

Don't Know Mind: Not Needing to Have Answers & the Wisdom Function ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 What is the difference between eating and not eating?
00:00:07 When a person who is a compulsive eater
00:00:13 overcomes their eating compulsion,
00:00:17 they don't stop eating.
00:00:20 They continue to eat, but they eat in a different way.
00:00:24 It's not driven, and it's healthier.
00:00:32 With regards to our mind,
00:00:37 the mind has a certain drive to find meaning.
00:00:45 That drive, I think, is in some way intrinsic to the image-talk circuits
themselves,
00:00:52 but also is linked to feel.
00:00:57 I define feel as emotional body sensation.
00:01:03 When the mind finds meaning,
00:01:07 you'll find a smile on your face,
00:01:10 or a rosiness in your chest, or a frisson,
00:01:14 a kind of ripple of pleasant excitement through your body.
00:01:19 When the mind fails to find meaning,
00:01:24 when the mind is confused, muddled, spinning to no avail,
00:01:30 then you'll find in the body sensations of fear and tear,
00:01:38 and impatience, agitation, and so forth.
00:01:43 So, the drive to find meaning involves, I believe,
00:01:50 a certain intrinsic drive in the image-talk circuits
00:01:55 to establish pattern,
00:02:00 and then some juice in the body,
00:02:03 particularly with regards to the pleasure associated with finding answers
00:02:09 and the discomfort in the body associated with being confused or not having
answers,
00:02:17 especially fear and sadness flavors.
00:02:23 So, some combination of forces within feel-image-talk drive us to have
meaning.
00:02:31 We can train ourselves into equanimity with don't-know.
00:02:36 It's a systematic training.
00:02:39 The medieval Christians called it docta ignorantia, or trained ignorance.
00:02:47 The ancient Greeks called it epokhe,

00:02:52 in their pronunciation, meaning to suspend.
00:02:56 Suspend what? Suspend the need to have answers.
00:02:59 In Zen, it's called don't-know mind.
00:03:02 This can be systematically trained,
00:03:06 meaning that one can systematically work through the forces in image-talk and
feel
00:03:14 that drive us to have meaning.
00:03:17 Now, why is it important to do that?
00:03:22 Well, I would say several reasons.
00:03:24 For one thing, inevitably, we will be faced with the inability to find
meaning.
00:03:34 Every new thing we know raises new questions.
00:03:38 So, our don't-know grows faster than our do-know.
00:03:43 By our, I mean the human species.
00:03:45 So, we have to accept the fact that we'll always be facing don't-know.
00:03:54 And in fact, a major theme in modern mathematics and modern physics
00:04:01 is the limits of what even can be known, or at least known in certain ways.
00:04:07 Gödel's undecidability and incompleteness theorems,
00:04:15 Heisenberg uncertainty in physics and so forth,
00:04:22 point us directly to don't-know.
00:04:25 In fact, a point could be made that the stability of the known universe,
00:04:32 in that it depends on Heisenberg uncertainty,
00:04:35 depends on God's equanimity with don't-know.
00:04:40 Anyway, so sooner or later, we and probably God,
00:04:45 are faced with don't-know.
00:04:48 I'm being somewhat metaphorical and humorous, I think you understand,
00:04:53 on the theoretical level.
00:04:55 And then on the practical level, hey, we're going to get old.
00:04:58 And as we get old, our mental faculties deteriorate.
00:05:01 I can see for myself I'm 65, and I can see it's downhill.
00:05:08 I'm past my intellectual peak.
00:05:12 But that doesn't freak me out,
00:05:15 because I have made friends with don't-know.
00:05:20 I've made friends with my own impending stupidity.
00:05:24 There was a famous 20th century mathematician that I like a lot.
00:05:28 He was quite eccentric, named Paul Erdos.
00:05:33 E-R-D-O-S is how you write that name.
00:05:37 And he wanted to have put on his gravestone.
00:05:40 I don't know if they actually did it, but what he said,
00:05:43 put on my gravestone is,
00:05:45 at last I'm not getting stupider anymore.
00:05:49 So I can see I'm sort of getting, gradually getting stupider.

00:05:53 But that's okay.

00:05:54 So theoretically and practically, sooner or later, we have to face don't-know.

00:06:00 There is a need to deal with the need to know.

00:06:04 And fortunately, there is a way of doing that.

00:06:07 The other reason why it's good to be able to deal with don't-know

00:06:15 is that, as you'll remember on the metaphor of the compulsive eater,

00:06:20 when the compulsive eater has worked through their compulsion to eat,

00:06:27 they don't stop eating.

00:06:29 In fact, they eat in a much more fulfilling new way.

00:06:34 When a human being works through the need to have answers,

00:06:39 they don't stop having answers.

00:06:41 They start having answers in a deeply fulfilling and radical new way.

00:06:47 That's why the Christians in the Middle Ages and the Greeks in classical antiquity,

00:06:54 at least some of them, cultivated this.

00:06:56 And it's the basis also for the Zen koan practices,

00:07:01 like what's the sound of one hand and so forth.

00:07:04 This new way of knowing, we have a name for it.

00:07:09 We call it wisdom function.

00:07:11 So both because we don't want to suffer due to the fact that don't-know is inevitable,

00:07:22 and also on the positive side, when we work through the need to know,

00:07:30 we get to know in a radical new way called insight, or if you wish, wisdom,

00:07:37 or even in its most extreme form, enlightenment.

00:07:42 For these reasons, there is a need to work through the need to know.