

You become yourself but more so

Spiritual Wisdom

It doesn't interest me what you do for a living. I want to know what you ache for, and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing.

— Oriah Mountain Dreamer

One of the biggest myths of spirituality is the idea that you have to become something or someone very different from who you are — as though you'll come out of the other side of enlightenment acting emotionless or robot-like. Many people make the mistake of assuming that becoming self-realized means they won't have any personality characteristics — or certainly not the ones they have now.

Maybe you have the idea that achieving inner peace means that you must act very serious, without ever becoming excited, or that you'd have some other limited behaviors. However, when you see the great saints, they're not limited at all. They're free. Many of them laugh and joke around. They're spontaneous and can even appear to get angry.

Don't Forget

Self-realized beings still have personality traits, but with one big difference. They know they are divine, and they know that you are divine. This awareness is the key to spiritual self-recognition.

The point of spiritual growth is not to become something other than what you are. Rather, it is a shift of awareness through which you begin to know and express more of who you really are.

Be Careful

Be yourself, but not your obnoxious self!

With their elevated awareness, even when self-realized beings trip and fall, they know that the universal play is tripping and falling in its own ecstasy. Even when they're physically sick, it's the universe experiencing illness through them. Enlightened ones don't limit themselves to judging each event as to how wonderful or horrible it was. They know that you can play the horrible-wonderful game your whole life, and never move beyond the endless cycles of fulfilled and unfulfilled expectations and desires.

Enlightened beings see everything that comes to them as a play of divine Consciousness, as an expression of their destiny, and as one more opportunity to leap up and rejoice in the awareness of their higher Self.

Again, the ideas in this chapter are some general pointings toward the collections of awareness that fall into the category of “enlightenment.” Some enlightened ones may have very different experiences of enlightenment.

How will you know?

How will you know when you’re enlightened? Some enlightened masters would tell you: “You already are enlightened, but your mind doesn’t know it.”

That’s what all of the spiritual practices and principles in this book are for — to move you beyond a limited view of yourself so you can remember and realize your true nature.

In a way, enlightenment exists within each of us all the time. The trick is to remove the clouds of false thoughts that block the sunlight of supreme reality — the light of Consciousness — and to thereby become enlightened.

A seeker asked the spiritual teacher Poonjaji, “How can I tell if I’m enlightened or not?”

Poonjaji answered, “Open your eyes and look around you. If you still see a world outside and apart from you, you are not enlightened. Why not? The world and the one who sees it are both projections of the mind, and while that mind is there, enlightenment is covered up. When you experience and know directly, without needing the eyes, that the world is an uncaused appearance within your own Self, you will not need to ask whether you are enlightened or not.”

Getting enlightened isn’t like receiving a degree where everyone who has taken certain classes receives the same degree with the same rights and benefits. For example, Hawaiians have many words to represent all the different kinds of rain – from gentle sprinkles to thunderstorms – whereas mainlanders are usually satisfied with calling them all by the same name: “rain.” In the same way, the word enlightenment actually represents a wide variety of spiritual states of awareness.

Many people have a taste of enlightenment at least once in their lives. These tastes of enlightenment can take different forms for different people. Sometimes it’s a feeling of oneness with everything around them, or a sense that the light shining through a forest is also shining in their heart. Moments of enlightenment can also come when someone who has suffered a great loss feels themselves being pared down to their soul, or when someone has the experience of being in a perfect flow of action, such as during sports or creative art expressions. Some may simply shift into an awareness of the unity of life inside and around themselves.

Many people don't recognize these enlightened moments because they don't have a context to place them in. They may look back at their experience of divine oneness and perfection and say to themselves something like, "Hmmm, that was strange," before going back to life as usual.

Even enlightened masters who are able to hold on to a steady enlightened perspective may still have pockets of growth to unfold – they may make mistakes, go against their own teachings, or do something that modern society thinks isn't appropriate or polite. Let me tell you right now that anyone who thinks that an enlightened person must be perfect in any and every way and that he or she must fit into all of modern society's concepts about how an enlightened or spiritual person should be needs to go back to the fantasy of "Santa Claus Land."

I've heard many former devotees of enlightened masters who see faults in their teacher and decry how they were fooled and how everything they learned was therefore a sham. This kind of approach to the spiritual journey is unenlightened and unintelligent. It is a distraction to get trapped in arguments about who is or is not how enlightened. Focus on your own enlightenment. Learn from whom you can and keep your attention on the state of your own mind, heart, soul, and spiritual connection with Universal Consciousness.

Spiritual Wisdom

Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?

– Luke 6:41

Of course, if you want to learn from an enlightened master, you also want to do some research and keep your wits about you. Also remember that the teachers' words and examples are like those fingers that are pointing toward where you are meant to look. Don't get trapped by their fingernails or the sleeves under those pointing fingers! Don't get swept away by the other people who are also looking at the master's pointing finger. Keep your focus on what the finger is pointing to.

If you find that a particular path or teacher is taking you *away* from enlightenment, then, by all means, bid a fond farewell and move forward courageously and with trust that the divine will guide your steps and unfold your greatest destiny.

Imagine what you'll look like if and when you become an enlightened being. Perhaps you'll end up looking like a guru draped in robes who sits on a throne espousing your wisdom to wide-eyed seekers who are intent on unfurling the meaning in every sentence. Or maybe you'll be a simple person without any outer marks of spiritual attainment other than the light that shines through your eyes and the glowing effects of your words and actions.

Don't Forget

Each person's realization is unique and personal, while still being universal. The key is to find your own realization.