

Enlightenment 'Downsides' ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 How do you feel about the lack of informed consent for enlightenment?

00:00:05 I sometimes like to somewhat jokingly say that there's no informed consent for enlightenment.

00:00:13 People tend to overestimate or underestimate how wonderful the experience is.

00:00:24 How wonderful is it? Well, I would say anyone who has entered into the world of no-self, emptiness, and wisdom mind,

00:00:40 who abides in that world, if you give them a choice to live one day knowing what they know,

00:00:47 or live an entire lifetime but not be allowed to know that, I think I can't speak for everyone,

00:00:57 but I would say most people who live in that world would say,

00:01:03 I'd rather have one day knowing what I know than a lifetime not being able to know this.

00:01:09 So that's how wonderful it is. On the other hand, people tend to overestimate how wonderful it is.

00:01:19 People tend to project completely unrealistic fantasies, really, about what enlightened people,

00:01:30 enlightened people being, of course, an entire range from initial stream entry all the way up to arhats,

00:01:42 people tend to overestimate what it's like or project things that are completely unrealistic.

00:01:52 For example, that if you have some degree of enlightenment you never make mistakes,

00:01:57 or that everything is perfect in your life, or that everything is always bliss and wonderful and so forth.

00:02:08 People don't realize there are certain peculiar downsides to enlightenment.

00:02:16 For one thing, you can't describe it very well to other people.

00:02:24 So it's like you know this secret, you look out and you see the state of humanity,

00:02:34 you know exactly what needs to be done, you know that what needs to be done is doable by anyone,

00:02:41 and you see that people aren't doing it, don't know whether to laugh or cry at the human condition,

00:02:49 and you can't really explain it very well to people.

00:02:55 I mean, you can try, and a few people catch on, but it sort of goes in one ear and out the other

00:03:06 for most people that you'll try to talk to about this.

00:03:10 So it's like that character out of Greek mythology, I forgot her name,

00:03:19 but the gods gave her this blessing that she could know the future,

00:03:24 but the flip side of that was that no one would believe her.

00:03:30 So you sort of know exactly what needs to be done, and you know that it's doable,

00:03:36 but no one believes you, or not very many people believe you.

00:03:42 So that's one of the downsides.

00:03:46 Another thing is that you get to have all this influence, let's say,

00:03:55 but you don't get to take any credit for it.

00:04:01 You don't even know what you're doing.

00:04:03 It's like falling off a cliff.

00:04:07 Enlightenment is like a free fall.

00:04:13 It's like falling off a cliff that never ends, and you've acclimatized to it.

00:04:18 That's why the Zen people say it's like riding an ox backwards.

00:04:23 So you don't actually know what you're doing, or even what you're saying.

00:04:29 When you give your most powerful teachings to people, you don't know what you're saying.

00:04:36 You don't even know who you are.

00:04:38 You can't take any credit for it whatsoever.

00:04:41 It just happens, like a leaf falling from a tree.

00:04:44 So it's not like you get to think of yourself as,

00:04:48 well, I'm this cool dude that can do this cool stuff.

00:04:52 No, that's not the way it works.

00:04:54 So you can't even know or enjoy, in a sense.

00:05:02 You just have to occur.