

"He who knows does not speak.  
He who speaks does not know."

- Lao Tzu

"Authority of any kind,  
especially in the field of understanding,  
is the most destructive thing.  
Leaders destroy the followers  
and followers destroy the leaders."

- J. Krishnamurti

 Occasionally, someone will ask, point-blank, “Are you awakened?” or, “Are you enlightened?” On the surface this seems to be a perfectly reasonable and straightforward question, deserving an equally forthright answer. I recently came across an internet web site that was devoted to “finding your spiritual teacher.” It was all about sorting through all the teachers and gurus out there and deciding which was authentic and would be the best teacher for you. This web site included a checklist of indicators and
tests, one of which being that you should be able to ask a prospective teacher, “Are you yourself enlightened?” and he or she should be able to clearly and unhesitatingly give you a direct yes or no response. If not, you should immediately go elsewhere; any truly enlightened individual should be able to tell you so in a straightforward manner and any hedging or fudging on this question is a sign that the individual in question is a charlatan.

Although this is probably well meant, the difficulty arises in that the unawakened mind of the dream character, with its conditioning and limitations, is attempting to put itself in a position to establish the criteria whereby awakening is to be evaluated, which by definition it does not and cannot understand. It is not that anything is being evaded here; it is simply that from the point of view of awakening the question, “Are you awakened” simply does not make any sense whatsoever. It is like asking, “What color is a kilometer?” Or, as Nisargadatta Maharaj suggested, like asking about “the child of a barren woman.” The questioner is sincerely earnest, and there is a wish to answer in a way that will be helpful, but once again the questions which are so pressing before awakening dissolve into meaninglessness and irrelevance when it happens. From the awakened perspective, the question, “Are you awakened?” is a fundamentally mistaken question: any answer is the wrong answer because the premise of the question is mistaken. It is like a Zen koan in that it is inherently unanswerable.

Awakening or enlightenment is also called “Self Realization,” because it is a matter of realizing who or what the Self actually is. It is the realization of who the ‘I’ is and who ‘I’ is not. The very essence of awakening is the realization that there is no one here to awaken; that there is no
individual, are no individuals. The Self is All That Is, there is nothing which It is not; "Consciousness is all there is." The appearance of an individual self as a separate entity and as the originator or 'doer' of anything is the primary illusion, the basic 'endarkenment' from which any enlightenment occurs.

"From the perspective of the infinite it is obvious that the individual self absolutely does not exist. The idea that we have a self that controls, arbitrates, or is the doer behind our actions, is absurd. The individual self is nothing but an idea of who we are. Ideas are ideas – and nothing more." (Suzanne Segal)

Any questions about the nature or the activities of this purely mythical beast called 'me' are therefore revealed to be nonsensical. The simple question, "What are you doing?" for example, can only be met with laughter or a simple shake of the head, unless it is sensed that the questioner may be open to hearing the real answer: "Doing? Me? There is no 'me' to 'do' anything, nor has there ever been. Nor, if you could but see it, is there a 'you' to 'do' any 'thing' either; nor any 'things' for 'us' to be doing." Consciousness is all there is, flowing, streaming through these instruments in a manner which, in accordance with the perfect unfolding of totality, is perceived as discreet individual entities autonomously performing actions, but in truth this is not the case. There is no individual, no entity, no separate self here to do anything or to be anything, awakened or enlightened included.

There may be times, in satsang or private conversation, when a true jnani may find it necessary to admit that the complete Understanding has occurred. Still, our well-meaning web site author notwithstanding, any'one' who generally proclaims to all listeners that he or she is enlightened is highly unlikely to be, for if they were they would
understand that such a statement is inherently self-contradictory. Who? Who is enlightened, you silly goose? If you were what you say you are, you would know better!

It's a little like that ubiquitous New Age slogan, "We are all one." Surely well meant but obviously self-contradictory; doesn't anyone see that if there are 'we' then there is not 'one' (but many), and if truly all there is is 'one,' there cannot possibly in any way be 'we'? Similarly, setting one's 'self' apart as one enlightened, as an individual entity distinct from 'others' who are not, is only to demonstrate the depth of the dream state. When there is Understanding, there cannot possibly in any way be a 'me' to claim it.

There is a great preoccupation among spiritual seekers with this subject of awakening or enlightenment. Much thought and many conversations revolve around questions about which teacher or writer is enlightened and which is not; whether or not a certain advanced student has 'gained' enlightenment yet; or even how close one is oneself to awakening. All of this preoccupation, and indeed the entire subject, becomes irrelevant in the event: all there is is Consciousness, functioning in and as these apparent forms. How can there be question of the apparent forms doing or gaining or becoming anything? All of this is a happening in Consciousness. What happens, happens. In which apparent form what dream event happens is of no significance. Who is it that cares?

All this is part of the timeless secret of enlightenment, but fear not; it is and always has been an open secret, the truth laid open always for everyone to see. As the sage Huang Po repeated over and over, "It is right in front of you!" The point is that true awareness, the true Understanding, cannot
possibly be faked. The light of the ultimate Understanding, even when it occurs in and is expressed through a mostly illiterate, uncultured body/mind organism, renders the most erudite and sophisticated intellectual comprehension of the teachings to be still just ignorant bumbling about in the dream. This has been demonstrated by sages throughout the ages, from Hui-Neng in fifth century China to Nisargadatta Maharaj in twentieth century Bombay.

On the other hand there are those who may have had transformative mystical experiences of Oneness and have also a commanding intellectual grasp of the teachings, together with a charismatic personality and an inclination to teach others. They will gather many followers and become quite successful in the guru business. When the blind lead the blind, none of the followers can see that the leader himself carries a white cane. But to the truly awakened, such a teacher gives himself away every time he opens his mouth.

Awakening is not an experience, and it is not knowledge. Knowledge is only a veil over the Known. And a highly misleading one at that. True awakening is a knowing and a seeing that goes beyond any knowledge and any experience; What Is, is, and cannot be contradicted, while those still in the dream can only guess and approximate.

Like so many things that have come before and many fads yet to come, Advaita and the teachings of not-two-ness, having existed all through ‘human history,’ have recently been hungrily devoured by the American Dream Machine and have come out the other end in a form more palatable to the sensibilities of modern western dream characters but hardly recognizable to those few throughout the ages.
in whom this unspeakable thing has happened, for whom the ‘pop’ of shift of focus, shift of perception, is so complete that there is Understanding, there is knowing that there is no one there to shift; that there is no one there to know that there is no one there to shift, to awaken.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna that from among all the people on the earth, “only one in many thousands seeks me: and of those who seek, hardly one in those many thousands realizes my true nature.” Taking this scriptural passage literally and attempting to do the math to calculate how many ‘enlightened ones’ there are in the world at any given time is problematic. Krishna was making a point, and I doubt it had to do with counting numbers of individuals. Nevertheless it does give some insight into the traditional awareness as to the infrequency of the occurrence of true enlightenment.

Ken Wilber takes a shot at something similar in One Taste. He relates how he once asked a Chinese Ch’an (Zen) teacher how many truly enlightened masters there had been throughout history, and the immediate answer was, “Maybe one thousand altogether.” Assuming for the sake of argument as few as a billion Chinese over the same time period: one thousand out of one billion comes to, yes, 0.0000001 percent of the population. Again, taking the numbers literally misses the point; there is a larger sense to this, regardless of the actual percentages, which has been recognized as part of the perennial wisdom:

“And that means, unmistakably, that the rest of the population were (and are) involved in, at best, various types of horizontal, translative, merely legitimate religion... magical practices, mythical beliefs, egoic petitionary prayer... ways to give meaning to the separate self...
26. Dream Machine

"Thus, without in any way belittling the truly stunning contributions of the glorious Eastern traditions, the point is fairly straightforward: radical transformative spirituality is extremely rare, anywhere in history, and anywhere in the world. (The numbers for the West are even more depressing. I rest my case.)" (Ken Wilber)

To modern western sensibilities, this is not acceptable: it seems elitist, exclusive, politically totally incorrect. Liberation, enlightenment, should be open to anyone who puts in the effort, not arbitrarily as a prize in some divine lottery system. Besides, it doesn’t sell; nobody is going to buy a ticket if the odds are one in several million.

And so, in the American Dream Machine version (which, by the way, is not limited to America), enlightenment is redefined to include anyone who has had an enlightening experience. We now have ‘awakening lite,’ in which you can call yourself awakened while still enjoying being fast asleep, and it is happening all over the place.

The result is a kind of tent revivalist satsang movement. According to many of the teachers on the guru circuit, awakening is happening wherever they go, to people just like you, and it’s the next great wave in the evolution of humankind to the next level of cosmic consciousness. Where have we heard this before?

Everywhere, and about everything. It is the way of all the earth, the ‘divine hypnosis,’ to be deceived and to stay asleep pursuing individual and collective liberation, personal and group enlightenment, when the only truth is completely impersonal and can be found only in the annihilation of the illusory individual.
"If a guru says 'I am enlightened,' it means the ego is enlightened so stay away. Western teachers who say this are preachers and only write books to load more garbage on seekers and more money in their pockets. They will attract so many students but in this Kali Yuga [the current dark age of ignorance in Hindu mythology] it is the falsehood which will draw the crowds. The Truth and the true gurus will be neglected. The Truth will be held by the honest and the honest will not be followed. Only the dishonest will be followed." (H.W.L. Poonja)

There are many teachers on the tent revival satsang circuit talking about enlightenment as the next great step in the evolution of the human race, and it's all very exciting because that step is happening now, with lots more people waking up than was ever the case at any other time in history.

This kind of thing is just confused and dream-bound thinking. Enlightenment has nothing to do with turning points in history, with lots of people waking up. It has nothing to do with evolution. As Jed McKenna notes, "If anything, enlightenment is evolution derailed." Evolution is a completely dualistic concept. Individuals, or the whole race, growing and changing and developing and becoming better over time: this is a description of dualism, of how dualism operates. Evolution is about change in relative objects. Enlightenment is the opposite; it is about realizing the Truth, absolute subjectivity, which is unchanging.

The whole concept of evolution assumes the existence of separate individual entities, a collective species or 'race' of such entities, and their existence in something called time. It also involves a whole set of value judgments as to what condition the human race is in now, and in what direction it should be going.
This way of seeing things, and the way of seeing things after true awakening or Understanding has occurred, are mutually exclusive. When awakening occurs, the whole context which contains individuals, the race, time, and value judgments is seen as an illusion, a dream. Awakening, enlightenment, means popping out of the context in which evolution makes any sense.

“Anything that implies a continuity, a sequence, a passing from stage to stage cannot be the Real. There is no progress in Reality; it is final, perfect, unrelated. Reality is not the result of a process; it is an explosion.” (Nisargadatta Maharaj)

Someone, perhaps it was Robert Adams, once suggested that there should be a Great Gathering Of Awakened Beings, and anybody who showed up would be immediately disqualified. (Ironically, there is such a gathering now, annually. Most of the well-known teachers who have published books and tour the world giving satsang attend and give presentations. I get fliers for it in the mail.)

Honestly, I just received something else in the mail: a pre-publication notice for a popular spiritual teacher’s new book, hawked with the tagline that at this pivotal moment in ‘our human history,’ the deepest truths that were once available only to ‘the most rare beings’ are now being made available to you; along with the admonition to order not one, but several copies – ‘to encourage media interest!’

I find it startling, to put it mildly, that the spiritual seeker community apparently considers this sort of thing acceptable coming from a leading teacher and a publishing house devoted exclusively to spiritual publications. Advertisements for SUV’s and Caribbean vacations use the same emotional
hooks – but usually come across with a little more integrity! Transparent deluded manipulative exploitative nonsense. And even perhaps on some level the idea behind it was well meant; somebody who really believes they are an awakened being and that they are going to save the world by awakening ‘more people than ever before!’

Recall Wilber’s assessment that true awakening is “extremely rare, anywhere in history, and anywhere in the world.” There is nothing amiss about trying to help people of course, but pay attention: telling individuals that they are so special that they have won the big prize and can now be an ‘enlightened being’ – when there is still a ‘being,’ a ‘me’ there to get involved in it – is ultimately not helping them or anyone else. Yes, there is suffering; but this is taking advantage of that suffering and in the end multiplying it, not ending it. This kind of stuff will always be said, will always happen. But leading spiritual teachers at least should know better.

But they don’t. Blind leading blind, so nobody knows the difference. Please, dear hearts, so much suffering is perpetuated by believing this crap. Listen. There are no awakened beings. Never have been. Awakening doesn’t happen to people like you or to people like me because awakening doesn’t happen to anyone. There is nobody home. There is no one here to awaken. Thinking that you are an awakened one, or that it is possible that you might become an awakened one, or that your teacher is an awakened one, or that there is at least one awakened one in a cave in the Himalaya somewhere, is called being asleep. Awakening means popping out of the context in which awakening makes any sense.

This book and much more is available free at www.PerfectBrilliantStillness.org