

After enlightenment, what's left, what's the point? ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 So, we're rolling with the question, what's left after enlightenment?

00:00:10 What's the point?

00:00:15 The best way to deal with this question is to look at the question itself.

00:00:23 Actually, it's two questions.

00:00:26 What's left after enlightenment and what's the point of the whole thing?

00:00:30 Let's analyze the questions themselves because they contain certain presuppositions and looking

00:00:41 at those presuppositions will be helpful in answering the questions.

00:00:47 If you say, what's left after enlightenment, the implication of that language is that there

00:00:54 is a single moment of enlightenment and that basically enlightenment is this binary system.

00:01:02 You're not enlightened and you are enlightened and it's these two things.

00:01:09 However, it has been my experience that it's not at all like that.

00:01:17 Although some people have a dramatic moment of enlightenment, it does happen.

00:01:23 For most people, it sort of sneaks up on them and unless it's pointed out to them, they

00:01:30 might not even be aware of quite how enlightened they've become because they've acclimatized

00:01:36 to it.

00:01:37 So, enlightenment experience does not necessarily involve one or a sequence of dramatic, sudden

00:01:45 experiences.

00:01:46 It may, but it doesn't have to.

00:01:49 Sometimes it's a more gradual process.

00:01:51 In fact, usually it's a more gradual process.

00:01:55 If you look at nature, you'll see that some processes in nature are discontinuous, they

00:02:02 jump.

00:02:03 Some processes in nature are continuous and it took mathematicians quite a long time to

00:02:09 develop an advanced form of calculus that could simultaneously deal with both continuous

00:02:17 and discontinuous functions.

00:02:19 But they had to because the nature of nature is that way.

00:02:23 And since enlightenment is part of nature, it's a natural process.
00:02:27 It's even called seeing your nature, can show to see your nature.
00:02:34 So because it's part of nature, we shouldn't be surprised that there are both sudden and
00:02:41 gradual components to the endeavor.
00:02:46 So if you say what's left after enlightenment, it implies that there's this single sudden
00:02:52 thing that somebody goes through and there's a before and an after.
00:02:57 Even if one had one of the sudden types of experiences, there's still a lifetime of working
00:03:06 out the consequences of that, improving behaviors, working through negative patterns.
00:03:15 In my own case, I did have a sudden experience, that is true, as the result of systematic
00:03:22 cultivation.
00:03:23 Some people have sudden experiences without even having practiced.
00:03:27 That's quite extraordinary, but it does happen just out of nowhere.
00:03:31 Suddenly they see what in Buddhism we call the no-self.
00:03:35 It happened to me a rather long time ago.
00:03:37 I'm 65 now and it was a while back.
00:03:44 But I've had to spend my entire life refining the implications of that, realizing how screwed
00:03:52 up I was in so many areas, even after that experience.
00:03:57 It wasn't all that many years ago that I saw a psychotherapist, a psychiatrist, an MD,
00:04:04 for 18 months to work on some behavioral issues that I felt I needed something besides the
00:04:11 meditation practice.
00:04:13 So one shouldn't think that there's enlightenment and then there's this after-enlightenment
00:04:24 thing.
00:04:25 It can be more gradual, for one thing, and even if it's sudden, you've got a long, long
00:04:33 way to go after you've seen the no-self.
00:04:38 That's just seeing the ox.
00:04:41 Look at the ox in 30 pictures, you've got to get on that ox, you've got to ride that
00:04:45 ox in daily life.
00:04:47 So part of the problem is the formulation of the question, implying there's enlightenment
00:04:53 and then there's after-enlightenment.
00:04:54 There's enlightenment and then there's a lifetime of after-enlightenment, if

it's a sudden one.

00:05:00 So it's still a lifetime.

00:05:02 Now we can, having cleared that away, we can talk about, well, what's left, if you want

00:05:09 to say what's left.

00:05:14 Well what's left is a whole bunch of screw-ups and bad habits and the effortless flow of

00:05:23 emptiness.

00:05:27 And as time goes on, the effortless flow of emptiness more and more eats up the screw-ups

00:05:34 and the bad habits, etc., etc.

00:05:37 So as time goes on, more and more of what's left is the effortless flow of emptiness,

00:05:45 which doesn't sound all that appealing until you actually experience it.

00:05:50 And then it's like, well, if you had a choice of living one day that way or living your

00:05:58 whole life not that way, you'd say, well, I'll take the one day and you could kill me

00:06:04 at the end of the day.

00:06:05 That's how good the effortless flow of emptiness is.

00:06:09 More and more of what's left is less and less something and more and more doing.

00:06:15 What's the point?

00:06:16 Well, that also sort of goes to an issue of meaning.

00:06:23 It's asking what's the meaning?

00:06:24 What's the ultimate meaning?

00:06:25 What's the meaning of the path?

00:06:27 What's the purpose of the path?

00:06:29 But the funny thing is that you have to work through the need to have meaning.

00:06:37 And I've given some talks about that.

00:06:42 So that in a sense, the answer to that question, what does it all mean or what is the purpose,

00:06:48 once again you have to look at the question and realize that there's an implication there.

00:06:52 As you begin to work through the need to find the purpose, the purpose arises spontaneously.

00:07:03 Now could I put a word to the point?

00:07:10 If you asked what's the point, could I put a word to that point?

00:07:18 Where the ox takes you would sort of be maybe the point of it.

00:07:24 So yes, I can put a word to that point.

00:07:29 That word would be love.

00:07:30 That's the point.