



Does an Enlightened Being Still Suffer?

Due to the general unclarity of the various descriptions of enlightenment presented by most traditions and teachings, there is a consistent imbalance in the perception of how enlightenment impacts our human nature. This is compounded by the projections of seekers on gurus or teachers as saint-like and perfect, which those gurus invite for the sake of self-aggrandizement or a thirst for power.

As such, it is important to pinpoint the main misconceptions surrounding this matter as they have managed to infuse themselves into the collective psyche of seekers, including those who only probe the subject intellectually. The fact is that if our initial assumptions on the subject of enlightenment are erroneous and misguided, our path will be crippled due to the disalignment of our intelligence with the higher truth and purpose of our evolution in the dimension of time. We could point to countless such misconceptions. However, this article in particular focuses upon those which have a direct impact not only on the integrity of the path, but also upon the way in which the concept of human suffering is understood and dealt with in the context of our spiritual evolution. It is an exceedingly important matter, for it touches upon our very humanity: who we are as humans within our evolution into self-actualization. If our perception of how our spiritual goal connects to our human evolution and fulfillment is flawed from the beginning, we are doomed to fail on our path on all levels.

The misconceptions about enlightenment which we wish to illustrate and discuss are as follows:

- 1. Enlightenment equals the transformation of our personality, mind, and emotions to such a degree that we become perfect and loving human beings free from negativity and suffering.**

This misconception is particularly common among those who ignorantly assume the spiritual path to be about the improvement of their psychological self: that to transform one's mind, to have no judgment about others, to be moral, and to follow an idealized code of conduct is to become 'self-realized'. This is what most religions or moral systems do: they give people a set of idealistic rules that their believers attempt to follow in the name of goodness or self-betterment. These ideals are such that they can never be reached, and thus the whole system ultimately serves to propagate guilt and denial. In spirituality, this ideal is often personified by the concept of a saint, a perfect human who lives in purity and love for others.

Such ideas may be appealing to linear and unimaginative minds. However, they cannot really lead us anywhere because they are just the imaginary projections of something that can never be actualized. A personality cannot be perfect, pure, and free because it is that very personality that is our main problem. Even if it trains itself to behave according to some ideal of perfection, it is still inherently and utterly fake. There is something monstrous in the concept of 'perfect' personality because it is a lie posing as something true.

There is no peace, no true love, and certainly no freedom to be found through the transformation of our human self alone because it is by nature imperfect and in pain. Our personality is just a transitory stage in our evolution. We are here to move beyond it, not to spend our life perfecting it. It is the absence of our true self that is the root of human misery, and the only way to go beyond pain is to realize our higher nature – who we are beyond the construct of the mind and emotions.

Obviously, the transformation of our mind and emotions is an essential component of our human evolution, but unless we experience our human nature from the soul, our sense of self is bound to remain shallow, empty, and fake.

2. Enlightenment is just one universal state and anyone who reaches it abides in the same level of realization.

Enlightenment is used as a blanket term to cover all kinds of spiritual realizations and inner expansions. Unfortunately, almost no one knows with any clarity what it is, including those who teach in its name, so naturally people tend to fall into the pitfall of simplifying it to the level of absurdity. Not all paths lead to the same goal and not every one who is awakened to the dimension beyond the mind arrives at the state of wholeness. Awakening refers to a single state of realization, and only if we are awakened on all levels do we become truly complete.

Before we begin to pose questions like, 'How does an enlightened being experience reality?' or 'Is an enlightened being free from suffering?', we must learn how to properly define to what that term refers. For instance, two people can be in entirely different awakened states, and based on that have a completely different relationship with their human nature. For example, the awakening of consciousness mainly empowers our ability to transform and purify the mind, while awakening of the heart is much more relevant to our emotional purification.

3. Enlightenment naturally purifies and transforms our human nature.

This is not really a misconception, for if one is truly self-realized, it is most likely that the essential purification and transformation on the human level has occurred. However, there are many cases of partial awakening where one's human nature remains untouched. Here, even though the awakened state may serve as a refuge from the mind, psychologically one has not transformed at all. So enlightenment does transform our human nature, but only if it is true



enlightenment, meaning that one has become complete and the human self has fully merged with the light of the soul.

4. After enlightenment, there is no more ego.

This is a highly unintelligent concept that is propagated and parroted by those who understand neither enlightenment nor the role or nature of ego. To give a relevant example, it came to my attention recently that a spiritual teacher had given up teaching in order to deepen his practice, after being told by his disciples that he 'still had an ego'. Following the boom of superficial, pseudo-advaita teachings over the past decade, it seems that some more conscious individuals have been decent enough to realize that they have nothing to really teach other than some non-dual slogans, nor have they personally transformed in any significant way. And while it is positive that a teacher can acknowledge his own limitations and even step down from the teaching role in order to address them, this is overshadowed by the high degree of misunderstanding and utter lack of intelligence and spiritual knowledge that these actions represent.

Why did this teacher need someone else to tell him that he still had an ego? And furthermore, why did he and his disciples assume the presence of ego to be inherently bad? This is a fundamental and indeed detrimental error. The truth is that the futile and impossible attempt to eliminate one's ego will not help anyone to realize his higher self, for awakening is not a process of elimination but rather a process of embodying our higher self, and based on that, aligning and transforming our lower self. As such, the problem with these teachers is not the presence of ego, but rather the lack of profound access to their pure nature which itself provides the force through which that ego can be properly transformed. If one is only superficially awakened, that transformation cannot really happen because for any significant transformation to occur, that ego needs to be completely merged with our higher self. On the other hand, if one has indeed reached a deep awakening but doubts the validity of that realization due to the presence of ego, this points to a scenario where the lack of understanding the role of ego and its place in our holistic consciousness has come to damage our further evolution through leading us to misinterpret and under-value our present attainment.

Ego-haters often quote Ramana Maharishi's words that there is no ego in enlightenment. Even if he did say that, does it follow that he was right? The spiritual path is about seeking truth, not blindly following the authority of gurus who are themselves often deeply conditioned by their respective traditions. When he felt claustrophobic, Ramana used to complain that he had lost his freedom by leaving his meditation caves for the 'prison' of his ashram. Who was unhappy about this? Obviously he still had an ego, and good for him.



There is nothing constructive in not having an ego because ego is inherently positive, a natural expression of our consciousness. Without the faculty of ego, we would become dysfunctional and insane. The problem is that ego has never been properly defined. What is the point of debating whether ego is there or is not if we don't know what it is?

The term ego comes from Latin, where it means 'I'. It is simply the universal sense of me that every human being experiences but, due to their low level of evolution, are not yet in touch with. The irony of human spirituality, so far, is that the human ego is actually extremely unevolved and yet seekers already want to get rid of it. It is like a baby that wants to transcend before learning first how to be human.

Ego is the center of me in our intelligence and in the mind. It is the thinker, the observer, the checker. But when it is awakened, it realizes its pure subjectivity (the conscious me) and becomes conscious of itself irrespective of the presence or absence of thoughts. Ego is responsible for our integrity in the mind, the coherency of our thinking processes, memories, and conscious existence. It is only the unconscious, fragmented, ignorant ego that is completely lost in the mind that is the problem and the root of suffering for most humans. But that ego has to be awakened and transformed, not eliminated. The fact that there are still people out there that identify enlightenment with the elimination of ego is just sad.

Ego in Zen is what they used to call the guest (or minister), while our pure consciousness was called the host (or the king). The guest is not eliminated but integrated with our fundamental self so that it can become a natural and healthy expression of our human consciousness.

5. After enlightenment, there are no more desires.

Again, behind this idea lies the old preconception that desires are bad. Of course, no one likes to desire things that they cannot get, and because most of the things we desire are difficult to get, our desires make us suffer. No wonder that in many traditions they promoted the ideal of celibacy. If one cannot attract a partner, why not sublimate this inability into not-wanting it and then glorify it into something noble? Then, it is not that one cannot have sex despite wanting to; one is choosing not to have sex for 'god' or 'enlightenment'.

In reality, it is not desires that are bad but our relationship with desiring. Desire is the fundamental energy of life, beginning with the primal desire to keep living. Why did those who pursued the idea of renunciation not renounce the desire to live? Because they could not. This desire (except perhaps in very extreme cases of suffering) is stronger than any idea created by the mind. We all want to live, which actually means that life wants to live through us. Each being is a living channel of life, creation, and evolution.



Without desire there would be no incentive to live. Those who are against desire are against life. Buddha himself was on some level against life, and his perception of creation was basically negative. Indeed, seeing creation as a prison of misery is a concept common to some traditions. And while this can be understood, due to the prevailing experience of suffering, we should not forget the other side of life and, above all, its higher purpose.

Desire is not only necessary to experience the positive dimension of our human existence; it is also necessary to evolve spiritually. Without a desire for peace, freedom, and our higher nature, no one would bother to enter the inner path and this place would forever remain a planet of apes...

The misconceptions about enlightenment outlined above have had a strong impact on how human suffering has been conceptualized within the context of the spiritual path. We live in the dimension of ignorance, where ignorance does nothing but produce more ignorance. No one is really questioning these views because sloth and mediocrity have totally infiltrated our spiritual consciousness. It is time to wake up and begin to question the basic building blocks of our spiritual understanding. What is enlightenment really? Do you really want to know? Are you ready to give up your life for this knowledge, or you are just playing games with spirituality? Then, what is suffering? What role does it play in our existence? And what is the intricate connection between realizing our true nature and yet still living in a plane where suffering simply cannot be avoided?

Enlightenment and the Three Dimensions of Suffering

Before we answer the question of whether enlightenment eliminates suffering, we must realize that not all suffering is equal. One can suffer for wrong reasons or for higher, more real reasons. For instance, walking the path is often difficult, and on the many occasions that one is unable to break through, one feels deep pain. This pain is not negative but rather a natural element of our evolution into light. On the other hand, one can also create one's own suffering which has nothing to do with reality. The mind has developed infinite ways to torture itself – because it has been disassociated from light for so long, it has become sick and pathological. We must see our pain, and we must see through that pain in order to bring a ground-breaking discrimination into the dimension of suffering. Some suffering needs to be renounced and entirely dissolved, some suffering needs to be accepted, some suffering needs to be embraced and loved, and some suffering needs to be used as the very tool of our transcendence.

There are in fact three dimensions of suffering: physical, psychological, and spiritual. When Buddha spoke of the four noble truths and of suffering as being the main incentive to enter the path, he only pointed to physical suffering (old age, sickness, and



death). On a few occasions he also spoke about psychological suffering, saying, for instance, that love is one of the culprits for suffering because it inevitably brings the pain of separation. Generally in Buddhism, psychological suffering is identified as those negative emotions that relate to attachment: clinging, greed, aversion, anger, or fear. However, we cannot really find a description of spiritual suffering in Buddhism, which is in truth the deepest suffering of all for a human being. For Buddhists, the purpose of the path is to go beyond both physical and psychological suffering, and because neither of them can be fully eliminated, one cultivates the quality of detachment and works towards reaching a stage of evolution where one is free from further incarnations (to become a no-returner).

In his 'final' meditation under the Bodhi tree, Buddha was supposed to have entered a deep contemplation of all the causes for our existence in samsara, and seeing the illusory nature of all of them, he is believed to have reached liberation. In truth, this is just a legend; it cannot be true – one cannot reach liberation by doing this kind of intellectual gymnastics! But it doesn't really matter – the fact is that even though Buddhism is so concerned with reaching freedom from suffering, it fails to describe our fundamental suffering, which is spiritual.

Everybody understands what physical suffering is. Even when it is slightly too cold or too hot, our body is not happy. Even feeling tired is a kind of suffering. In fact, our body is almost always uncomfortable in some way, but often we just don't register it. In this dimension, the kind of discomfort that we are so used to that we no longer recognize it is what we translate as feeling well. The question is: Does enlightenment free us from physical pain? The answer is no, it doesn't. It allows us to create a better relationship with pain: to accept it, to be patient, to let it be, and to remain more detached, but pain is pain and it is never pleasant. When Ramana was asked why he sits on a tiger's skin, he said that even a Jnani does not like rheumatism. Even though it is theoretically possible that by cultivating some physical and psychological disciplines one could desensitize the body from feeling pain, this has nothing to do with the path to self-realization.

The relationship between enlightenment and psychological pain is more complex and more interesting. This is due to the simple fact that spiritual transformation is intertwined with psychological maturation and purification. You can no doubt find spiritual teachers who are immoral or even evil, but the fact is that these people are certainly not self-realized. There are unfortunately a large number of individuals who feel qualified to teach on the subject of enlightenment despite the fact that they have a very limited experience of their true nature, from which their human self remains completely alienated. They have never surrendered to the light of the soul and they do not represent the knowledge or realization of enlightenment.

Awakening itself will not fully transform our psychological self. However, it is the essential foundation upon which that transformation can truly begin. Enlightenment is more than awakening, for it implies complete realization and surrender of the human to



the soul. When the human surrenders, the light of the soul naturally purifies the psyche, freeing it from its self-generating negativity and various lower tendencies. However, an awakened being is still human and naturally retains a certain amount of psychological vulnerability and capacity to feel pain. This is not negative in itself, for without this capacity one could not exist anymore as an integral, healthy, and natural human being. Enlightenment does not entirely eliminate psychological suffering, but rather dissolves suffering that is self-inflicted or self-created. This type of suffering is unnatural – it is generated by our mind and by our past – and it needs to be eliminated. Most of our psychological pain is actually from the past. The past that does not want to leave us alone; it keeps creeping back in to our present. Freedom from that past is essential to our ability to live totally in the now. We become free from that past by merging with our ultimate, future self.

An enlightened being can experience psychological pain, but that pain is a natural response to the now and a reflection of his humanity. We call this the 'minimum suffering'. Just as one who has realized his consciousness experiences minimum thoughts (infrequent thinking), someone who embodies his pure nature feels a minimum suffering based on his mind and emotions. For instance, any true teacher feels a deep discomfort when teaching insincere seekers and a natural distaste when dealing with those who walk the path for the sake of their ego. Even living on the earth, with its low consciousness, is painful to anyone who is one with the fundamental light of the soul. However, this suffering is experienced from the place beyond suffering, from our pure nature, from freedom and bliss. That part of us which experiences suffering is the human dimension of our existence. The human is part of the earth and its play of polarities – not to feel pain is not to feel pleasure; not to feel sadness is not to feel joy. To conclude: psychologically, an enlightened being can still experience that minimum, gentle suffering which is not in contradiction with the fact that his soul is in a constant and natural state of bliss at all times.

Finally, we come to the matter of spiritual suffering. Those souls who are more mature do not enter the path out of a desire to free their body and mind from suffering, but to free their soul. Spiritual suffering is the deepest kind of suffering, but regrettably most humans are not even able to register it because they are entirely locked in their psychosomatic existence.

There are humans who are very well physically, and who possess a very positive and integrated psyche. What kind of incentive could they have to enter the path? The spiritual path is not a walk in the park; it is very hard at times and requires many sacrifices. Why should they bother? Because while their body and mind may be feeling fine, their soul is in deep pain. The problem is that if we are not in touch with our soul, we are not in touch with her pain either. This is how it is easy to fall asleep and live this life locked in the shallow psychosomatic plane. Those who do not feel the pain of their soul, who do not feel a longing for their true self, who do not recognize that they have lost something invaluable by being disconnected from their original self – they are too



immature to pursue the inner path. Should they remain like this? No, they should wake up from their existential coma and begin to serve the very purpose of their creation.

Spiritual pain is the pain of being isolated from our pure nature. It is a pain of not having an abiding place in the plane of pure subjectivity. It is a pain of not having refuge beyond our thoughts and emotions, and a pain of being stuck in our human self like a human-ape. Those who are in touch with their spiritual pain feel their suffering all the time; they wake up in the morning in a state of suffering, even if their life is 'just great.' To wake up in a dimension of no-self is to wake up in darkness even if there is a bright sun in the sky.

While physical suffering cannot really be eliminated and psychological suffering can only be brought to bare minimum, spiritual suffering can be fully transcended. It is not transcended by a singular event of awakening, but by becoming whole. As long as we are not whole, we are still suffering. Not all humans have the capacity to walk the path of wholeness, and it is fine if they pursue a path of partial awakening. But one thing needs to be clear – they are suffering.

Spiritual suffering is not a curse but a blessing. It is the tool our soul uses in order to evolve. For instance, after the awakening of pure consciousness, we move beyond the mind and reach a higher degree of bliss and freedom. But as time goes by and we fully assimilate that new state of existence, it is our responsibility to realize that there is still suffering, that something is still missing. Each state of awakening manifests a higher condition of wellbeing, but it also reveals another more hidden layer of suffering. On some level, we can see our evolution into light as an evolution into increasingly subtle, more refined, and more transparent dimensions of suffering until suffering is no more. For the soul there is only one state of freedom from suffering – perfection. Only by realizing her perfect nature in unison with the perfection of the universal reality does she fully transcend suffering. Finally, our soul can rest. She has fully embodied her original light, become whole, and as complete being she is eternally absorbed in the dimension of absence, in her perfect samadhi in the beloved.

It must be fully clear that although a self-realized being has reached spiritual peace and fulfillment, on the human level he is just human. Well, he is and he isn't. He isn't because he embodies the state of light and the roots of his being are in the inner realm. Additionally, his mind is silent and he is free from all the neurotic tendencies that plague most so-called normal people. But this does not mean that he is perfect, nor does it mean that he is not experiencing psychological difficulties at times, or simply feeling sad or even lonely. We must not forget that many of our psychological states are not merely generated by the mind but are expressions of various chemical and hormonal processes in our body which are affected by the environment. We are complex beings and so many elements need to be in harmony for us to feel both psychologically and physically well. Nobody can feel good all the time because it is simply against the laws of nature.



An enlightened being also has natural physical and emotional needs. Even if he is free from overdependence upon others and finds natural peace and bliss in being alone, he also has a gentle need to share his life and emotions with other people. He is not a robot. The idea is not to diminish our human nature, but to bring it to the point of health, balance, and harmony. A self-realized being can also have ups and downs in his human experience, but he experiences these ups and downs more in the middle of the spectrum, like the gentle waves of psychological existence. Additionally, his relationship with his human nature is different due to the simple fact that he is more than human: he is a soul, a divine being living at all times in the plane of pure subjectivity.

So all those elements need to be considered before the question of whether a self-realized being still experiences suffering can be answered. It is not a yes or no answer (nor is it both or neither) because those who ask this question usually have no idea what they are actually asking. It is like the common question: Does meditation make you happy? How can you answer this question? What does 'happy' really mean? What constitutes happiness, and, above all, what conditions our interpretation of whether we are happy or not? Some people claim to be happy, but if you look into their eyes, you see either a deep pain or just nothing because there is simply nobody there. That 'nobody' thinks that he is happy, but it is all rather ridiculous and delusional.

The truth is that one has to deeply study the nature of the spiritual path and to dive deeply into the intricate relationship between the realization of our inner self and our parallel existence on the human dimension. Only then can one come closer to clarifying the place of suffering in our lives and how that suffering is experienced in someone who has become his soul. The purpose of the path is not to become happy (only fools are happy) nor is it about being unhappy or neutral. It is to reach freedom and the bliss of our true nature. Bliss is not happiness – it is a state of existence. It is not a condition within which our personality or ego is translating itself as happy – it is a state of samadhi in the divine.

A self-realized being who has enough depth and integrity to embrace his human nature will also naturally embrace the presence of suffering. For him, that minimum suffering that he still experiences on the human level is just a small price to pay for being a complete human and living a total life. Those who practice extreme disidentification from their human condition in order not to suffer are cowards, and because of that they are bound to live a half-life in the name of their conditioned beliefs about the meaning of enlightenment. There have been many individuals of that sort, living in caves, living an unnatural life of celibacy, suppressing their minds, repressing their natural needs in the name of foolish beliefs. And as the science of enlightenment has moved from the East to the West, it is for that reason that it is so important to properly understand the complex and multidimensional connection between our evolution into our pure nature and transcendence, and our capacity to fully live our human existence – to embrace that ultimate paradox.



It is not just a figure of speech to say that spirituality has moved to the West. We are not referring to all those half-baked gurus who give satsangs in the West in the name of Pseudo-Advaita, or to Zen monks or Tibetan teachers who are building monasteries in the USA. We are speaking in real terms about that which cannot be seen: the silent migration of the inner knowledge from where it originated in the East to where it is now developing in the West. Despite the fact that it is very hard to find a genuine teacher in the West, it is still true that it is the Western soul that, in this century, is taking responsibility for carrying the sacred flame of spiritual knowledge. The Western spirit contributes to the consciousness of the soul and of our very humanity, and to the science of spirituality. The meeting between East (which does not really exist anymore) and West is the meeting between transcendence and humanity, between impersonality and individuality – the meeting between the final peace and our ordinary human nature.

Blessings,

Anadi

For a glossary of the terminology used in this teaching and for further resources, you may visit our website www.anaditeaching.com

