



## *Enlightenment*

One Zen master told his disciples that, after they have experienced enlightenment, they should forget it as it is of absolutely no use in life. This is misleading to those inexperienced ones who read it. After a true enlightenment experience, one is never the same, even though he consciously forgets the joy and fulfillment and goes on to work for others. In Zen practice, particularly in Rinzai Zen (which uses Koan practice), it is possible to force a premature satori experience through overly-zealous practice, and the results of the experience will soon fade. This is the danger of this kind of practice. Better is the slow maturing that leads to the “instantaneous” satori. It is possible to have many satori experiences in a lifetime. Hakuin, one of Japan’s two greatest teachers, reports having had quite a few of the “Great Joys” and innumerable smaller experiences. This reminds us of Ramakrishna, the Indian saint who, in his mature years, was often in a perpetual state corresponding to Satori, to the extent that he was unconscious of the everyday world for long periods of time. Such a state would be misunderstood in the West, where doctors might diagnose it as hysteria.

Zen says that you must leave each state as it is experienced, as a cloud floats across the sky, stopping at no one place. For complete non-attachment, nothing should be clung to, even enlightenment. And this term, enlightenment, is used very differently in different cultures. As I have pointed out before, the enlightenment of the great Rishi in India was far different from the Buddhist enlightenment in China and Japan.

It is possible to mistake a conceptual state, in which things are supposedly understood, for a genuine enlightenment experience, where “understanding” is the least of the concerns. Experiencing something, living something, manifesting it, is far different from having an intellectual understanding. Words play no part in the genuine article, and the realization of this Unity often leaves one tongue-tied. In Zen terms, enlightenment is chopping wood and drawing water. Those who look for the miraculous or the showy are up the wrong creek. My Indian teacher said that only an enlightened one (perhaps the teacher) could tell you of YOUR enlightenment. If someone says, “I’m enlightened!” you can be sure he’s a million miles away. Only the teacher, or one like the teacher, can confirm the student’s status. His words that he has gone past the teacher would give him away.

There is Reality in the events of the world, particularly those having to do with nature. The trick is in the eye of the beholder.

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