



What is Enlightenment?

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What is spiritual enlightenment? You often hear the term "enlightenment" in deep spiritual discussions, but it is almost impossible to find anyone who can definitively say what "enlightenment," "awakening," "union," or "self-realization" actually entails. In fact, many religions differ as to their proposals for the highest state of spiritual attainment -- which is often called salvation, liberation or becoming one with God (union) -- that often do not even include enlightenment, or they may simply recognize it under a different name.

Enlightenment is the direct realization of our self-nature, source essence, or true self. This awakening constitutes directly experiencing the source and essence of reality, the original dimension of equal identity where mind and matter are one because you have found the ultimate underlying, true nature of all things. Enlightenment means to directly, experientially realize that basic substance of cosmic life where matter and consciousness are the same substance, which then consequently opens up various powers and a universal visage.

That transcendental source nature you discover is often called God, Ein Sof, Allah, Brahman, dharmakaya, fundamental nature, Buddha-nature, Tao, Emptiness or Self. Some of the secular designations include Pure Consciousness, pristine awareness, one mind, uncreated light, clear light or infinite universal illumination to denote the fact that It is the ultimate substratum that gives birth to the knowingness of manifest consciousness.

The way to this realization is through meditation and other spiritual practices that teach you to stop clinging to states of consciousness. You must always allow consciousness to arise, but should not cling to thoughts to thus become a perfectly free, effortless, natural and spontaneous individual. As your thoughts quiet down because of this practice, your body's chakras and chi channels will open up (you will experience a kundalini awakening) and you will gradually stop identifying your body and mind as your self. In time you can attain a pristine realization of selflessness (a state absent of the ego, I-thought or sense of separate "I-amness") that constitutes enlightenment.

Regardless of your religious tradition, when you diligently cultivate spiritual practice you will gradually pass through many transitional stages of progress and particular spiritual experiences. These experiences can include special degrees of one-pointed concentration (absorption) called dhyana and samadhi attainments, which prepare you for enlightenment if you cultivate far enough. Many religions, both Eastern and Western, describe these possible achievements in great detail, and many such experiences that are not enlightenment are analyzed within so that practitioners do not incorrectly assume they have actually achieved awakening when they have only experienced inferior attainments. The various achievement levels to this awakening of self-realization that are explained.

This book is the first of its kind to collect not only the rare autobiographical and biographical accounts from many traditions of individuals who achieved enlightenment (because it is a non-denominational accomplishment), but also the relevant passages in each tradition's scriptures that reveal the characteristics of the original nature that everyone awakens to (such as perfect purity, changelessness, infinity, eternality, and

bliss). The reader quickly comes to the conclusion that despite sectarian differences, everyone is actually awakening to the very same thing. It cannot be anything else! The pathway to enlightenment is analyzed using many different religious paths and frameworks. Many common errors of spiritual practice and misinterpretations of spiritual states are also revealed to help individuals become correctly oriented so that they can attain enlightenment as well.



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