort of relationship with this person where they think that they can call the shots

00:15:37 as far as how you run your community and so forth.

00:15:41 We're talking about you now.

00:15:42 I'm talking about me.

00:15:43 Yeah, just to be clear.

00:15:44 Yeah, that's right.

00:15:46 But I'm talking about a general situation.

00:15:49 Now, after it happened to me, I started to look around,

00:15:53 and I started to see that I see now other scenes where this is happening.

00:15:59 I see it in a Hindu-type thing.

00:16:03 I saw it in a Native American thing.

00:16:05 I saw it in a Zen thing.

00:16:07 Okay, so then I realized, okay, maybe that's a minor chapter,

00:16:13 but I do see that this is a pattern.

00:16:17 And I wasn't watching for that.

00:16:21 Right.

00:16:22 I just got sucked in.

00:16:24 I just got sucked into a fully shared insanity.

00:16:36 I mean, it wasn't like literally psychotic, but, you know.

00:16:41 When was this, roughly speaking?

00:16:49 It's on dates, but I'm guessing maybe 20 years ago, something like that.

00:16:55 Ballpark, yeah.

00:16:56 Yeah, that's ballpark.

00:16:59 Okay, so I have a sort of characteristic style, right?

00:17:02 And my students expect a certain characteristic style from me.

00:17:06 And I was not doing that.

00:17:12 It was like I was being high-handed and manipulative, okay,

00:17:20 but this was being driven by something else,

00:17:25 a strong connection that I had with someone.

00:17:31 So, like, students started to get really pissed off.

00:17:35 It's like, what's wrong?

00:17:38 They sort of expect you to be a certain way, and, you know,

00:17:43 you're just not that way, and it's inappropriate.

00:17:50 And so it got around in the Buddhist community.

00:17:58 And so I don't want to name specific names in all of this,

00:18:07 but I'll just say two very, very well-known mindfulness teachers

00:18:14 who are friends of mine and who I respect asked me to come visit them

00:18:23 and sort of like, hey, what's going on kind of thing.

00:18:27 That plus the feedback I was getting from my students,

00:18:33 eventually it sort of shook me back into reality.

00:18:42 But even that took a while, okay?

00:18:44 It took months of just this constant feedback,

00:18:48 constantly getting feedback from students, you're off base,

00:18:52 this is not who you are, this is not what we signed up for.

00:18:57 And then having, like, two really, really well-known people in the community

00:19:04 say, like, more or less, you know, dude, what's going on?

00:19:10 And sort of with that tone, right, because this is very collegial.
00:19:18 It's like, oh, my God, I'm really off here.
00:19:23 And I just essentially exited that connection with that person.
00:19:34 I know for myself that it can be needed,
00:19:42 but I was so fortunate that it was done in that way, you might say.
00:19:53 It didn't have to take the form of this horrific scandal kind of thing.
00:20:03 So, you know, and I know how hard it is.
00:20:07 Even for me, it was like my style basically is to be that way.
00:20:14 But it still took months for me to really realize what was going on.
00:20:24 Do you feel like you have kind of all the effective feedback mechanisms up for you?
00:20:31 I mean, you went through this and had this fortunate intervention way back when.
00:20:36 Do you feel like you have people around you that actively give you that feedback?
00:20:42 Seems to be, because other than this problem,
00:20:50 I am not aware of any problems in all the years,
00:20:55 and other than that problem that I alluded to.
00:20:57 Yeah. This kind of sharing and dialogue is important.
00:21:03 We need to be able to talk about things. We do.
00:21:06 That's what we humans need.
00:21:09 We can't just, you know, make it an untouchable thing.
00:21:14 We have to, even though it can be really painful, to bring it out.
00:21:18 And I think it's a wonderful contribution towards, I'm hoping, some open dialogue,
00:21:26 some open sharing, some more transparency amongst senior teachers,
00:21:33 all so that a deeper healing can take place for everybody who needs healing
00:21:39 and a clearer understanding can come through to help prevent this kind of stuff from happening in the future.
00:21:47 So thank you for that.