

## MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AND ENLIGHTENMENT

*'The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me.'*  
Meister Eckhart

### Ineffable and Beyond Words

Real, genuine spiritual experiences cannot be adequately described or conveyed in words. "Attempts at putting into speech or writing the mystical experience itself have never succeeded, because those who know do not need it; those who do not cannot gain it without a bridge."

The narrator of the mystical experience is in much the same situation as the man trying to recount a dream. As he begins to formulate the experience in words, it subtly changes shape; he concludes with a narration that may be more comprehensible – even more entertaining – but it is not the dream. As T.S. Eliot wrote: 'We had the experience but missed the meaning . . .' (1)

Because the state of enlightenment or self-realization cannot be expressed in words or defined in linear terms, any attempt to do so can only allude to the nature of the experience. At best, words are only pointers. Lao Tzu: *'He who knows does not speak. He who speaks does not know.'*

The truth of oneness cannot be contained in a name or a concept any more than the ocean can be held in a spoon: in the absence of the division and polarities that define the human experience, what remains is ineffable. So accustomed are we to expressing ourselves conceptually and describing the events of life so that others can understand them, a world undefined, untouched by thought, defies the grasp of language. It is the experience Rudolph Otto calls *mysterium tremendum*, something "wholly other," overpowering, and completely beyond the bounds of normal experience. (2)

In the absence of an adequate verbal language to capture the mystical experience, certain metaphors and analogies have been suggested for describing the state of enlightenment:

One of the aims of the esoteric disciplines is to remove "blindness" or "illusion," to "awaken" a "fresh" perception. Enlightenment or illumination are words often used for progress in these disciplines, for a breakthrough in the level of awareness – flooding a dark spot with light. The Indian tradition speaks of opening the third eye, of seeing more and more from a new vantage point. *Satori*, in Zen, is considered an intuitive "awakening." The Sufis speak of the development of a "new organ" of perception. Some speak of seeing things "freshly" or for the first time. To William Blake it is a "cleansing of the doors of perception." Others, like

Gurdjieff, compare their experiences to that of a child, who presumably has not yet developed many automatic ways of tuning out the world. In Zen, one speaks similarly of seeing something for the five-hundredth time in the same way that one saw it for the first time. (3)

In order to explain the essential nature of enlightenment, the great Indian sage Ramana Maharshi employed the analogy of film projected onto a blank screen:

Q: If the Realized and unrealized alike perceive the world, where is the difference between them?

A: When the realized man sees the world he sees the Self that is the substratum of all that is seen. Whether the unrealized man sees the world or not, he is ignorant of his true being, the Self. Take the example of a film on a cinema screen. What is there in front of you before the film begins? Only the screen. On that screen you see the entire show, and to all appearances the pictures are real. But go and try to take hold of them and what do you take hold of? The screen on which the pictures appear so real. After the play, when the pictures disappear, what remains? The screen again. So it is with the Self. That alone exists; the pictures come and go. If you hold onto the Self, you will not be deceived by the appearance of the pictures. Nor does it matter at all whether the pictures appear or disappear. (4)

Another useful analogy of the experience of enlightenment, from the Zen tradition, is the complementary nature of a fan designed with two completely different sides:

After you have seen into your True nature – that is, become enlightened – you see all objects are temporary phenomena undergoing endless change, but you see them in and through the aspect of sameness. You then understand that without the undifferentiated there can be no individual existences. I can illustrate what I am saying with this paper fan. One side has many stripes, as you see; the other is pure white. The white side can be called the undifferentiated, the side with the stripes, the discriminated. What makes the stripes appear as stripes is the white, or undifferentiated, side of the fan. Conversely, what makes the white side meaningful is the stripes. They are two aspects of the One. But while the discriminated aspect is subject to ceaseless transformation, that which is undifferentiated is changeless. (5)

Advaita Vedanta teacher Jean Klein, while acknowledging the difficulty of expressing self-realization in words, uses precise language to point to the psychological insight which allows the enlightened state to emerge naturally:

No exact definition of this realization can be given, since it lies beyond duality and cannot be grasped by language. One can, however, endeavour to describe

it by saying that the realized person is one who has reached a pure and full consciousness of "I am." For the ordinary person, such a consciousness is always confused because it is impure, that is to say, accompanied by qualifications. "I am this or that," "I have to deal with this or that." In reality this "I am" is ever there, it can't be otherwise. It accompanies each and every state. To return to the "I am" in its complete purity, there is no other way than the total elimination of everything that accompanies it: objects, states. Then that consciousness which hitherto used to turn to the innumerable companions of the "I am," sees them all to be lifeless, finds itself, and realizes its own everlasting splendour. (6)

## Preparation and Purification

The possibility of enlightenment is latent in everyone, only requiring the right conditions to manifest. The Christian mystic Meister Eckhart likens the process to a seed developing into a mature tree: "The seed of God is within us. Given an intelligent and hardworking farmer, it will thrive and grow up to God, whose seed It is, and accordingly its fruits will be God-nature. Pear seeds grow into pear trees, nut seeds into nut trees, and God seeds into God."

Misperception of the nature of phenomenal reality and ignorance of our true self are the twin obstacles to spiritual awakening. Only by discarding the false identification with our thoughts, emotions and perceptions can integration with higher reality and alignment with the timeless present naturally occur. Kabir: "*Behold the One in all things. It is the second that leads you astray.*"

Q: Since reality is all the time with us, what does self-realization consist of?

A: Realization is but the opposite of ignorance. To take the world as real and one's self as unreal is ignorance, the cause of sorrow. To know the Self as the only reality and all else as temporal and transient is freedom, peace and joy. It is all very simple. Instead of seeing things as imagined, learn to see them as they are. When you can see everything as it is, you will also see yourself as you are. It is like cleansing a mirror. The same mirror that shows you the world as it is, will also show you your own face. The thought 'I am' is the polishing cloth. Use it. (7)

Identification with the body and mind and ignorance of one's real timeless nature is the fundamental error, preventing direct realization of the Self. "Pure consciousness wholly unrelated to the physical body and transcending the mind is a matter of direct experience. Sages know their bodiless, eternal Existence just as the layman knows his bodily existence."

Self-realization is not however a state which is foreign to you, which is far from you, and which has to be reached by you. You are always in that state. You forget it, and identify yourself with the mind and its creation. To cease to identify your-

self with the mind is all that is required. We have so long identified ourselves with the not-self that we find it difficult to regard ourselves as the Self. Giving up this identification with the not-self is all that is meant by Self-realization. (8)

Within every human being there is a timeless element that is immediate and ever-present, but obscured by our false identification with subjective thoughts, emotions and perceptions that create a sense of separation between oneself and the totality of life:

Being is the eternal, ever-present One Life beyond the myriad forms of life that are subject to birth and death. However, Being is not only beyond but also deep within every form as the innermost invisible and indestructible essence. This means that it is accessible to you now as your own deepest self, your true nature. But don't seek to grasp it with your mind. Don't try to understand it. You can know it only when the mind is still. When you are present, when your attention is fully and intensely in the Now, Being can be felt, but it can never be understood mentally. To regain awareness of Being and to abide in that state of "feeling-realization" is enlightenment.

Q: What is the greatest obstacle to experiencing this reality?

A: Identification with your mind creates an opaque screen of concepts, labels, images, words, judgments, and definitions that block all true relationship . . . It is this screen of thought that creates the illusion of separateness, the illusion that there is you *and* a totally separate "other." You then forget the essential fact that, underneath the level of physical appearances and separate forms, you are one with all that *is*. (9)

Enlightenment is not the product of will or effort, or attempts to capture it through a mind-based approach. It only appears when we directly perceive, through moment-to-moment awareness, the timeless presence lying behind the restless movement of the mind:

Enlightenment has no cause whatsoever. Enlightenment, True Nature, True Self, Wholeness, the Unconditioned Absolute – whatever words have been given to what is without words, unthinkable, unknowable, ungraspable – is not the effect of a cause. It is luminously present and timeless, overlooked by the roving intellect that is trying to grasp it and obscured by the bodymind's constantly shifting moods, desires and fears . . . Meditation that is free and effortless, without goal, without expectation, is an expression of Pure Being that has nowhere to go, nothing to get. (10)

Right understanding of the body-mind and purification of the psyche are essential stages in the preparation for genuine Self-realization. "Enlightenment is only the moment when there's the absolute understanding that what you call the 'me,' the 'I' is nothing other than a fabrication of the mind."

Q: Once the Supreme State is reached, can it be shared with others?

A: The Supreme State is universal, here and now, everybody already shares in it. It is the state of being – knowing and liking. Who does not like to be, or does not know his own existence? But we take no advantage of this joy of being conscious, we do not go into it and purify it of all that is foreign to it. The work of mental self-purification, the cleansing of the psyche, is essential. Just as a speck in the eye, by causing inflammation, may wipe out the world, so the mistaken idea: 'I am the body-mind' causes the self-concern, which obscures the universe. It is useless to fight the sense of being a limited and separate person unless the roots of it are laid bare. Selfishness is rooted in the mistaken idea of oneself. (11)

Qualities such as simplicity, nonattachment and egolessness prepare the ground for the mystical experience. Meister Eckhart describes this state of 'spiritual poverty' in Christian terms:

A man must become truly poor and as free from his own creaturely will as when he was born. And I tell you, by the eternal truth, that so long as you *desire* to fulfill the will of God and have any hankering after eternity and God, for just so long you are not truly poor. He alone has true spiritual poverty who wills nothing, knows nothing, desires nothing. (12)

Attempts to preview the state of enlightenment in words, images or symbols are ultimately fruitless as the unknown cannot be captured in terms of the known:

You cannot be told what will happen, nor is it desirable; anticipation will create illusions. In the inner search, the unexpected is inevitable; the discovery is invariably beyond all imagination. Just as an unborn child cannot know life after birth, for it has nothing in its mind with which to form a valid picture, so is the mind unable to think of the real in terms of the unreal, except by negation: 'Not this, not that.' The acceptance of the unreal as real is the obstacle, to see the false as the false and abandon the false brings reality into being. The state of utter clarity, immense love, utter fearlessness; these are mere words at the present, outlines without colour, hints at what can be. (13)

## The Nature of Mystical Experience

The ultimate state of mystical enlightenment, in which a seeker is in tune with the Infinite, is known in some spiritual traditions as 'Union with Ultimate Reality' or 'Absorption into the Divinity.' It is an experience of one's highest spiritual potential and evolution as a human being. "Enlightenment is an expression of the inner state. It is our natural state; that means it is not

separate from us. Enlightenment means the total knowing and total understanding of who you are in the real sense."

The word enlightenment conjures up the idea of some superhuman accomplishment, and the ego likes to keep it that way, but it is simply your natural state of *felt* oneness with Being. It is the state of connectedness with something immeasurable and indestructible, something that, almost paradoxically, is essentially you and yet is much greater than you. It is finding your true nature beyond name and form. The inability to feel this connectedness gives rise to the illusion of separation, from yourself and the world around you. You then perceive yourself, consciously or unconsciously, as an isolated fragment. (14)

The mystical experience is traditionally described as contact, communion, or identification with a higher power and eternal principle. "It is the intense awareness of oneness, of the magnificent unity of the cosmos, absolute and indivisible. This perceived singularity, in which at one level one remains oneself, at another one totally loses oneself, is the Real." In the words of Plotinus:

See all things, not in the process of becoming, but in Being, and see themselves in the other. Each being contains in itself the whole intelligible world. Therefore All is everywhere. Each is All and All is each. Man as he now is has ceased to be the All. But when he ceases to be an individual, he raises himself again and penetrates the whole world. (15)

The world's great spiritual traditions affirm that awakening and true inner peace is found within the innermost depths of consciousness which reveals the real, eternal Self. "Enlightenment is the realization, the lived experience, that unconditioned consciousness is our fundamental nature. It is the experience of our own being as a vast expanse of unbroken consciousness pervading our body and our environment as a single whole."

When a man knows his true Self for the first time something else arises from the depths of his being and takes possession of him. That something is behind the mind; it is infinite, divine, eternal. Some people call it the Kingdom of Heaven, others call it the soul and others again Nirvana, and Hindus call it Liberation; you may give it what name you wish. When this happens a man has not really lost himself; rather he has found himself. Unless and until a man embarks on this quest of the true Self, doubt and uncertainty will follow his footsteps throughout life. The greatest kings and statesmen try to rule others when in their heart of hearts they know they cannot rule themselves. Yet the greatest power is at the command of the man who has penetrated to his inmost depth . . . What is the use of knowing about everything else when you do not yet know who you are? Men avoid this enquiry into the true Self, but what else is there so worthy to be undertaken? (16)

Enlightenment is often experienced as a shift in perception from the secondary to the primary, from identification with form and duality to recognition of the underlying unity of all life. Spiritual teacher Bede Griffiths: "Suddenly we know we belong to another world, that there is another dimension to existence. We are freed from the flux of time and see something of the eternal order that underlies it."

In this moment of realization, we transcend the boundaries we have always believed to be real and consciously reconnect with the Source. By whatever name we call it – the Ground, the Absolute, God, Tao, Pure Mind, the Unborn – this is the reality we inhabited before we identified with the ego or took on the concepts of time and space and language; in other words before we became self-conscious. Accounts of spiritual awakening vary widely, but across all traditions certain essentials are unchanged – including the challenging truth that we cannot make the crossing from duality to wholeness in the vessel of our own ego: the self cannot transcend the self . . . When one sees, *really sees*, that he or she is not the doer, not the thinker, the body/mind is dropped and in its place is left only wholeness. Spiritual liberation does not free the self from suffering; to the contrary, it is we who are freed from the self's tragic reign, allowing us to realize our oneness with what is. (17)

Enlightenment is not a state to be achieved through effort or discipline as it is the timeless Reality which is the foundation of all experience. "Go very deeply within yourself and discover that which has never changed. You know the many changes in you, but the knower of these changes has never changed."

Q: What is enlightenment?

A: The instantaneous insight that convinced you there is nothing and no one to enlighten.

Q: How can I come near to it?

A: Every step made to come near takes you away. 'It is nearer than picking a flower.' Be aware of only your unwillingness to give up wanting to produce. This intervention alienates us from the natural flow of life. Feel yourself in this awareness. Abide there and you will be taken by it. You will be in a new dimension, in an objectless expansiveness without reference. It is a moment of wonder; utterly without cause.

Q: It seems to me that we can experience only indirectly what is beyond body, senses and mind. How can we encounter it directly?

A: What and where is the underlying source of all our perceptions? This discovery may be called the experience of enlightenment. Our intrinsic nature is timeless

awareness, which is beginningless and endless. It is a non-state, a non-experience, and is self-sufficient, free from all need of stimulation and free from any motivation to build images and structures. (18)

The Supreme Reality discovered in enlightenment is beyond space and time and cannot be perceived by the senses or understood by the mind. "It is not perceivable because it is what makes perception possible. It is beyond being and not being. It is neither the mirror nor the image in the mirror. It is what *is* – the timeless reality."

The world and the mind are states of being. The Supreme is not a state. It pervades all states, but is not a state of something else. It is entirely uncaused, independent, complete in itself, beyond time and space, mind and matter.

Q: By what sign do you recognize it?

A: That's the point that it leaves no trace. There is nothing to recognize it by. It must be seen directly, by giving up all search for signs and approaches. When all names and forms have been given up, the real is with you. You need not seek it. Plurality and diversity are the play of the mind only. Reality is one.

Q: If reality leaves no evidence, there is no speaking about it.

A: It *is*. It cannot be denied. It is deep and dark, mystery beyond mystery. But it *is*, while all else merely happens. (19)

## Qualities of the Enlightenment Experience

In the enlightened state one experiences reality directly without distance, separation or the interference of psychological conditioning. "We begin to truly see, truly touch, truly hear. We move from imagination to actuality." Spiritual realization leads to a direct comprehension of Ultimate Reality and a sense of one's place in the universe and relation with a transcendental power. A higher, more complete understanding of both oneself and the forces at play in the cosmos emerges. Shakespeare: "Until now the stars were influencing him; henceforth he is the ruler of the stars."

One of the outcomes of the mystical experience is a feeling of fulfillment and inspiration, of certainty and happiness. "The outstanding characteristic of the experience is a sense of complete fulfillment, in every sense of the word, fulfillment to a degree and of a quality which is not known elsewhere."

Most people incorrectly believe that mystical experience is far away and almost impossible to achieve. Idries Shah: "The mystical goal is something nearer to mankind than is realized."



The assumption that something esoteric or transcendental must be far off or complicated has been assumed by the ignorance of individuals. It is 'far off' only in a direction which people do not realize."

Those who have experienced enlightenment speak of its fundamental simplicity, of recovering a state of being that is eternally ever-present, natural and luminous. Thich Nhat Hanh: "To reach truth is not to accumulate knowledge, but to awaken to the *heart of reality*. Reality reveals itself complete and whole at the moment of awakening. In the light of this awakening, nothing is added and nothing is lost."

Awakening, and the realization that one does not acquire anything one did not already have, is so simple and obvious that it is only natural to feel that there must be something further still. Enlightenment evokes the strongest feelings of intimacy. Realization of Buddha-nature is realization of the kinship of all forms of life. These feelings are beyond words. If there is a secret involved it is an open secret, known by everyone in his heart of hearts but forgotten or lost sight of in the hurly-burly of ego-dominated thinking and feeling. (20)

The enlightened state is not extraordinary or dazzling, but natural, simple and ordinary in its essence. It is described by Eckhart Tolle as the direct experience of pure Being: "Being can be *felt* as the ever-present *I am* that is beyond name and form. To feel and thus to know that you *are* and to abide in that deeply rooted state is enlightenment."

Being is the eternal, ever-present One Life beyond the myriad forms of life that are subject to birth and death. However, Being is not only beyond but also deep within every form as its innermost invisible and indestructible essence. This means that it is accessible to you now as your own deepest self, your true nature. But don't seek to grasp it with your mind. Don't try to understand it. You can know it only when the mind is still. When you are present, when your attention is fully and intensely in the now, Being can be felt, but it can never be understood mentally. To regain awareness of Being and to abide in that state of "feeling-realization" is enlightenment. (21)

Self-realization needs no proofs or external confirmation as the awakened state is essentially self-evident and self-validating:

Q: What proof will I have that I know myself correctly?

A: You need no proofs. The experience is unique and unmistakable. It will dawn on you suddenly, when the obstacles are removed to some extent. It is like a frayed rope snapping. Yours is to work at the strands. The break is bound to happen. It can be delayed, but not prevented. (22)

The experience of enlightenment is usually a sudden flash of direct, non-conceptual understanding, not the time-bound, evolutionary result of a gradual approach. "The initiation of the awakening process is an act of grace. You cannot make it happen nor can you prepare yourself for it or accumulate credits toward it."

Q: Surely there are degrees of realization?

A: There are no steps to self-realization. There is nothing gradual about it. It happens suddenly and is irreversible. You rotate into a new dimension, seen from which the previous ones are mere abstractions. Just like on sunrise you see things as they are, so on self-realization you see everything as it is. The world of illusion is left behind. (23)

Even though enlightenment is an instantaneous event, the subsequent unfolding and integration of the experience into everyday life takes time: "Even those rare beings who experience a sudden, dramatic, and seemingly irreversible awakening will still go through a process in which the new state of consciousness gradually flows into and transforms everything they do and so becomes integrated into their lives." Although enlightenment is sudden it is usually preceded by years of serious spiritual work. Many of those who claim to have been spontaneously enlightened without prior spiritual training are probably self-deceived. Respected Zen teacher Philip Kapleau describes his own experience in this regard:

Q: Aren't there cases where enlightenment has come about suddenly and spontaneously? What precipitates it, and how is it different from Zen enlightenment?

A: Strictly speaking every kind of awakening is sudden in the sense that it occurs abruptly, like water coming to a boil; what is "gradual" is the long training that usually precedes it. By "spontaneous" you mean enlightenment that comes without spiritual training, is that right?

Q: Yes.

A: The question is always, "How genuine are so-called spontaneous enlightenments?" In the past twelve years I've tested dozens of persons who claimed to be enlightened and found only one who I felt had had a genuine awakening, without prior training. Without training, however, one's life won't be appreciably transformed, for one won't be able to operate out of that enlightenment and in time it will become merely a cherished memory. (24)

One of the indicators of an authentic spiritual awakening, in which one discovers one's true nature, is the removal of any sense of separation from Reality and the establishment of a state of inner freedom and wholeness which is free from past conditioning and habitual patterns of behaviour. "In living freedom you are free from choice, free from striving, free from the need

to define or qualify yourself in any way. You are neither this nor that. You are the knower of all, primal perception, original limitless being.”

Your “I” becomes a living reality once the idea that society has given you of being a separate entity has entirely left you – together with its desires, fears and imagination, its beliefs that it is this or that. One reminder, one foretaste of your unrestricted being will immediately make it clear that these are not reality but its expressions. You will be instantaneously convinced of what you are. The truth of the nature of existence will be spontaneously revealed to you, that *you* give birth to all that exists. Without awareness nothing would be. (25)

In his books *The Ease of Being* and *Who Am I?* Advaita Vedanta teacher Jean Klein has clearly described his initial enlightenment experience, the conditions which directly preceded it, and the resulting profound changes in his life:

I was watching flying birds without thought or interpretation, when I was completely taken by them and felt everything happening in myself. In this moment I knew myself consciously. The next morning I knew, in facing the multiplicity of daily life, that *being* understanding was established. The self-image had completely dissolved and, freed from the conflict and interference of the I-image, all happenings belonged to being awareness, the totality. Life flowed on without cross-currents of the ego. Psychological memory, like and dislike, attraction and repulsion, had vanished. The constant presence, that we call the Self, was free from repetition, memory, judgment, comparison and appraisal. The center of my being had been spontaneously ejected from time and space into timeless stillness. In this non-state of being, the separation between “you” and “me” vanished completely. Nothing appeared outside. All things belonged in me but I was no longer in them. There was only oneness. (26)

Q: Was your awakening sudden or gradual?

A: The awakening is instantaneous but transmutation on the phenomenal level is in time.

Q: So the sage can mature after enlightenment?

A: One is struck on all levels but the transformation and harmonization of the human substance, temperament, character and biological organism, are time-bound. Not all enlightened beings are teachers or become teachers immediately. The way to transmit truth may mature.

Q: What was your state of mind and body immediately preceding the awakening in consciousness?

A: Receptivity. It was absolutely non-oriented, non-localized, totally relaxed without projection, expectation or idea. Only in this completely relaxed state was I taken by grace. (27)

The Indian master Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj has also described in *I Am That* how he came to discover his true nature by faithfully following the instructions of his teacher:

Q: May I be permitted to ask how did you arrive at your present condition?

A: My teacher told me to hold onto the sense 'I am' tenaciously and not to swerve from it even for a moment. I did my best to follow his advice and in a comparatively short time I realized within myself the truth of his teaching. All I did was to remember his teaching, his face, his words constantly. This brought an end to the mind, in the stillness of the mind I saw myself as I am – unbound. (28)

## Extrasensory Powers and Perception

In certain cases one of the consequences of the development of higher states of consciousness is the presence of new capacities and abilities. At this stage it is possible to operate in higher dimensions and gain spiritual powers which are beyond the perception and reach of the ordinary individual. Ibn El-Arabi: '*Angels are the powers hidden in the faculties and organs of man.*'

The true intellect is the organ of comprehension existing in every human being. From time to time in ordinary human life it breaks through, producing strange phenomena which cannot be accounted for by the usual methods. Sometimes these are called occult phenomena, sometimes they are thought to be a transcending of the time or space relationship. This is the element in the human being which is responsible for his evolution to a higher form. You have to feel it in a way which you feel nothing else. It comes into your consciousness as a truth different in quality from other things which you have been accustomed to regarding as truths. By its very difference you recognize that it belongs to the area which we call 'the other.' (29)

Traditional spiritual teachings claim that many of the greatest human achievements, including scientific and philosophical discoveries, have been achieved through special powers, forms of heightened consciousness, and extra-dimensional perception. "A certain kind of mental and other activity can produce, under special conditions and with particular efforts, what is termed a higher working of the mind, leading to special perceptions whose apparatus is latent in the ordinary man. Rumi on the higher functions of the mind: 'The degree of necessity determines the development of organs in man . . . therefore increase your necessity.'"

Those who have attained self-realization employ higher powers with great care and only in certain situations and circumstances:

Q: We are told that various Yogic powers arise spontaneously in a man who has realized his own true being. What is your experience in these matters?

A: Man's five-fold body (physical, etc.) has potential powers beyond our wildest dreams. Not only is the entire universe reflected in man, but also the power to control the universe is waiting to be used by him. The wise man is not anxious to use such powers, except when the situation calls for them. He finds the abilities and skills in the human personality quite adequate for the business of daily living. Some of the powers can be developed by specialized training, but the man who flaunts such powers is still in bondage. The wise man counts nothing as his own. When at some time and place some miracle is attributed to some person, he will not establish any causal link between events and people, nor will he allow any conclusion to be drawn. All happened as it happened because it had to happen; everything happens as it does because the universe is as it is. (30)

The relationship between enlightenment and the manifestation of powers is complex and multi-faceted. There are no general rules applicable to all, and each individual case is different.

Self-Realization may be accompanied by occult powers or it may not be. If the person has sought such powers before Realization, he may get the powers after Realization. There are others who had not sought such powers and who had attempted only Self-Realization. They do not manifest such powers. These powers may also be sought and gained even after Self-Realization. But then they are used for a definite purpose, i.e. the benefit of others. (31)

Any extrasensory powers gained during the course of spiritual practice have both precise functions and clear limitations:

The sixth sense, which is assumed by theoreticians to be a sense of complete pre-science, of almost divine all-knowledge, is nothing of the kind. Like all the other senses it has its limitations. Its function is not to make the perfected Man all-wise, but to enable him to fulfill a mission of greater perception and fuller life. He no longer suffers from the sense of uncertainty and incompleteness which is familiar to other people. (32)

Like all things of the world, spiritual powers are transient and dependent on the Reality from which they emerge. In fact, people see things which are far more miraculous than so-called spiritual powers, but give them little notice simply because they occur every day. As the sage Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj observes: "There is no greater miracle than 'I' experiencing the world."

There is no end to the miracles that can happen in the world, but they are still of the manifest. There have been many powerful minds and powerful beings who, by their penance or strength of mind, have acquired powers and performed miracles. What has happened to them? The same thing that happens to everyone. If they have had the experience of their true Self, such people would not be trying to acquire powers. (33)

When properly understood, supernatural powers are seen as by-products of spiritual enlightenment, not to be pursued or extolled in themselves. "Psychic abilities in one degree or another are natural by-products of meditation and an awakened mind; as such they are not regarded in Zen as exceptional or wonderful. Zen masters never make a vain display of psychic powers, nor do they set out to cultivate them for their own sake. They are in fact looked upon as delusions – a subtle variety – but still something other than enlightenment."

Zen never boasts about its achievements, nor does it extol supernatural powers to glorify its teachings. On the contrary, the tradition of Zen has shown unmistakably its scornful attitude toward miracle working. Zen does not court or care about miraculous powers of any sort. What it does care about is the understanding and realization of that *wonder of all wonders* – the indescribable *Dharmakaya* – which can be found in all places and at all times. This was clearly demonstrated in the words of Pang Wen when he said, "To fetch water and carry wood are both miraculous acts." Despite all their mockery and dislike of wonder-working acts and supernatural powers, the accomplished Zen masters were by no means incapable of performing them. They could do so if they deemed it necessary for a worthwhile purpose. *These miraculous powers are simply the normal by-products of true Enlightenment. A perfectly enlightened being must possess them, otherwise his Enlightenment can at most be considered as only partial.* (34)

Authentic spiritual teachings downplay the pursuit of extraordinary powers and emphasize the real task of awakening to one's true nature and being:

The liberation proposed by Zen, realized by arriving at the source of mind, is not only liberation from unnecessary limitation and suffering, but liberation of a vast reserve of power inherent in reality. It is customary for Zen masters to refrain from discussing the higher powers latent in the human mind (although they are described at length in certain Buddhist texts), and to avoid making a display of such powers. This custom is observed to discourage people from seeking Zen for reasons of personal ambition. (35)

Special powers and transcendental gifts are gained and employed by realized beings in strict accordance with the capacity to use them in the proper way and to benefit humanity. When spiritual powers are employed by a teacher they must be applied skilfully so as not to ensnare the student in the pursuit of secondary phenomena not directly related to inner development:

Zen practice is not about cultivating magic or special powers. Zen means attaining everyday mind; it is not about cultivating special practices. Yet there are stories about Zen masters sometimes using this special energy to hit their students' minds and wake them up. Keen-eyed teachers seldom resort to this style of teaching unless they absolutely have to. And if they do use this kind of candy to open their student's mind, they quickly take the candy away once the teaching has had its effect. A true teacher never lets his students become attached to the candy. A true master seldom, if ever, resorts to displays of magic and special energy. Students become easily attached to these qualities. If you often deal with a realm of magic, you are only a magic man and not a true teacher. This is because true teaching is about showing people how to take away their karma and help other beings, and not confusing people with magic and miracles. (36)

## Depth and Level of Enlightenment

Multiple levels of experience lie within the human being and are revealed with the unfolding and refinement of consciousness. Meister Eckhart: "A man has many skins in himself, covering the depths of his heart. Man knows so many things; he does not know himself. Why, thirty or forty skins or hides, just like an ox's or a bear's, so thick and hard, covers the soul. Go into your own ground and know to learn yourself there."

Although the experience of spiritual awakening is always the same in essence, there are differences in luminosity and depth, and one may attain degrees of enlightenment upon enlightenment. "Practice and enlightenment have no limit. Dogen Zenji expresses this noble, profound spirit as 'trace-less enlightenment is continued endlessly'."

Just as in the saying "even if one ascends Mount Sumeru there are still heavens above," even though one is enlightened, one further attains enlightenment. However, in essence there are not several kinds of enlightenment. If it's real enlightenment, whether shallow or deep, it is essentially the same, but in that enlightenment there are tremendous differences in clarity and depth. Therefore, from olden times there is the saying "eighteen great enlightenments and innumerable small enlightenments." (37)

In Buddhist teachings the refinement of consciousness experienced with successive depths of enlightenment is referred to as 'opening the three seals.' This is explained in detail by Zen master Sueng Sahn:

We have already spoken about the first seal: "All compounded things are impermanent." Everything in this universe is always changing. Everything arises from conditions, remains for some period, and returns to emptiness. If you attain this point, you will not be so easily attached to things, so you will not suf-

fer. Then you can find the one thing that never changes, the thing that never comes and goes. This “not-changing thing” is your true nature; it is not even a “thing.” To truly experience this you must first attain that all things, all experiences, and all aspects of the mind arise from conditions and are impermanent. When you attain this point, then this realization indelibly marks your consciousness like a seal. If you have this experience even once, very deeply, you never forget it . . . The name and form of all things are constantly changing, changing, changing. Everything appears out of emptiness and eventually returns to emptiness. Nothing stays forever, because nothing has any kind of “thing” that we can call a self, a lasting nature. The attainment of this view is another seal that marks your consciousness . . . If you attain these first two points, you can then realize that this world is already completely empty and still. Nothing ever comes and goes. Everything appears out of complete stillness and extinction and everything eventually returns to emptiness and extinction. To realize this is to be marked with the last seal: “Nirvana is perfect stillness.” The nature of all things is perfect stillness. So if you attain these seals, you attain complete stillness. The Bible says, “Be still and know that I am God.” Buddhism teaches, “All Dharmas come from complete stillness.” If you want to find God, if you want to find Buddha, if you want to find mind, or consciousness, or true self, or the Absolute, you must attain this point of complete stillness and extinction. This stillness is true emptiness: it is the nature of our minds and this whole universe. (38)

The experience of enlightenment has many levels and gradations, both in depth and quality of understanding. In the Sufi tradition these are sometimes described as ‘The Four Journeys’:

There are four journeys. The first of these is the attainment of the condition known as *fana*, sometimes translated as “annihilation.” This is the stage of unification of the consciousness, in which one is harmonized with objective reality. There are three stages after this. Niffari, a great teacher of the tenth century, describes the four journeys in his *Muwaqif*, written in Egypt nearly a thousand years ago. After he has reached the stage of *fana*, the mystic passes into the Second Journey, in which he truly becomes the Perfect Man by the stabilization of his objective knowledge. This is the stage of *baqa*, permanency. He is now not a “God-intoxicated man,” but a teacher in his own right. He has the title of *qutub*, magnetic center, “point toward which all turn.” In the Third Journey, the teacher becomes a spiritual director to each kind of person in accordance with that person’s individuality. The previous kind of teacher (of the Second Journey) is able to teach only within his own immediate culture or local religion. The third kind of teacher may appear to be many different things to different men. He is operating on many levels. He is not “all things to all men” as part of a deliberate policy. He can, on the other hand, benefit everyone in accordance with that person’s potentiality. The teacher of the Second Journey, in contrast, is able to work only with selected individuals. In the Fourth, and last, Journey, the Perfect Man guides others in their transition from what is generally considered to be physical death,



to a further stage of development which is invisible to the ordinary person. For the mystic, therefore, the apparent break which takes place at conventional physical death does not exist. A continuous communication and interchange exists between him and the next form of life. (39)

## Integration Into Everyday Life

There is a profound change in the way in which life is experienced following Self-Realization. "Each thing *just as it is* takes on an entirely new significance or worth. Miraculously, everything is radically transformed through remaining what it is." Jean Klein describes this quality of sacredness following enlightenment:

Q: How did the different situations in your life appear after being established in this fullness?

A: Life went on as before but I no longer felt bound to existence. All activities were related to the wholeness that is Being. Nothing felt accidental or unconscious. I would say all activities became sacred. As I was no longer bound to things and there was no localization in form or concept, I felt the immensity, the vastness in which all moved. All appeared in space. When you are bound to the activity you see only the activity itself and not as it stands in relation to the whole environment. When there is seeing from globality things appear in the situation that you have never seen before and there comes discernment and intelligent discrimination. (40)

The spiritual condition of the enlightened human being compels him or her to fulfill their obligations in the world to the very best of their abilities. The authentic mystical experience, to have any real meaning, should improve the individual, making them a better person who is of greater value to the human community. In the ancient *Srimad Bhagavatam* it is written, '*Learn to look with an equal eye upon all beings, seeing the one Self in all.*'

From the beginning, a large proportion of Sufis have maintained their connection with the 'ordinary' world. For them, the effects of what they knew, had seen and understood were brought into play in their dealings with the world about them. What they believed shone through what they wrote and did. They had prepared their minds for the mystical experience, and when it came, when it had filled them, they became not frenzied, but infinitely richer. That wealth they then brought to bear on those around them, those who came to them, and those who heard and read their treatises. In that state of controlled ecstasy, calmed inwardly by the certainty that only enlightenment can bring, the Sufi is free to move about the world, to act in it, to take his place in it, and often to excel in it. He has achieved a new level of perception, a new kind of understanding, a new breadth of cons-

ciousness, he has experienced the cosmos as unity and so has understood his own significance: he is the enlightened man. (41)

The depth of enlightenment is reflected by the way in which the activities of daily life are faced and carried out. The awakened person does not reside in a "heavenly realm" and continues to share the experiences of earthly life with their fellow human beings, albeit from a higher spiritual perspective. "Having a thoroughly great enlightenment does not mean we become something other than a human being, without happiness and without troubles: *Though I thought I had cast away the world and was without self, snowy days are all the colder.*"

Accomplishment refers to the degree to which enlightenment itself is assimilated and fused into one with that person's character and life. It's a matter of how much enlightenment becomes one's personality, becomes one's character, becomes one's life. Even though the fact of the no-self becomes visible with the enlightened eye, how much has the person *become* no-self? Even though the fact that self and others are one becomes visible with the enlightened eye, it's a question of whether one's daily activity expresses the oneness of self and other. That's what's important. (42)

Spiritual awareness not only transforms the inner being but also brings about a heartfelt, altruistic desire to share transcendental understanding with others. "With the grace of awakening comes responsibility. You see its significance and recognize the arising of awareness as the most important thing that *can* happen to you. Opening yourself to the emerging consciousness and bringing its light into this world then becomes the primary purpose of your life."

The behaviour of realized beings is appropriate to the circumstances of the moment, and their teaching expressions vary with the requirements of 'time, place and people.' Those who have experienced genuine spiritual awakening may convey their understanding to others in ways which are different for different people. The modes of expression differ according to circumstances:

Q: Why does the action of various sages take such different expression?

A: Each situation brings its own action but the action is potential. The actualization of the action belongs to the character, imagination, faculties of the body-mind. Similar situations can be furnished in different ways without losing their intrinsic direction. Some people express themselves in thinking, some in action, some in the artistic mode, some in silence. All expression comes out of giving. Ultimately it is all playing, an expression of universal energy. Certain sages are more in an earthly life than others. It belongs to their existence and all they bring to it. No way is better or worse than another. It is a completely mistaken idea, a wrong interpretation, that a wise human being leaves society. When a sage is in society but not of it he or she is the most positive element in the society. (43)

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