"The writing comes in three scripts:
one that you and only you can read;
one that you and others can read;
and one that neither you nor anyone else can read.
I am that third script."
- Shams of Tabriz

"Sometimes naked, sometimes mad,
now as scholars, now as fools;
thus they appear on the earth - the free ones!"
- Shankara

So okay, what is the difference between a regular person and a sage?

On the deepest level, distinctions between sage and nonsage are essentially meaningless. Neither exist as such. These distinctions exist only in appearance. In the so-called sage, this is known. Both are body/mind organisms, both with their conditioning, both with emotions arising
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and actions happening through them. The only ‘difference’ is that the sage sees that there is no ‘one’ there; that this is the impersonal functioning of Presence through the instruments of the body/mind organisms, whereas the ordinary person claims the emotion or the action, thinks they are responsible for it, and calls it their own.

But the emotions or actions arising would be different?

Not necessarily. Only according to the conditioning of the respective body/mind organisms.

So if a person got angry a lot before awakening...?

...Anger might well continue to arise in that body/mind organism after, according to the conditioning. The difference is that the sage would not get involved with the anger once it arose: it would arise and pass in a natural way and be done with it. The sage would not own it or feel guilty about it or try to explain it or justify it or make excuses, or think that he should try to improve himself so it would not happen again. What is there to improve? Anger simply arises as part of the impersonal functioning in Consciousness. That it arises in that particular body/mind organism is of no concern to the sage.

Okay, could a sage kill someone?

The sage knows ‘he’ or ‘she’ cannot ‘do’ anything.

Okay, okay, could the sage be the instrument through which a killing happens?

Why not? If it is part of the perfect infinite unfolding in
Consciousness for something, anything, or any combination of things to happen, how can they not happen? In traditional terms, if it is the 'destiny' of one body/mind organism according to divine will to be killed and the 'destiny' of another to do the killing, that will happen. And the sage will also understand that society will punish 'him' for that, and that the punishment of that body/mind organism will also be accepted as the 'divine will,' as part of the perfect functioning of totality.

But why would it be the divine will for a sage...

Why not? Are you telling me you know the basis or reasons for the divine will?

Well, I guess it would be unlikely that someone with the conditioning to kill would ever become a sage...

Now you're trying to get out of it! You've heard many times that there are no preconditions for the Understanding to occur. Quite honestly, the example of killing someone is an extreme one. In a sage there would be no motivation to kill someone; so yes, it might seem to be unlikely. But the dream characters, the body/mind instruments, are hardly in a position to predict this kind of thing. There could be any number of reasons, some comprehensible, some completely incomprehensible from the standpoint of the body/mind instruments, why or how such a thing might be necessary in the perfect unfolding in Consciousness. If it were part of the infinite unfolding for something like this to happen, it would. I don't know if you've noticed, but there does seem to be a tendency for Consciousness to bring about any possible combination, sooner or later.
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Okay, so the sage is really just like an ordinary person? What does he gain, what is the benefit of enlightenment?

It is the body/mind organisms and their functioning that are alike. The sage knows he is not the body/mind, not a person at all. There is no one to gain anything!

So the benefit would be for those around him, like the guy’s friends maybe, or when he had students...

Ha! ‘The guy’s friends,’ assuming it’s a guy and assuming he has any friends, might find him harder to get along with than before! But yes, sure, there is the potential for great benefit for others. Whether that is realized depends on the conditioning, and also on what unfolds in Consciousness, what the eastern traditions refer to as ‘destiny.’

The conditioning of the students?

Who says he has any students?

But wouldn’t a sage teach?

Why? Once again, only if it is in the script in the dream for that ‘sage’ dream character to teach. Only if it was the ‘destiny,’ according to the cosmic unfolding, of that ‘sage’ body/mind organism to talk on the subject, in the functioning of Consciousness.

Okay, so if he doesn’t teach, and he still has these emotions, and he can even do bad stuff...

What?
So okay, what is the difference between a regular person and a sage?

Just the Understanding, my friend. Only the seeing, the knowing; that is all. Just the Peace that passes all understanding. And what good is it? None at all, you could say. Buddha said, “Truly, I obtained nothing from enlightenment.” And Huang Po wrote, “There is just a mysterious tacit understanding and no more.” The sage is not a superhuman, a regular person with something added. The sage is a regular person with something less; the sense of being a separate self, a separate individual, is gone: there is no one home.

I’ve heard that in the sage, everything happens spontaneously.

Yes. And do you want to know what else? In everyone, everything happens spontaneously. In you, everything happens spontaneously.

I don’t experience it like that.

Exactly. That’s the difference.

Do you believe that the Understanding can happen to anyone?

I don’t believe anything.

What?

There are no beliefs here.
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That’s an extraordinary statement.

Not at all. It’s really quite simple. You either know something or you don’t. If you know something, you don’t have to believe it’s true or have faith that it’s true; you know it beyond doubt, it simply is, and there’s no belief involved. On the other hand if you don’t know something, the honest thing is to simply say you don’t know. But of course there are many psychological and political and social reasons why people can’t admit, even to themselves, that they don’t know something, so they create a belief; which is essentially saying that you don’t really know something is true, but you’re going to pretend you do. It’s all activity in the dream. There’s really only one thing which is not of the dream, only one thing that can be known, and that is the basic consciousness, “I Am.” Everything else is just a concept, a construct of mind in the dream, something “I don’t know.” Everything.

Okay, but can this Understanding happen to anyone, any body/mind?

Of course.

Could it happen to me?

No, of course not. That’s the difference. But it could happen in the case of the body/mind organism which at the moment you think is you, and then there would be the understanding that there never was a ‘you,’ a ‘me’ for anything to happen to, and that who You are is the Consciousness in which all this appears to happen. The Understanding and the belief in a ‘me’ are mutually exclusive: if one is there the other will not be.