

Six Common Traps on the Path to Enlightenment ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 Most people, if they're going to get caught someplace, that's going to prevent them from
00:00:19 becoming enlightened.

00:00:21 It's going to be in allocating so much time and energy to finding the right map, the right
00:00:30 model, the right teacher, the right situation, that there's little time and energy left to
00:00:37 actually do the practice.

00:00:40 So we might call that the map trap.

00:00:48 The second trap, speaking broadly about the spiritual path, is what we might call the
00:00:57 fundamentalism trap.

00:00:59 You buy into a mythological system that allows you to make dramatic and significant improvements
00:01:11 in both your happiness subjectively and your behavior objectively.

00:01:18 Even small positive changes in a person's life in terms of being happier subjectively
00:01:24 and behaving better objectively, that's what I mean by positive changes, even small positive
00:01:30 changes in a person's life are very, very difficult to come by.

00:01:36 Ask any psychotherapist.

00:01:39 To have huge positive changes in a person's life quickly, dramatically, that's not a small
00:01:47 thing.

00:01:49 Something really good happens.

00:01:52 The problem is your intellectual horizons have now become closed.

00:01:58 The very mythological structure that allowed for these positive changes prevents the next
00:02:08 stage in positive change.

00:02:10 The antidote for not getting caught in a good place for the fundamentalist is to realize
00:02:17 what I just said, if they can.

00:02:25 Let's say that you do a meditation practice.

00:02:28 You can achieve states of calm and concentration, and that's certainly a good thing.

00:02:39 But year after year after year, that's sort of where you're at.

00:02:43 You sit down, everything is sort of tranquil, time passes quickly, you get up, you're refreshed,
00:02:52 but that's about it.

00:02:53 Well, that's a good place, but you can go beyond that to a better place.

00:03:00 So we might call that the tranquility trap.

00:03:02 The antidote for that particular getting caught in a good place is you take these blissful,
00:03:10 tranquil states and then you clarify them.

00:03:13 By distinguishing different flavors of restfulness, that brings a clarification component into
00:03:22 the tranquility piece.

00:03:28 You think that you're going closer and closer to the source by exploring the world of archetypes,
00:03:34 special powers, body experiences, former lives, you name it.

00:03:42 It can be a good place, but it can also limit you.

00:03:47 You think you're making spiritual progress, going deeper and deeper and deeper towards
00:03:53 the formless source, but actually you've turned 90 degrees, you're now on a trajectory that's
00:03:58 at right angles to going down to the source of consciousness, but you don't know it.
00:04:03 You're going out, out, out, exploring the power realms.
00:04:09 If you deconstruct the realm of spirits mindfully, it will take you to spirit, and that's the
00:04:15 antidote to the realms of power trap.
00:04:18 You interpret the experience of the power realms as a sensory event, just like any other
00:04:23 sensory event, power or bizarre, you treat it as though it were banal, and you apply
00:04:29 concentration, clarity, and equanimity to it, as you would with any other sensory event.
00:04:35 That then allows you to go deeper and deeper and deeper towards not the realm of spirits,
00:04:42 but the realm of the great spirit, shall we say, that formless doing, the dharmakaya.
00:04:53 It can happen that you get classical enlightenment.
00:04:56 It's the real thing.
00:04:57 It's permanent, you've seen the no-self, but you think you know more than you do, and you
00:05:04 might even start teaching from that place.
00:05:08 That's another good place you can get caught in.
00:05:12 Enlightenment is a many-faceted jewel.
00:05:15 You can see it from many, many sides.
00:05:17 In my experience, it's a continuum, a vast continuum, with many facets.
00:05:24 A person could easily miss some of those facets.
00:05:29 Just because you've seen the no-self doesn't mean you don't have a long, long way to go
00:05:38 to become truly liberated from your old habits.
00:05:43 What shall we call it?
00:05:45 The enlightenment trap.
00:05:48 Well, the antidote to that is the courage to take feedback from other teachers, and
00:05:58 to find teachers vastly senior to yourself, to take feedback from them.
00:06:05 Constantly take feedback from your environment.
00:06:08 One of my teachers used to say, Kyō no satori wa ashita no machigai.
00:06:13 You may know satori.
00:06:14 It's the Japanese for awakening.
00:06:16 Today's enlightenment is tomorrow's mistake, meaning you have to be constantly willing
00:06:24 to move forward.
00:06:30 The observer trap is the characteristic weakness in the mindfulness way of working.
00:06:35 Now, that doesn't mean that it's a showstopper.
00:06:40 It just means when you work within that way, you have to be aware that this could be a
00:06:45 problem and you have to be aware of what the antidote is, what the fix is.
00:06:52 Two parts to the fix.
00:06:53 The first is to bear in mind what I just said, that there is this possible danger.
00:06:59 If you're not aware of this possible danger, then you might fall into that trap.
00:07:07 You know that this could be a possible danger.
00:07:09 Well, then how do we not have that happen?
00:07:14 Well, think about when you learn to drive a car, assuming you have learned to drive

00:07:20 a car.

00:07:22 When you first attempt to do it, I remember when I first learned to drive a car, I was

00:07:27 on a stick shift and it took so much effort and I had to think about everything.

00:07:37 I could just barely do it.

00:07:39 I thought to myself, I'll never be able to operate this car and do anything else.

00:07:47 I'll just have to be constantly thinking about the two dozen things I have to be constantly

00:07:52 thinking about.

00:07:54 But you know what?

00:07:55 After six months, I'm just bopping along on the freeways in LA, listening to the radio,

00:08:03 munching on a burrito, talking to somebody, and it's rush hour traffic, it's smog, it's

00:08:11 chaos and no problem.

00:08:16 What happened?

00:08:18 The fact of having driven so much was driving the car.

00:08:25 In other words, the driving became second nature.

00:08:29 First practice develops concentration, sensory clarity, and equanimity.

00:08:36 At first, you have to think about it and it takes a lot of effort.

00:08:41 At some point, the concentration, clarity, and equanimity start to go on autopilot.

00:08:48 Then the subtle mental images, subtle internal conversations, and subtle emotional sensations

00:08:59 in the body that create the sense that there is someone meditating, that there is a self

00:09:08 directing this process.

00:09:11 Those sensory arisings start to get enfolded within the momentum of the concentration,

00:09:19 clarity, and equanimity without the need for more of them to be directing the process.

00:09:27 In other words, just as with the driving metaphor, the habit of driving eventually can drive

00:09:34 the car.

00:09:35 So in the mindfulness metaphor, the habit of mindfulness eventually meditates you and

00:09:43 seeps around and dissolves the sense of a meditator.

00:09:48 And that's how it works.