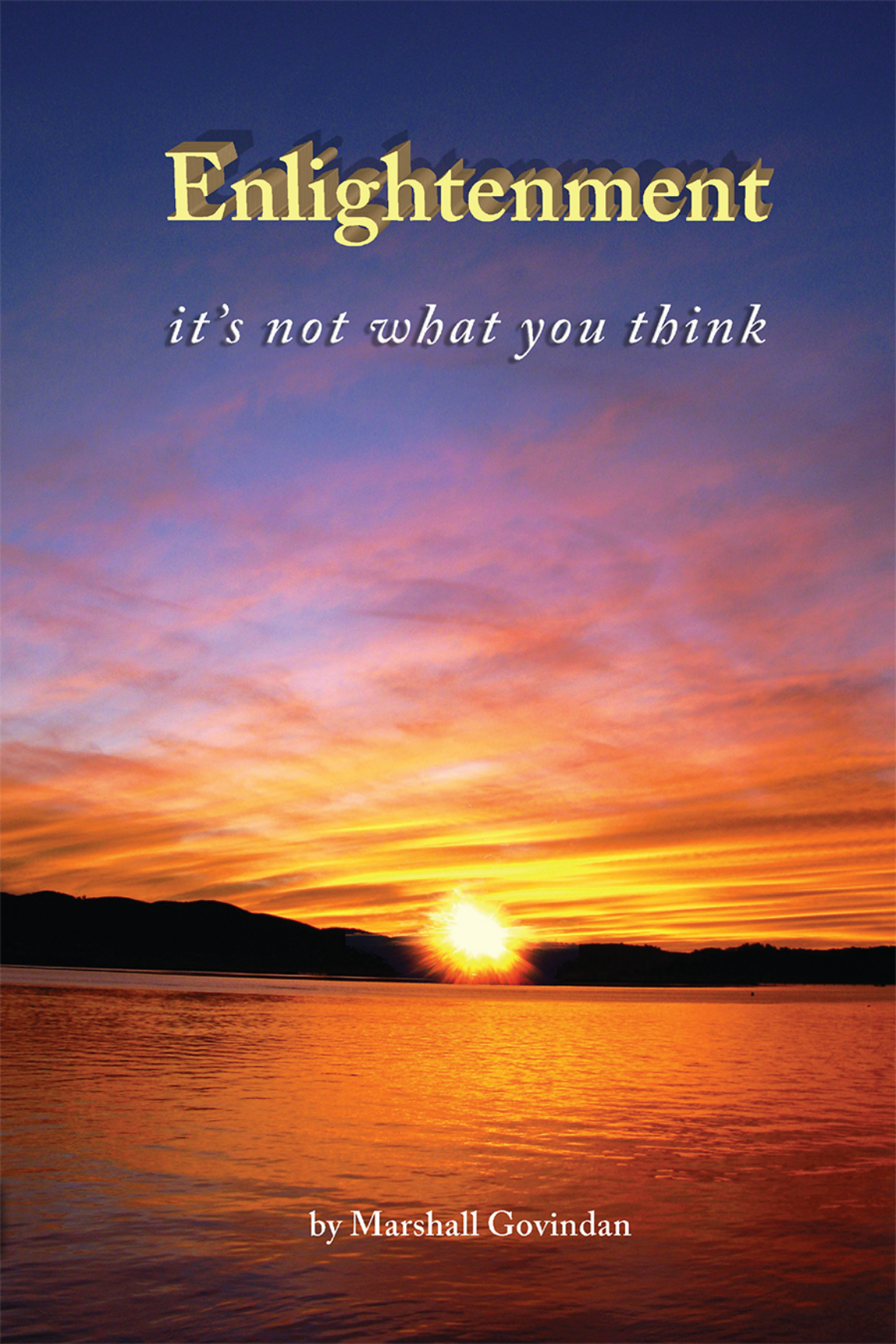


Enlightenment

it's not what you think



by Marshall Govindan

“This eminently practical guide to spiritual life draws deeply from many wells of wisdom, including the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, the Kriya Yoga of Babaji, the writings of the Tamil Siddhas, the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, and the insights of contemporary studies of the brain. Written in an accessible style, this book will help its readers understand the quest for higher meaning, and provides a toolbox to inspire wayfarers on this most important of journeys. Immensely enjoyable reading!”

Christopher Key Chapple, Doshi Professor of Indic and Comparative Theology and Director, Master of Arts in Yoga Studies,
Loyola Marymount University

“True enlightenment is not simply an elevated state of mind but a complete change of consciousness from the limited ego to the supreme Self-realization in which we are one with all existence – extending to all time and space and beyond.

Marshall Govindan reveals the secrets of the Yoga Siddhas and their transformative practices to help you approach that supreme enlightenment as the ultimate goal of all that you do.”

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Director, **American Institute of Vedic Studies**
Yoga, Ayurveda and Jyotish Teacher
Padma Bhushan awardee from President of India
Author: Shiva, the Lord of Yoga and over thirty books.

“With this work, Enlightenment, Govindan delivers the gifts of siddha masters to our doorsteps.

Here, he delineates succinctly and clearly the time-tested techniques of these masters for eliminating obstacles—our deepest afflictions of fear, doubt, and all forms of grief and sorrow which obstruct the incessant flow of our intrinsic luminosity and happiness. Enlightenment is a must-read, for it is practical, simple, and meaningful... It is a decisive tool we can use for finding life's purpose.”

Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, PhD
Spiritual Head, **Himalayan Institute**
Teacher, author, humanitarian, and visionary spiritual leader

“Marshall Govindan’s latest book, *Enlightenment: It’s not what you think*, speaks of it as maintaining continuous (seamless, gapless) awareness of the underlying Reality, a state of being, rather than a state of thinking, a state of silence, which can be achieved by practising Kriya yoga, as experienced and taught by Kriya Babaji Nagaraj. A “MUST BOOK” for every yoga practitioner.”

Dr. T.N. Ganapathy, Ph D

Director,

Tamil Yoga Siddha Research Centre

Ashoknagar,

Chennai 600 083

Tamil Nadu, India

“We all have within ourselves an innate and underlying quality of joy that’s always present, unchanging and available, no matter our inner or outer circumstance. So how is it, then, that we don’t experience unchanging joy in every moment? This is the critical and life-changing question that Marshall Govindan explores and implores us to understand, as well as realize in his book: *Enlightenment: It’s Not What You Think*. Marshall offers us a potent guide of exquisite teachings that offer us both simple and straightforward answers on how we can recognize, while revealing the obstacles that otherwise distract us from realizing our birthright of unchanging joy. This is truly a guidebook for all who wish to awaken beyond ego centeredness to open-hearted and everlasting peace.”

Dr. Richard Miller, Ph D

Author of *Yoga Nidra: The Meditative Heart of Yoga* and *iRest Meditation: Restorative Practices for Health, Resiliency and Well-Being*

Enlightenment: It's Not What You Think

by

Marshall Govindan

Babaji's Kriya Yoga and Publications, Inc.

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ॐ INTRODUCTION ॐ

Reading or speaking about enlightenment is a challenge because it's not what you think. Words are inadequate to describe it, like the words on a menu describing restaurant specialties. Enlightenment, too, must be tasted. However, some descriptions may prepare you for your first glimpse of it and then guide you to become it.

Let me start by asking a personal question. Why did you open this book? The possible answers are many. "I am a spiritual seeker, struggling in the material world ... I enjoy meditation, and I have heard that enlightenment is its result ... I want to find peace of mind ... I'm having an existential crisis, and I'm looking for answers to the suffering in my mind ... I'm looking for God ... I'm looking for a spiritual experience." These are all good reasons to read this book.

What's the one thing that we are all seeking? It's probably happiness. Everyone is looking for happiness, even those who probably wouldn't read this book. They're just looking for it elsewhere. Maybe they are searching for it in a relationship or a meal, or in physical activity or on television. Some are even working late tonight, thinking that work brings them happiness. *Finding* happiness is not really the problem.

The real question is, why does happiness disappear? You might find happiness, large and small, in many circumstances. But holding onto it is like trying to gather water in your hands, only to watch it disappear through your fingers.

You're not alone. Every human being who has ever lived has faced the problem of trying to find lasting happiness in things – things that do not last.

Nothing stays the same. Material objects don't last. Neither do feelings. Think of the happiest moments of your life. Have you been able to hold onto those sweet or exciting feelings? What disrupted them or caused them to fade? Where did the disturbances come from?

The enlightened masters known as Yoga Siddhas and modern psychologists agree that it's impossible to hold on to happiness because of movements arising from the subconscious mind: memories, desires, fears, likes, dislikes, emotions, and experiences that you can't let go of. The Siddhas diagnosed the fundamental cause of human suffering this way: You are dreaming with your eyes open.

You wake up in the morning and start dreaming. "Where's my coffee ... where's my cigarette ... I don't want to go to work ... I don't like my job." Many of the thoughts are habitual, but where do these daydreams come from? Yogis and psychologists agree that they come from the subconscious mind as *vasanas* (tendencies), including fantasies, desires, and aversions that you can't give up, and *samskaras* (habits) of thought, word, and action that your subconscious mind is programmed to repeat.

To illustrate this, think of a happy time in your life, a time when you got something that you had long desired: the perfect job, the perfect relationship, the house, the car. It should have been one of the happiest moments of your life. But what happened? Immediately, something arose to disturb you! Thoughts, doubts, fears: "Did I make the right choice? ... What if I'm not up to the job?" Or maybe you began desiring something else even more, and in a moment, as if a cloud had passed in front of the sun, your happiness faded.

The great Siddha Patanjali wrote at the beginning of his famous work *The Yoga Sutras*, "Yoga is the process of ceasing to identify with the movements of the mind, which arise from the subconscious." A depressing thought enters your mind and you identify with it, you embrace it, you possess it. A fearful thought comes, and it banishes the happiness that was just there! You are like

someone absorbed in watching television. Only after the program is over do you realize, oh, I have a life to get back to!

So, who is the person that thinks these things and lives this life?

The Yoga Siddhas not only diagnosed the cause of human suffering. They also prescribed a remedy to heal it. They said, “The amount of happiness in life is proportional to your discipline.” They used the Sanskrit word *sadhana* to suggest a disciplined mind and heart. Sadhana means everything that you do to remember who you are and everything you do to let go of what you are not. It’s a difficult challenge.

In the following essays, you will learn how to challenge yourself to apply this prescription and uncover who you truly are.

You are Absolute Being, Absolute Consciousness, and Absolute Bliss. Being is that which always is; it never changes. *Consciousness* is that which observes. It witnesses every thought, every emotion, and everything perceived through the five senses. It does nothing. It is choice less awareness. *Bliss*, unlike happiness, is unconditional. It is pure joy and may be felt even when happiness is struck down by unwanted circumstances or events.

But first, to allow you to experience what the words Absolute Being, Absolute Consciousness, and Absolute Bliss really mean – to actually experience them, not merely think about what is on our menu – prepare yourself by following this guided meditation.

A guided meditation

I recommend that you either read the following guided meditation two or three times to commit its simple instructions to memory or read it into a recording device and play it back while practicing.

Breathe deeply several times. As you breathe in, feel yourself filling with energy. As you breathe out, feel yourself letting go of tension and fatigue. Now, begin to breathe normally and repeat the words *I Am* several times, followed by a

pause. Each time you say *I Am*, notice how your awareness changes. Maybe at first, you'll be aware of physical sensations. Then perhaps emotions. Then perhaps thoughts.

Each time you say *I Am*, it's like adjusting the lens of a microscope, and you're underneath the microscope. At some point, you'll notice that all of these thoughts, emotions, and sensations are appearing and disappearing on a kind of screen, like the images on a television. You'll notice that the screen is made up of particles. As you go deeper and deeper within yourself saying *I Am*, you'll notice that the particles are moving: particles of light everywhere, inside you, around you, moving through you. At this level, it's difficult to distinguish where you end and other things begin. There's vast space between the particles.

Now if I ask, who are you, what will you say? It's no longer enough to refer to your name, a memory, or a sensation. Now, like the mystics, you can say *I Am That* – that infinite being from which everything comes and to which everything returns. Like a vast ocean out of which countless waves appear. Until now, you've only been living on the surface of your being. Your consciousness has focused on the individual waves, thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Now, your consciousness has expanded, and you're aware of the infinite and eternal ocean of being that transcends you. The mystic says, "*I Am That*. I was never born. That which I truly am has always existed. *I Am That*. Everything is within me. I am in everything. Everything comes and everything goes, thoughts, sensations, and emotions, but I remain."

How to maintain this perspective? Your breath gives you a natural reminder. During inhalation it makes a sound like *ham*, which in Sanskrit means *I Am*. During exhalation, it makes a sound like *sa*, which in Sanskrit means *That*. Whenever you notice the inhalation, mentally say *ham* and remember *I Am*. Whenever you notice the exhalation, mentally say *sa* and remember *That*.

Make no effort to control the breath. Simply follow it. If other thoughts arise, don't chase them away. Just return to *ham'sa*. Gradually as your breathing slows down, thoughts subside. This subtly emphasizes the subjective side of absolute reality: *I Am*. If you reverse it, it emphasizes the objective side of reality: *That*,

I Am. Two sides of one coin. *I am that I am*. So, for the next ten minutes, be very calm, focus on your breath, and repeat *ham ... sa*, as you breathe in and out. And remember to concentrate on what the words *I Am That* point to.

After practicing for at least ten minutes, try to maintain the perspective of the Witness as long as possible. In reality, this perspective is available to you twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. To the extent that you can maintain it – through the highs and lows and whatever karma delivers to your doorstep, whether roses or rotten tomatoes – you will be enlightened. Light is a metaphor for Consciousness. Just as a source of light is separate from what it illuminates, so are you – pure Absolute Being, Consciousness, and Bliss – separate from any and all experiences. Enlightened sages tell us that we are already enlightened. But paradoxically, we continuously fail to notice when we lose the perspective of the Witness, the soul, our true Self. Self-realization and enlightenment are the ability to maintain this perspective.

The essays that follow will guide you in developing your capacity for Self-realization and enlightenment. They will also help you recognize the obstacles that stand in the way of enlightenment, how to avoid them, and why so few seekers succeed. Even if your objective is simply to avoid human suffering, these essays will help you develop the wisdom to do so. The wisdom of enlightened masters is your greatest heritage, and it is within reach when you pursue it with clear understanding and sincere application.

ॐ CHAPTER 1 ॐ

Enlightenment: It's Not What You Think

What does the word enlightenment mean? Descriptions of spiritual enlightenment vary in the literature and the religious and spiritual traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Yoga, Christianity, and Western mysticism. Accounts by mystics from these traditions describe what they have experienced as the ultimate state of beatitude, one free from suffering. This distinguishes them from revelatory religious literature, which speaks of a heavenly afterlife framed in the language of worldly dimensions.

The first stages of enlightenment in the classical Yoga tradition of Patanjali and India's Vedanta are part of the experience of *samadhi*. There is a saying: "Those who know *samadhi* do not talk about it, and those who talk about it do not know it." That's because *samadhi* is not what you think it is! It is exactly contrary to what you imagine it to be: It is the space between your thoughts. It is mental silence. It is remaining aware of what is aware. Rather than talking about it, let's begin with words about *samadhi* by Self-realized Masters. Words cannot create the experience of *samadhi*, but the following will point you in the right direction, like signs on highways pointing to distant cities.

Wisdom from realized sages

Be still, and know that I am God.

— Psalm 46 of David

Summa (Tamil for *be still*)

— Paambatti Siddha

I am That I am.

— Exodus 3:14

Jehovah, speaking from the burning bush to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

The chief characteristic of the state of Samadhi is the presence of the sole feeling, I am, and nothing more, with no thoughts or other outer activity of the consciousness.

— Ramana Maharshi

In samadhi there is only the feeling of “I-I” and not thoughts.

— Ramana Maharshi

I-I is the way Ramana Maharshi referred to That, which you become aware of behind the thought or word *I*.

Realize that Thou art That Brahman ... which alone shines, which is beyond the Logos, all pervading, uniform, truth, consciousness, bliss, having no end, indestructible.

— Adi Shankaracharya (*Crest Jewel of Wisdom*, verse 264)

When the mind, matured by ceaseless discipline of this kind (Self remembrance) becomes merged in Brahman, then samadhi, devoid of all forms becomes of itself the producer of the realization of non-dual bliss.

— Adi Shankaracharya (*Crest Jewel of Wisdom*, verse 363)

This un-manifested spiritual consciousness begins to manifest like the dawn in the pure heart, and shining like the mid-day sun in the “cave of wisdom,” illuminating the whole universe.

— Adi Shankaracharya (*Crest Jewel of Wisdom*, verse 134)

Like space, I go further than thought (am all pervading);

Like the sun, I am different from what is made visible by it;

Like a mountain, I am eternally immovable;

Like the ocean, I am boundless.

— Adi Shankaracharya (*Crest Jewel of Wisdom*, verse 500)

Samadhi is the breathless state of communion with God or Truth.

— Yogi S.A.A. Ramaiah

I am Existence, Knowledge, Bliss Absolute.... Death is a joke to me for I am the Death of Death.

— Kriya Babaji Nagaraj (*The Voice of Babaji: Trilogy on Kriya Yoga*, Part 3)

Now, nothing can disturb me anymore.

— Ramana Maharshi

This is my favorite description of samadhi, because it is so down-to-earth and instructive about how we must relate to all of life's challenges, calmly active, actively calm.

I have lost the habit of thinking.

— Sri Aurobindo

He said this after he had completed his three greatest literary masterpieces. It indicates that they were the product not of his thinking but of *prajnata* (insight), born of samadhi and mental silence.

In these essays, the word *enlightenment* means spiritual enlightenment. It should not be confused with the philosophical movement known as The Enlightenment or The Age of Reason, which dominated the European world of ideas in the eighteenth century. The principal goals of Enlightenment thinkers were liberty, progress, reason, tolerance, fraternity, and an end to the abuses of the Church through the separation of church and state. The Enlightenment gave rise to the French and American revolutions and modern liberal democracies.

Spirituality versus religion

A 2015 survey of religious affiliation in America by Pew Research Center¹ revealed that, when asked to identify their religious affiliation, more than one-third of those surveyed described their religious identity as “none.” Among the “nones,” a large and growing number of people characterized themselves as “spiritual but not religious.”

What does it mean to be spiritual but not religious? Is it more than the rejection of adherence to organized religion? If so, what are the goals of those who profess to be spiritual? What are the shared beliefs of those who profess to be spiritual, but who speak different languages or are from different cultural communities? What are the differences between them? Does religion support those who identify themselves as spiritual, and if so, how? Does being spiritual support the affirmation of religious beliefs and faith, and if so, how? Can science confirm the existence of higher states of consciousness associated with spiritual enlightenment? These are some of the questions that will be answered in this chapter.

Religions value that which has a form, including scriptures, personalities, symbols, beliefs, creeds, architecture, ceremonies, clothing and physical appearance, prayer, activities, hierarchies of authority, and history. Religions distinguish themselves by their forms. They will even go to war over differences in form. When you identify yourself as adhering to a particular religion, you immediately create a barrier between yourself and others who do not share that identification. Throughout human history, religion has been, and remains, one of the greatest sources of social and political division.

The spirit has no form, and spiritual traditions value the formless. For them, spirituality refers to that which is beyond all forms. To go beyond all forms, spiritual traditions around the world have found that the cultivation of silence and meditation is essential. In silence, verbal and mental forms dissolve. Truth,

¹ <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

Love, Beauty, and Wisdom are revealed in silence. Seekers after these absolutes should, therefore, cultivate silence.

Meditation allows you to transcend the physical and mental states of consciousness and enter the spiritual dimension of life. Other practices that achieve this include breathing techniques, the repetition of mantras, and asanas or postures, when performed with meditative awareness. Collectively, all of these practices comprise Yoga, and so Yoga can be called “the practical side of all religions.”

Religion is what you believe. Yoga is what you do as a regular practice of self-discipline. Belief exists only in the intellect, but the intellect builds categories and raises distinctions between this and that. The distinctions exist only on the intellectual plane, and they may provide the rationale for everything else that distinguishes religion. Yoga and its practices of spiritual discipline allow you to experience the spiritual dimension of existence, where all intellectual, mental, and even physical differences dissolve into Oneness: the source, the quantum field, conscious energy.

Those who identify themselves as spiritual are seeking to be present in this world in a higher, lasting state of consciousness, unlike followers of religion who seek salvation in an afterlife, either in a heaven or as liberation from the obligation to reincarnate in this world of suffering. Spiritual seekers strive to be in the Eternal Now; they emphasize the power of being present in this very moment. But they are not seeking merely passing spiritual experiences. They are searching for a lasting state of higher consciousness, variously described as enlightenment, the awakening, satori, illumination, samadhi, Self-realization, and Christ Consciousness. Although these expressions vary among spiritual and cultural traditions, they refer to the permanent attainment of a higher state of consciousness in which the seeker realizes Oneness with all.

Freedom from suffering goes hand-in-hand with enlightenment. There is an inverse relationship between the two, and so the prescription for a spiritual life begins with a diagnosis of the cause of human suffering: attachment and its partner aversion, both born of ignorance and egoism. If the purpose of education is to relieve human suffering, the knowledge that eliminates human

The pure, non-reflective state of cognitive insight effectively restrains the externalization of consciousness into old forms, thoughts, or habits. The Yogi is liberated from all attachments. The background has, in effect, become the foreground in the Yogi's field of consciousness. The feeling *I Am* rules. All of this is accomplished by a higher consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo put it, "I have lost the habit of thinking." No longer riding the elevator, rising to and descending from samadhi, the Yogi remains at all times enlightened in a state of effortless and continuous Self-realization or effulgent awareness.

With the cessation [of identifying with] even this last impression [*I Am*] all [others] having been restrained, there results the seedless *nirbija* cognitive absorption.

— Patanjali (*The Yoga Sutras*, I:51)

As the proverbial stick used to poke the fire is at last itself cast into the fire, even the last impression *I Am*, used to detach the Self from identification with objects of consciousness, is cast away. What remains is effulgent Self-awareness, independent of everything. There is no more separation between the knower and the known, not even the thought "I have realized God."

The paradox of enlightenment and the trap of specialness

In our modern, materialistic culture where individualism, competition, outward appearance, and greed are emphasized, we are encouraged to have special new experiences and to become someone special. But the push to be special requires that we feel superior to others, and if we fail to do so, its opposite – the feeling of being unworthy – breeds resentment. Whether we succeed or fail, the ego grows stronger! Specialness takes you away from the realization of Oneness. If you aspire to the realization of Oneness, you will not get there through the ego, no matter how rich, powerful, and knowledgeable you become.

What is needed is a change of perspective from that of the ego, which identifies with your body and the movements of your mind and emotions, to the perspective of your soul, which is the *Witness*. The Witness does nothing. It possesses nothing. It observes. It is pure Consciousness. Take a deep breath and step back from whatever thoughts, feelings, or sensations you are having

right now. Be a witness to them. Enjoy this new perspective right now. It is pure Consciousness. But unlike everything else, “it” cannot be experienced, because it is not an object. It is the subject. Everything else is object.

Realizing “who I am” is not about having a new experience. There is nothing special about having an experience. You are not going to become special either. Being special implies being separate from everything else. You are pure Consciousness, and that is both immanent in and transcendent of every thing, unlimited by time and space, and therefore not separate.

The first paradox here is that, from the soul’s perspective, you are already enlightened, but you continually forget it. Enlightenment means remaining continuously conscious of and identified with Consciousness itself. Reaching this state is the objective of all authentic spiritual teaching and methods.

The second paradox is that the farther you progress on the path to enlightenment, the less you seek to become someone special and to have special experiences, and the less you are attracted to those whose marketing makes them appear special. A sense of unity with everything and transcendence replaces the need to be special, because the feeling of being special sets you apart from the One.

At the beginning of your search, you may have hoped that the path would lead to so-called spiritual experiences, such as visions, psychic encounters, and astral travel. Or you sought someone special, a so-called spiritual master, who would alleviate your suffering. Or you wanted to become someone special. In 1971, someone preparing to go to India for the first time told me, “I am not coming back to America until I become a spiritual master.”

Too often, so-called spiritual masters are merely masters of marketing, and so-called spiritual books create unrealistic expectations of encountering exotic or miraculous experiences.

A true Guru never claims to be a Guru and never claims any special status. A true spiritual master has mastered the ego and will never encourage any

seek your boss's advice. Your boss tells you, "I'm too busy to help you." Later, you observe your mind dwelling on the reaction, and feelings of frustration and doubts about your own competence arise. You put the problem aside. Six months later, another difficult problem surfaces. You consider asking your boss for help but decide not to, remembering the previous response to your request for help. So, you avoid seeking assistance from your boss when you have unresolved problems. Feelings of resentment toward your boss grow. Feelings of frustration grow. Doubts about your own competence grow.

Clinging means *I don't want this one to go away*. What happened was so pleasurable and it made me feel so great that I don't want the feeling to vanish. For example, you learn that you are getting a promotion and a considerable pay raise. You start to fantasize about how your life is going to change for the better. You start building castles in the air. Or it may involve something that you dread, for example, that after investing your time, money, and energy in a project, you will lose your investment. So, you continue to worry about it. Perversely, you cling to causes of suffering, including feelings of anger, sadness, and resentment, foolishly believing that, if you dwell on such feelings long enough, they will transform themselves into some form of happiness. Instead of making a small but deliberate and immediate effort to let them go, you allow them to hang around and reinforce existing blockages formed in the past.

Blockages involve the accumulation of energy around unresolved experiences. They may manifest themselves as fear about things we are averse to and find difficult, even painful, and fantasies about desires and attachments, typically what we have found to be pleasurable. They are a by-product of the egoistic perspective that "I am my body ... I am my memories ... I am my emotions and feelings." They reflect the mind's confusion created by egoism: that happiness or unhappiness is to be found "out there," in things to which I am attached or averse. The river of life brings millions of experiences, but egoism, the habit of identifying with what we are not, causes our consciousness to contract around some of them, and we get hung up. We prefer clinging to them rather than letting them pass by with everything else on the way to the infinite ocean of our Being.

The Yoga Siddhas prescribed a more direct method: concentrating on a point of light, known as *bindu*, or on the sacred syllable *Aum*, particularly between the eyebrows, and then allowing our consciousness to expand. The result of this practice is the realization of *vettaveli* (vast, luminous space).

In seeking to inspire others to realize the Divine and to transform ignorant human nature, the Siddhas avoided any reference to a deity with a name, form, or personality. Nowhere in the writings of the Siddhas do we find any references to gods, deities, or a divine personality. For the Siddhas, God is the supreme abstraction, beyond name and form. To define God, or anything else for that matter, is to limit it. So, how can we limit with words what is limitless? Nevertheless, the Siddhas sought to inspire others to realize the Supreme Being, through the practice of Kundalini Yoga, as *vettaveli*.

In the verse above by the Siddha Dhanvantri, “the dumb” refers to the mystical syllable *Aum*, implying that it can never be grasped as a concept or through discussion but only in silence, which is unceasing eloquence. “The end” refers to the *sahasrara* chakra at the top of the head, where there are no more relationships. The relationships between Guru and disciple and God and devotee end in union. “The uncreated space” refers to *vettaveli*, the Siddhas’ favorite metaphor to describe the indescribable Absolute: vast, luminous space. It is an allogical whole not determined by any set of relations. No amount of speaking can capture it, but we might realize it through the guidance of the Guru in the practice of Kundalini Yoga as prescribed by the Siddhas.

In the next lines, Dhanvantri mentions the elements essential to realizing *vettaveli*: learning it in the person of the Guru (“at the feet”), awakening the energy in the *muladhara* chakra and directing it mentally upward through the five higher chakras until it reaches the *sahasrara* chakra. Becoming one with this Absolute Reality and enjoying its bliss, we deserve to be called the “son of Agastyar,” that is, belonging to the Siddha tradition of Agastyar.

Vettaveli represents the blissful *samadhi* state, the space of consciousness, of transcendental awareness, the awareness of Being itself. It is a “place” where thoughts drop off one by one until our consciousness exists merely as an empty

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