

Guest Editorial

The Enlightenment Myth

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Abstract

There is a tremendous amount of confusion out there in both the general population and the scientific community about the nature of spiritual enlightenment. This editorial attempts to clear up this confusion in a straightforward and scientifically motivated way.

Keywords: Enlightenment, spiritual, awakening, science, religion, self, consciousness, myth.

The Enlightenment Myth

You are always enlightened. Enlightenment is your true nature. The only question is whether you know it or not. When you enter into a state of delusion and identify yourself with something that you are not, something that you perceive, you don't know it anymore. You don't know it because you've become deluded. When you become enlightened, you know your true enlightened nature. Nothing changes except what you know yourself to be. When you're enlightened, you know your true nature. When you're deluded, you believe yourself to be something you're not. You believe false beliefs about yourself. The whole thing is ridiculous because your true nature is always enlightened. You have to become deluded and not know what you are before you can make a big deal about knowing that you're enlightened. That's why enlightened beings never make a big deal about their so-called enlightenment. They simply know what they really are without any delusion. In the process of becoming enlightened, all they really did was to destroy delusion, which is only a set of false beliefs they believed about themselves when they were deluded. The process of becoming enlightened is nothing more than a self-destructive process of destroying those false beliefs that you believe about yourself.

To Awaken to the Truth of What You Really Are, You Have to Examine Your Ego

There is no way to awaken to the truth of what you really are unless you make a thorough and detailed examination of your ego. You have to dissect your ego like you're a medical student in anatomy class. You have to break down every detail of your ego structure and make a complete examination of what it's all about. What you'll discover is that what your ego is all about is fear and denial. The ego only has one real purpose, which is to defend and emotionally reinforce your self-identification with the emotionally animated form of the person you take yourself to be.

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The first question is, who are you really? The only possible answer is that you are a presence of consciousness that is identifying itself with its ego. To identify yourself with your ego, you have to perceive your ego. In the sense of a subject-object relation, you are the subject and your ego is an object that you're perceiving. You are the subjective perceiver, which is called I. The ego is also called I, but the ego is a false I, since the ego is something that you can perceive. The true subjective nature of the I is the perceiver, which can only be described as a pure presence of perceiving consciousness. The true nature of the perceiver cannot be something it perceives.

The second question is, why does the perceiver identify itself with its ego? The answer is weird, but there is no other possible answer. Everything you can perceive is like a computer-generated virtual reality. Images of that virtual reality are projected from a screen to your point of view and are animated in the flow of energy that energizes the computer. The computer screen encodes bits of information, and that information is organized into the form of images that are projected to your point of view. Modern physics tells us those bits of information are encoded as qubits on an event horizon that acts as a holographic screen, and that event horizon always arises in an observer's accelerated frame of reference. The laws of nature are simply the computational rules that govern the operation of the computer, which are like the operating system of the computer.

Images of the computer-generated virtual reality are projected from the screen to your point of view as the observer of the images and are animated in the flow of energy that energizes the computer. You play the virtual reality game as you focus your attention on those images. You not only perceive the images that are projected from the screen to your own point of view, but you also animate those images by energizing them with the expression of your own energy. That energy arises from your motion as a point of consciousness. You also project the images as you focus your attention on them by shining your own light of consciousness on them. The word enlightenment refers to your own light of consciousness that is reflected off the screen as that light projects the images from the screen back to your own point of view. You shine the light of consciousness on the images and illuminate them as you focus your attention on them.

This moving point of illuminating and perceiving consciousness is called the Self. The Self is the subject in the subject-object relation that defines self and other. The Self always carries with itself its own sense of individual existence, which is called I Am. This sense of I-Am-ness is the sense of being present as the Self perceives its own virtual reality world. The ego is part of that virtual reality world, like the central character or an avatar in a virtual reality game. When the Self identifies itself with its ego, it is as though the ego is the perceiver of that virtual reality world, but the true nature of the perceiver is always the Self. There is only an illusion that the ego can perceive that virtual reality world when the Self identifies itself with its ego.

How does self-identification occur? The virtual reality world is emotionally animated, and that emotional energy arises from the motion of the Self as a moving point of illuminating and perceiving consciousness. The subject-object relation of self and other becomes perverted as the Self takes itself to be its ego and sees all the objects in its world as separate from its ego. In

reality, its ego is just another object the Self perceives, but when the Self identifies itself with its ego, it seems as though its ego is the perceiver of all those other objects. Self-identification always creates a sense of separation. The ego is always mentally constructed as a personal self-concept, and the self-concept is always emotionally energized and body-based. In the mental construction of the ego, a body-based self-image is emotionally related to the image of some other thing the Self perceives. That emotional relation makes the Self feel emotionally self-limited to the emotionally animated form of its body as it perceives that emotional energy. When the Self feels emotionally self-limited to the emotionally animated form of its body, it falsely identifies itself with its ego. Self-identification with its ego is only a false belief the Self believes about itself due to its feeling of self-limitation, which is no more real than an emotional body feeling it perceives in its virtual reality world.

Why does that expression of emotional energy make the Self feel self-limited to the form of its body? The expression of emotions, as in the expression of fear and desire, are about defending the survival of the body in the virtual reality world. The body only survives in the virtual reality world because it expresses self-defensive emotions. That's the only purpose of expressing self-defensive emotions. Their expression defends body survival. When the Self emotionally identifies itself with its ego and feels emotionally self-limited to the form of its body, it feels compelled to defend the survival of its body and ego in the virtual reality world as though its existence depends upon it. The way the Self defends the survival of its ego is by focusing its attention on its ego in a personally biased way, which leads to the expression of more personally biased self-defensive emotions that emotionally reinforce its self-identification with its ego.

Delusion arises because the Self is defending the survival of its ego as though its existence depends upon it. That's how the Self emotionally constructs all the false beliefs it believes about itself. Those false beliefs are emotionally constructed in its mind as self-concepts. Expressions of fear and desire are self-defensive emotions that have no other purpose than to defend the survival of the body and the ego. When the Self feels compelled to defend the survival of its body and ego in the virtual reality world that it perceives as though its existence depends upon it, those are the self-defensive emotions the Self will express with its personally biased focus of attention.

Something else weird happens when the Self expresses these emotions and identifies itself with its ego. The self-concept requires the mental construction of a body-based self-image. That personal self-image is always constructed out of memory of past events and anticipation of future events. The construction of a personal self-image requires an emotional projection into either the past or the future. The personal self-image can only be constructed out of the memory or the anticipation of events. The problem is, the Self as a presence of consciousness is only present in the present moment. When the Self emotionally constructs a personal self-image through emotional projection into past or future events, the Self is no longer aware of itself as a presence of consciousness that only exists in the present moment. That lack of awareness of itself is an essential aspect of how the Self falsely identifies itself with its ego. Memory of the past and

anticipation of the future is an aspect of the virtual reality world the Self perceives. As the Self perceives its personal self-image constructed out of memory and anticipation, this leads the Self to identify itself with its ego that can only appear to exist in that virtual reality world.

When the Self emotionally identifies itself with its ego, it feels compelled to defend the survival of its ego as though its existence upon it. All expressions of fear and desire defend the survival of the ego because they defend the survival of the body. The ego really only cares about defending its own survival in the virtual reality world, which is what the Self cares about when it identifies itself with its ego. The most important way the ego defends its survival is by expressing the desire to be in control and to feel powerful. The ego defends its survival in relation to other things that appear in the virtual reality world by expressing the desire to control things and have power over others. The desire to be in control and have power over others is always self-defensive. That's how the ego defends its survival. The desire to defend itself arises from its fear of death and nonexistence, and the desire to be in control and feel powerful is a denial of death. At its very core, the ego is only motivated by fear and denial.

To awaken to the truth of what you really are, you have to move beyond fear and denial. The way you move beyond your fear and denial of death is by accepting death. The death you have to accept is the death of your ego. Before you can allow your ego to die away, you have to make a thorough examination of your ego and clearly see how your ego is motivated by fear and denial.

The way you move beyond your desire to be in control and defend yourself is through surrender. You have to give up your desire to be in control and defend yourself. When you surrender and give up your personally biased desire to control things and defend yourself, you accept things as they are and come into alignment with the normal flow of things. When you surrender and stop defending yourself, you accept the death of your ego. The way you move beyond the emotional construction of your ego in your mind is by severing emotional attachments. Your emotional attachments are what emotionally relate your personal self-image to the image of other things you perceive in the virtual reality world. You have to become willing to let go before you can move beyond that virtual reality world. When you sever an emotional attachment it feels like something dies inside because part of your emotionally energized ego structure dies away. When you stop emotionally constructing your ego, you stop emotionally projecting yourself into a nonexistent personal past or future. You have to stop doing that before you can know yourself to be a presence of consciousness that only exists in the present moment.

When the Self identifies itself within its ego, the Self is only motivated by fear and denial. This leads straight to delusion since the death the Self fears and denies is the death of its ego, not the true nature of its existence. The true nature of existence of the Self cannot die because it's never born. The Self can only falsely identify itself with the emotionally animated form of its body and ego that appears in the virtual reality world its perceives. The only true thing the Self can ever know about itself is its own sense of being present or I-Am-ness as a presence of consciousness that exists in the present moment, but even that sense of individual existence is not the true

nature of the existence of the Self. The true nature of the existence of the Self is beyond the virtual reality world that the Self perceives and beyond the Self as the perceiver of that virtual reality world. The true nature of existence is called the Source, which is beyond the Self.

When you know your true nature as the Source of the Self, you become enlightened in the sense of perceiving the Self as a moving point of illuminating and perceiving consciousness. You become aware of the Self from the highest possible level of consciousness that can only be described as emptiness, silence, stillness and darkness. When you become enlightened, you know yourself to be the Source of that selfless awareness that perceives the Self.

Awakening to the truth of what you really are is about becoming desireless. When you become desireless, you become selfless. That's how you destroy your ego. The ego can only appear to exist when it enters into a state of emotional conflict. Emotional conflicts are an inherent part of living an embodied life. The body can only appear to survive in the virtual reality world the Self perceives because of the expression of fear and desire, which are always in conflict. At the level of the body, the desire to eat another body is in conflict with the fear of being eaten by another body. Movement toward is always in conflict with movement away. At the level of the ego, this emotional conflict is expressed as the desire to be close to another in conflict with the fear of being controlled by another. There is no possible way to resolve this emotional conflict at the level of motion. The desire to move toward cannot be resolved with the desire to move away. The mental construction of the ego is intrinsically based on the expression of emotions that inherently are in emotional conflict. These emotional conflicts cannot be resolved at the level of motion. Emotional conflicts cannot be resolved at the level of the body.

The only way to resolve emotional conflicts is to become desireless. At the level of the Self, becoming desireless is the same as becoming motionless. The expression of all emotions arises from the motion of the Self as a moving point of illuminating and perceiving consciousness. That motion is the nature of expressing emotional energy. The expression of emotions is always in conflict at the level of the body since movement away is always in conflict with movement toward. Emotional conflicts are the nature of how a body-based ego is mentally constructed.

The only way to resolve these emotional conflicts and deconstruct the ego is to become desireless, which at the level of the Self means becoming motionless. When the Self becomes motionless and desireless, it also becomes selfless. Becoming desireless and selfless is the key step that leads to enlightenment. The Source of the Self is motionless, which is like a motionless ocean, and the Self is like a drop of water that moves relative to the ocean. The energy inherent in the motion of the Self creates waves on the surface of the ocean. The Source is a motionless ocean of consciousness, the Self is a moving point of illuminating and perceiving consciousness that moves relative to the ocean, and the waves that appear on the surface of the ocean are a result of that motion. In more modern language, the surface of the ocean is like a computer screen that displays the images of a computer-generated virtual reality. The form of those images

are illuminated by the light of consciousness, energized and animated by the motion of the Self, projected from the screen to the point of view of the Self, and perceived by the Self.

When the motion of the Self comes to an end in a desireless and selfless state, the virtual reality world the Self perceives disappears from existence from the point of view of the Self. The virtual reality world disappears from existence since the surface of the ocean disappears when there is no motion. In its true motionless state, the ocean has no surface and is undivided and unlimited. When the motion of the Self comes to an end, the Self returns to this undivided and unlimited state of existence. This motionless state is described as a state of freefall, as in falling into the void. That's when enlightenment happens. Falling into the void is the nature of passing through the gateless gate. The gate is the Self. Passing through the gateless gate only becomes possible when the Self becomes selfless. When the motion of the Self comes to an end and the Self becomes desireless and selfless, the Self dissolves back into its motionless Source like a drop of water that dissolves into the ocean. At the level of being, the individual being of the Self dissolves into the undivided and unlimited being of its Source.

When you become enlightened, you know yourself to be the Source of that selfless awareness that perceives the Self. You become aware of the Self from the highest level of consciousness. That selfless awareness can only be described as the emptiness, silence, stillness and darkness of the void. In the Vedic language of nonduality, ultimately, Atman is Brahman. In an ultimate state of dissolution, there is no difference between the individual being of Atman and the undivided and unlimited being of Brahman. When you become enlightened, Atman knows itself to be Brahman as Brahman becomes aware of Atman, which is another way of saying I Am Brahman.

*Brahman is the only Truth, the world is illusion, and ultimately, there is no difference between
Atman and Brahman--Shankara*

The unreal has no being; the real never ceases to be.

*In the knowledge of the Atman, which is a dark night to the ignorant,
The recollected mind is fully awake and aware,
The ignorant are awake in their sense life, which is darkness to the sage.
--Bhagavad Gita*

*In the silence and the void,
Standing alone and unchanging,
Ever present and in motion.
I do not know its name.
Call it Tao*

Returning is the motion of the Tao

Tao in the world is like a river flowing home to the sea

*It returns to nothingness
It leads all things back to the great oneness*

*Ever desireless, one can see the mystery
Ever desiring, one can see the manifestations
These two spring from the same source
This appears as darkness
Darkness within darkness
The gate to all mystery
--Tao-Te-Ching*

*The great path has no gates
Thousands of roads enter it
When one passes through this gateless gate
One walks the universe alone
--Mu-mon*

Empty yourself of everything

*The man of Tao remains unknown
Perfect virtue produces nothing
No-self is true self
And the greatest man is nobody
--Chuang Tzu*

Disclaimer

The only purpose of this discussion is to make a map. No matter how good you are at map making, at the end of the day, you're only making a map. The problem is, a map can only point out travel directions, and if you're not willing to make the journey, you're not going anywhere.

The only obstacle to becoming enlightened is the ego. The ego is the only obstacle, the only thing that stands in the way of enlightenment. The ego is what must be destroyed to become enlightened. When delusion is destroyed, only the truth remains. The problem is, the ego is only like a costume we wear, and it's not enough to destroy the costume to become enlightened. What really needs to be destroyed is that part of us that identifies itself with the ego. What really needs to be destroyed is our own sense of being a Self, our own sense of individual existence. The Self is what identifies itself with the ego. The Self is an untruth. When the Self is destroyed, only the

truth of existence remains. When the Self is destroyed, we can see it never really existed. If you're going for the truth, you're not taking anything with you, not even your own Self.

Final Thoughts

Only what has independent existence is real. Individual existence is an illusion because it does not have independent existence. The illusion of individual existence is dependent on the reality of the independent existence of undivided existence. In other words, Brahman, as the source of Atman, is the only truth. Only Brahman, undivided existence, is truly independent and truly real.

There is no such thing as individual freedom. The expression of individual free will, which is the illusion of being a doer at the level of an emotionally animated body, is bondage because it leads to self-identification with a body, and the behaviors of the body are motivated by fear and denial. The expression of individual will only leads to bondage and fear, and there is no freedom in that.

Beyond the Present Moment

Is there anything beyond the present moment? Does a dog have Buddha nature? Yes and no, but no matter how you answer this question, you lose your own Buddha nature. At the level of the body, the answer is no. The body can only disappear from existence. At the level of the Self, the answer is yes. The individual being of the Self can dissolve back into undivided being. Whether you answer this question yes or no, you lose your own Buddha nature. Atman, the Self, the sense of individual existence at the level of I Am, only exists in the present moment. Beyond the present moment is Brahman, the Source of Atman, the void of undivided existence.

You have to be present in the present moment to ask and answer questions. When you go beyond the present moment, into the void, no questions can be asked and no questions can be answered.

When you go beyond the present moment and your individual being dissolves into the void of undivided being, you experience eternity. When you come back to the present moment from the timeless experience of eternity, the present moment becomes an eternal now.

The Holy Grail as a Metaphor for Spiritual Enlightenment

People just don't get the metaphors. The T S Eliot epic poem *The Wasteland* is based on the grail legend. People want to make their spiritual metaphors into something concrete so they don't have to look at what the metaphor is really pointing to. In Christianity, the grail metaphor has been corrupted into the idea of a chalice that Christ used at the last supper, but this is just a way to misunderstand what the metaphor is pointing to. In the grail legend, the wasteland refers to the waste of time and energy you spend when you look for the grail in the wrong place. The grail is a metaphor for spiritual enlightenment, which is best understood as returning to the Source of the light of consciousness. The light of consciousness is what illuminates the world. When you look for the grail in the illuminated world, you're looking in the wrong place and you're wasting your

time and energy. You're looking in the wasteland. You have to look into the Source of the light of consciousness, which can only be described as the darkness. When Genesis says that God divided the light from the darkness, the light refers to the light of consciousness that illuminates the world and the darkness refers to the Source of the light of consciousness. Genesis refers to the motion of the Self in relation to the surface of the ocean when it says the Spirit of God moves over the face of the deep. The deep refers to the Source as an ocean of consciousness. The face of the deep refers to the surface that displays all images of the illuminated world. That world is void and formless and in darkness until illuminated by the light of consciousness. If you want to discover the grail and return to the Source, you have to look in the darkness. Don't be like the man who loses his keys in the darkness but decides to look under a lamp post because the light is better there. Be like Neo in the Matrix. Put on your dark glasses and look in the darkness.

Burning, burning, burning, burning
O Lord, Thou pluckest me out
--The Fire Sermon

If you look long enough into the darkness, you become the darkness. In that self-destructive process of becoming the darkness, you destroy the Self that illuminates its own world. When you withdraw your attention away from the virtual reality game, you refuse to play the game. When you withdraw your attention away from the virtual reality world, you stop illuminating that world. When the light of consciousness is extinguished and all illuminated things disappear from existence, only the darkness, silence, emptiness and absolute nothingness of the void remains. When you become the darkness, you also become enlightened as you become aware of the illuminating Self. You know yourself to be the Source of the Self that illuminates its own world.

If you stare long enough into the abyss
The abyss also stares into you
--Nietzsche

Truly, I have attained nothing from total enlightenment
--Buddha

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