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Why Do Personal Development?

Part of the nature of humans is to be constantly developing, growing and moving toward a balanced and mature way of being. Our present personality is determined by both who and what we have been and by the person we strive to become. The goal of personal development is to learn and apply that which enables us to attain emotional wellbeing, understanding and effectiveness, and to share this knowledge with others.

Personal development is the conscious evolution of human nature, and yet throughout history it has been sorely lacking! Although it is in our nature to learn and grow, we are held back by our culture, which is predominantly focused on survival needs, each of us in competition with others, and our spiritual inner nature is repressed. The animal rules. We make no room for unconditional love.

Even though the culture may have evolved with technological advancement and administrative complexity, human nature has not moved forward as it might. We are now paying the price for human selfishness and inconsideration. Going forward, the quality of our lives on this planet - even our survival - now depends on each of us taking responsibility for our personal growth.

The human being needs to awaken to the soul that inhabits each body and is our true self and source of inner knowing. Awaken through a process of self-discovery, leading to one's own, self-directed spirituality. We need to become mindfully conscious instead of ruled by the dictates of instincts, past habits and fixed beliefs. We need to throw away dogma, open our minds and reconsider. Instead of fear about our survival and competitive angst, we will then be motivated by compassionate understanding and creative love.

For those that do move forward, the next epoch - that is almost upon us as we move into 2012 - will be a celebration of human cooperation and shared love. It's our best hope for the future - and it's in our hands.

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Blair Warren's book, 'The No-Nonsense Guide to Enlightenment' will challenge the very basis of your belief systems but, at the same time, could set your feet on a whole new path of discovery. This book will upset some, inspire many and help others to find their true teacher who resides deep within.

~~~ **John Harricharan, author of "The Power Pause"**

**In his book, The No-Nonsense Guide To Enlightenment**, Blair Warren has written a thought-provoking and intriguing book. Not only is his work profound, but at the same time practical. The road to enlightenment centers on one's ability to examine his perceptions of the world. Warren issues a guideline in the form of three questions to pursue this goal. This book is a MUST READ!

~~~ **Bernard F. Cleveland, Ph.D.**

I've been privileged to know Blair Warren for nearly ten years and have experienced his unique talent for storytelling, the written word and sparking the imaginations of others on many, many occasions. And for nearly as long as I've known him I've been urging, begging and pleading with him to "put himself out there" and share his talent with others. I am pleased to know he's finally done it, but not as pleased as those who are about to discover *The No-Nonsense Guide to Enlightenment* are going to be.

Blair has a way with words and ideas that is nothing short of brilliant. By the end of the first page he has you hooked. By the end of the last page he has you begging for more. And in between he engages your mind and imagination like few writers can. Just wait and see for yourself.

While I don't agree with every idea Blair presents in his book, it doesn't matter. His book isn't about "ideas". It is about life – and how we must each find our own way in it. And that's a message I wholeheartedly embrace.

~~~ **Dr. Joe Vitale, #1 Best-Selling Author of "Spiritual Marketing"**

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**Whether you're seeking enlightenment**, or hoping to recapture the experience, you must read this eye-opening book, "The No-Nonsense Guide to Enlightenment" by Blair Warren, otherwise you are almost surely looking in the wrong place and won't find what you're looking for.

This is, by far, the greatest book on the subject of enlightenment I've ever read, truly a work of profound wisdom. Buy it. Read it and BE Enlightened!

~~~ **Darel Rutherford, author of "So Why Aren't You Rich" and "Being the Solution"**

Bravo! This book is long overdue. "The No-Nonsense Guide to Enlightenment" by Blair Warren has struck a chord that loudly resonates within our soul.

Many teachers bring their wisdom to the table; while others try to cram their perceptions down your throat. Life happens--facts are assumed. The truth is a bit harder to find unless you take the time to search deeper within your heart. "Facts" usually are relative, while Truth is personal and absolute.

Undoubtedly, some will find this book controversial and a challenge. Those who doubt that others can dictate their Truth will find it interesting, comforting, provocative, and practical food for thought.

Perhaps Charles Fillmore said it best:

Above all, seek within, and bow at no human shrine. You have the same fountain of truth from which to draw as has the most favored individual on this planet, and you will never get unadulterated truth, until you evoke it within your own soul. This is the road all must eventually travel.

Get your own copy of "The No-Nonsense Guide to Enlightenment" and put it to use today. You'll be glad you did!

~~~ **Anita Bergen, author of "Pause and Reflect" and "Life and Other Options"**  
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In the interests of readability gender-neutral language is not used in this book.

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# CHAPTER 1 - WHOSE GAME ARE YOU PLAYING?

Imagine you are at a carnival. On the midway. Laughter and smiles abound. A man calls out for your attention. Knock three bottles from a small table with a softball and you will be a winner. He demonstrates. He glances at the target and gently lobs the ball. The bottles tumble to the ground. What could be easier? You pay the man a dollar, take the ball in hand, and with perfect aim you let it go. The bottles rock some but don't fall. You try again. And again. Occasionally one or two fall, but never all three. In disgust, you turn to leave but the man and the others around you urge you to try again. The man demonstrates once more, then tosses you the ball. Your friends tell you to be a good sport. Smile. Have fun. Don't give up. You force a smile and continue to play. Now, everyone is laughing, smiling, having a grand time. Except for you. The bottles will not fall. In fact, the bottles will never fall for the game is rigged. You cannot win. You can smile and pretend all you want. Your friends can offer encouragement till the end of time, but you will never win.

You can stop imagining now, because if you are someone who has followed all the rules of life only to be left bitter and disillusioned, this scenario is not make believe. It is your life. And it, too, is rigged.

From birth we have been taught to behave in ways we cannot sustain, to strive for things that do not exist and to expect things that can never occur. Left

undetected and unchallenged, these teachings guarantee a life of frustration and failure for those who try to practice them. But for those who teach them, they guarantee an endless supply of “lost souls” desperate for someone to show them where they’ve gone wrong. And unfortunately for the seekers, the answers they receive come out of a system in which only the teachers can win. Of course this fact is hidden, cloaked in beautiful language, intriguing riddles, in the promise of miracles and magic. For as long as the fact is concealed, the game will go on. The students will struggle and the teachers will thrive.

For those of you who have somehow managed to find happiness living within this system or have created a new one that works for you, I suggest you set this book aside. Save it for another time. Life is too precious. Too short. Why waste a moment analyzing it when you can go out and live it?

When my daughter was about six years old we gave her the game Twister for her birthday. She had seen other children playing the game on television and knew just what to do. I remember watching her as she spread the plastic mat on the floor and tied herself in knots placing her left foot on yellow, right hand on green, right foot on blue, etc. Soon, my wife and I joined in the fun. We must have played like that for about ten minutes when my daughter suddenly stopped and asked, “How do you win?”

Until that moment, we didn’t even realize we weren’t playing by the rules. We were simply enjoying ourselves and making it up as we went along. We decided we’d better get the instructions out of the box and find out how to play the

game. Within minutes of playing according to the official rules, my daughter grew bored and walked away from the game. We never played it again.

Now there's nothing wrong with playing the game according to the rules, *if you enjoy doing so*. But if the rules you've been given aren't working for you, maybe it's time to question them. Maybe it's time to write your own. Or maybe it's time to play a different game altogether.

## **ENLIGHTENMENT - A GLIMPSE**

For the record, I have no formal training in psychology, philosophy, theology or any other field that generally spawns teachers of enlightenment. I cannot levitate, heal the sick, summon the spirits of the dead, cleanse your aura or predict your future. In other words, I'm probably not that much different than you.

Though my formal education and professional background has led me into other fields, namely Information Systems and Broadcasting, I have had a lifelong interest in areas such as self-improvement, psychology, and spirituality. Ever since I was 13 years old, I have studied everything I could to learn more about each of these areas, all with one goal in mind: enlightenment. Of course, when I was starting out I didn't even know what enlightenment was, or what it was supposed to be. I just knew there was "something" out there - some "big secret" I just had to uncover.

But despite my efforts, for the first 37 years of my life the closest I came to being enlightened was when some guy in a sheet and sandals scammed me out of twenty dollars at an airport. Within the last few years, however, all this has changed. I now regularly have what I believe are enlightenment experiences and, for the most part, they don't look like what I'd been led to believe they would. In fact, I am now convinced that I even had such experiences before my recent discoveries, but since I was duped into looking for someone else's idea of enlightenment, I had missed my own all along. I'll even go one step further; if you've experienced similar disappointments in your quest for enlightenment, I'll bet the same is true of you. You've missed out on some of the greatest learning experiences of your life because you've been led to believe in something that does not exist.

It is my position that enlightenment is not necessarily the elusive mystical experience it has been made out to be. It doesn't require years of struggle to attain. It doesn't require that you chant in lotus position at the feet of some guru. And it doesn't require that you separate yourself from your family and friends, give away all your possessions and move to a compound on the outskirts of town. You *may* find it through one of these methods, but it isn't necessary to do so. In fact, enlightenment is available to each of us, wherever we happen to find ourselves and at any given moment, *if* we know what it is we're looking for. With that in mind, let me clear up perhaps the biggest misconception about enlightenment right at the start.

In June of 2000, late night talk show host Conan O'Brien gave a hysterical commencement address at Harvard, his Alma Mater, in which he warned those graduating that they would now and forever be subject to the line, "And you graduated from Harvard?" He said if they asked someone how jumper cables worked, they would be asked, "And you graduated from Harvard?" If they ever forgot their underwear went on the inside of their pants rather than the outside, others would ask, "And you graduated from Harvard?" I have discovered that the label "enlightenment" comes with a similar curse. Now, whenever I lose my temper, become frustrated or am unable to find the pen I have neatly clipped to my shirt pocket, those closest to me take great glee in asking, "And you call yourself enlightened?"

The fact is I do not call myself enlightened. To be more specific, I do not claim to *be* enlightened. I simply claim to have *experienced* enlightenment. The key word is *experienced*. That's what enlightenment is, an experience. It is *not* a state of being. This is the biggest misconception people have about enlightenment. They think that if they could only "become enlightened" that their lives would somehow become magical and perfect.

So before we go any further let me assure you that there is absolutely no guarantee that enlightenment will make you happy, rich, famous or even "better" than you were before. It *might* do some of these things. Maybe. It might also lead to something else. Just like falling in love might lead to a lifelong romance or a quickie divorce. The end result doesn't validate or invalidate the experience that

led to the results. Our experience of love can be deep, intense and as real as the hair on our heads, but that is no guarantee that it will last. And our experience of enlightenment is no different.

Enlightenment doesn't guarantee that you will be immune to the emotional trials and tribulations of life. As long as you are alive these dark times will make their appearances in your life. Why? Because they are part of the human experience and as long as you are human, you're going to experience them. Occasionally we hear of people who had dedicated their lives to worthy causes such as the prevention of disease, abuse or violence only to end up dying from the very things they fought. We find these cases tragically ironic but we recognize that despite their good intentions, these people weren't immune to the human experience. And despite what you may have come to believe, those who claim to have experienced enlightenment, myself included, are no different.

No doubt you've heard the saying, "Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water." While the saying is true, it doesn't go far enough. Perhaps, "Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water, experience joy and frustration. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water, experience joy and frustration," would be more accurate as it includes not just the physical experiences but the emotional ones as well.

## **WHY SEEK ENLIGHTENMENT?**

If you're wondering why anyone should seek enlightenment if it is not the magic bullet we've been lead to believe, there are two good reasons.

First, while enlightenment is not going to solve all of our problems, it gives us a degree of power over our lives that can hardly be imagined by those who haven't experienced it. It provides opportunities for us to more consciously participate in life and, as a result, have more impact, not just in our lives, but also in the lives of others. No, when you experience enlightenment magical things will not suddenly begin to happen in your life. Instead, you will become aware of the magical things that are already occurring in your life.

And second, those who truly seek enlightenment have little choice in the matter. For the vast majority of people, enlightenment is nothing more than a vague concept that catches their attention every so often. Some may dabble a bit in its pursuit, but after a weekend seminar or reading a few books on the subject, their interests quickly take them in other directions. But there are others for whom the quest isn't so casual. For them, it is an obsession. I know this because I was one of them.

My first "enlightenment" experience occurred just over three years ago, and until now I've only shared the insights I've gained since then with a handful of people. Each one of them, without fail, has encouraged me to share these ideas with others. This book is a result of their encouragement.

For months after I finally “got it” I jotted down my thoughts in hopes they would add up to something that others would find useful. As I went back through the material, I was taken aback by some of the things I had written. Quite frankly, many of them contradicted the traditional teachings I’d encountered over the years. I now know why.

A dangerous thing happens when a man discovers his own truth. Suddenly, he no longer finds himself at the feet of some guru. He no longer buys into the pretty pictures his teachers once held up for him as bait. He no longer finds himself bound by the dogma of some body of thought that supposedly holds the keys to his salvation. He has fought his way out of the cage and earned his freedom. And no one who controls him or hopes to in the future wants to see that happen.

The fact is no one holds the key to your own enlightenment except you. It is yours to use at any time you choose. It is my position that the only reason you haven’t recognized this before is that others have, knowingly or unknowingly, encouraged you to look elsewhere for that key and you believed them. You don’t need to chant, believe in spirits, shave your head or give your life over to a guru. Again, you can do these things and find enlightenment. But, if you’re like me and turned off by such approaches yet still feel pulled toward enlightenment, there is another way.

In fact, my purpose in writing this book is simply this: to get you to stop looking “out there” for the answer and, instead, simply recognize the power you have had all along, a power some would rather you never discover.

## **EXERCISE**

At this point I want you to do the first and only exercise you will find in this book. It's simple to do and should only take a few minutes to complete. If you're like me, you'll be tempted to simply read the instructions and move on rather than actually completing the exercise. Don't do it this time! We will be returning to this exercise at the end of the book and you'll only be cheating yourself if you haven't completed it at that time.

Now, think of a time when you were absolutely certain about your view of reality, but then experienced an unexpected, sudden and dramatic change in your perceptions. When this type of experience occurs, it typically does so in the face of an apparently, unforgiving reality. That is, you are absolutely certain of the hard reality of your “facts” when all of a sudden they give way and leave you with a new understanding of reality itself.

Perhaps you learned that a dear friend was really cheating you behind your back and, in an instant, the relationship was destroyed. Maybe you discovered that your boss didn't have a grudge against you at all but was simply experiencing problems at home and, in an instant, you became friends.

Recently, I had an experience like this when I caught my children playing on our computer without my permission. Like any good father, I had to teach them a lesson. I banned them from the computer and sent them to their rooms. When I found out that my wife had given them permission and that they had been

designing a birthday card for me, I experienced a profound change in attitude to say the least.

Your new understanding of reality could be trivial or profound. All that matters is that the change in your perspective was unexpected, sudden and dramatic. If you'd like, you can come up with several such experiences, but you only need one. Once you've identified an appropriate experience, all you need to do at this point is be able to remember it when we reach the end of this book. Write it down if necessary. But whatever you do, please do this before continuing.

## **CHAPTER 2 - THE NIGHT I “GOT IT”**

My first true enlightenment experience didn't occur as a result of chanting or meditating, and it didn't occur as a result of praying or any other spiritual practices. I'd tried all of these things and then some without success. But then on August 27, 2000 at just after 1:00 a.m. I woke from a deep sleep and was quickly consumed with an awareness of death. I had no sense of fear. On the contrary, it was an incredibly peaceful and beautiful experience. And it would be a turning point in my life.

Nothing in particular woke me. No movement, no noise, no dream. My eyes simply opened and my world had changed. I turned to my wife who lay sleeping beside me with her arm draped across my chest. As I watched her sleep, I was struck with the thought that one day this relationship would end. We could dedicate our lives to having the perfect marriage and that wouldn't be enough. Someday, death would come and take it all away. Now don't get me wrong, it wasn't that I didn't know this before. Clearly I wasn't operating under the illusion that my wife and I were immortal. But somehow, the reality of this inevitability had escaped me until this moment. It was inside this thought that I awakened to the incredible gift that was my life.

I no longer saw life as a biological process but as a spiritual one. In an instant, the thought of death no longer scared me because for the first time I felt truly alive and I knew that a physical death could never take that away. No matter

what happened from that point on, for one fleeting moment in time, I had experienced the greatest gift imaginable.

I left my wife's side and went into each of my kids' bedrooms and sat beside them. I took their hands in mine and as I watched them sleep, I thanked God for that moment of realization, for awakening me to the gift of life before it was taken from me. The feeling was so strong, so consuming, that I began to wonder if I was about to die. Right then, right there. Why else would I be having such strong feelings? I sat, listening, waiting. Was it my time? I felt absolutely no fear, only love, appreciation, and a childlike curiosity. If death was in the wings, I felt I could easily go. After all, what right did I have to expect anything more than what I had already experienced in my life? But there was nothing more for me to notice or await. Not that night at least. It was just after 2 a.m. when I made my way back to my bed and fell asleep as quickly and as inexplicably as I had awakened just an hour before.

The next morning I tried to make sense of what had happened to me. The effects of my experience had carried over into my waking hours and I wasn't sure how to handle them. Though I woke to the same circumstances that had existed the night before, their meaning and importance had been transformed. I could tell that things that had bothered me in the past no longer would. And things I'd overlooked would take on new meaning and significance. I'd studied self-help and spiritual literature for years searching for enlightenment to no avail. But in the

wee hours of the morning of August 27, 2000, with absolutely no warning and no effort, it found me.

I had arrived.

What would I do now? I was clearly a different person. How would I relate to those who knew me the way I was before? How could I go back to the same old job, the same old concerns I'd once had? What would life be like from now on when I no longer feared death, when I was fully aware of the gifts and blessings in my life?

I didn't have to wonder long. If I had felt let down and disillusioned in the past, it wasn't anything like what was just around the corner.

When you have an experience like what I just described, the first thing you feel you want to do is share it with others. You want to share it with anyone and everyone who will listen. You almost feel as if it is your *responsibility* to share it with others – to “do them a favor” and wake them up. At this point I'd like to give you a little piece of advice. If you do ever have an experience like the one I just described, *resist* the urge to share it with others, at least at first. Why? Two reasons.

First, it drives a wedge between you and others. Telling others about the experience isn't going to make them have the same experience. And without *having* the experience, they are not going to be able to understand your reaction to it. A person coming off an experience like this typically sounds like they're

speaking gibberish. Other people will not be able to relate to your enthusiasm. You might as well try to explain Einstein's General Theory of Relativity to a dog (or to me, for that matter.)

And second, since the experience is temporary, it is a near certainty that you're going to set yourself up for an enormous fall. The elation and enthusiasm are going to vanish and, unless you're careful, your credibility with yourself and others will go right along with it. I know, for this is exactly what happened to me.

The next afternoon, just hours after my "transformation," hours after sharing my experience and newfound commitments with others, I fell into a deep depression. I was stunned. How could this have happened? I wasn't depressed about anything in particular. I was just depressed. When I realized I had already lost touch with the experience I'd had the night before, it got worse. Why didn't it stick? What will my family and friends think of me now that I've stuck my foot so firmly in my mouth? Where was that enlightened person I'd thought I'd become?

I knew I must have done something wrong, but what? I went back to the books and tapes I'd studied so often in the past in order to understand what was happening to me. But this time, there was something very strange about the messages I was reading. Something very wrong. For the first time in my life I was convinced I'd tasted enlightenment, but in its aftermath, it didn't look much like what these books and tapes had described. Soon after, I set aside my quest for answers and decided to give myself a break from the path.

Once I stopped searching for someone "out there" to give me the answers, I tried to make sense of what had happened to me without the help of gurus and wise men. I shared my entire experience, the elation, the depression and the subsequent confusion, with a small group of my closest friends. I began to keep notebooks of sporadic thoughts and concerns that arose over the next few months. And in time, a miraculous thing began to occur. In my efforts to make sense of that one miraculous hour back in August of 2000, a flood of startling insights began to fill my mind. And over the course of a few weeks, I'd stumbled across a handful of thoughts that would eventually shatter the mystery of enlightenment that had eluded me all my life.

I'm about to share these insights with you, but before I do, I want to remind you that simply understanding or agreeing with these insights will not make you enlightened. This will no more lead to you becoming enlightened than understanding and agreeing with the notion of exercise will lead to you becoming physically fit. If you want to improve your health through exercise, you must sweat and you must do so regularly. If you want to become enlightened, you must pay the price. But how? By discovering your own path. And you do this by facing the forces at work in your own life, right now, right where you are. You don't need to leave your family, give away your possessions, shave your head and move to the Far East, or join a group of people in a compound on the outskirts of town and stockpile firearms.

The most anyone else can do for you is to tell you what they have discovered, point you in the right direction, then get out of your way. So please think of the insights and ideas that follow not as being true or false, but as being tools you can use to unearth insights of your own. Agree with them, disagree with them, try to prove or disprove them using examples from your own life, but do not simply accept them. After all, if you're still seeking enlightenment, simply accepting what others have told you more than trusting your own insights may have gotten you into this trouble in the first place.

## **CHAPTER 3 - THE SACRED COWS OF SELF-HELP**

Whenever people seek enlightenment, there are typically a number of “principles” and “truths” we are taught in order to “help” us along the path. These ideas seem so valid, so helpful, so warm and fuzzy that few of us ever think to question them. This is unfortunate, because these ideas more often serve as *obstacles* to enlightenment rather than the steppingstones we’ve been led to believe. Here are some of the more common misconceptions that trip us up.

### **ENLIGHTENMENT CHANGES EVERYTHING**

Once you reach true enlightenment, life will never be the same. You will become a Master of your emotions, your health and your circumstances. Though the conditions of your life may not immediately change, you will have access to spiritual powers that you can soon use to manifest any situation or material object you desire. Sound familiar?

The truth is, as I mentioned earlier, enlightenment is simply an experience, *not a permanent way of life*. You don't "get" enlightened like you get a tattoo, get a college degree or get married. It is an experience. It begins, it ends, and another one takes its place. If there is a permanent change in one's life after an experience, it has as much to do with what one does *with* the experience as it does the experience itself. After all, any experience can change your life, not just enlightenment. A brush with death can change you. A severe beating as a child

can change you. Winning the lottery can change you. And yes, an intense enlightenment experience can change you. But even these changes depend on you and the way you handle the experience. Enlightenment *may* change everything. But then again, so might almost anything else.

## **CHANGE YOUR BELIEFS, CHANGE YOUR LIFE**

This is one of the classic mantras from the world of self-help, and like most of the others, it contains just enough truth to wreak havoc on those who try to practice it. While I have absolutely no doubt that beliefs are one of the biggest determining factors in our lives, I question just how much of a role we really play in changing them. Think of it this way...

We believe the things we believe because they make sense to us given our current view of the world, not because we consciously want to believe them. Right? Our beliefs, by definition, are ideas we *hold* as true, not ideas we *wish* were true. In other words, beliefs represent our individual understanding of reality. They change when our understanding of reality changes – not when we want them to change.

Now, while the subconscious mind is capable of distorting reality in ways that can make us believe almost anything, this is done subconsciously and as such, is not a tool we can *consciously* use to change our beliefs. If you don't believe me, let's try a little experiment.

Who do you *believe* was the seventh Vice President of the United States?

- A) Daffy Duck
- B) The artist formerly known as Prince
- C) Millard Fillmore, or
- D) SpongeBob SquarePants

Be careful not to select an answer simply because you “know” it is the correct one. Instead, pick the one you *believe* is right. Okay?

Okay, if you're like most people, you selected C. Now, if you are someone who can change your beliefs, I'd like you to do that now and believe it was A - Daffy Duck. Go ahead. I'll wait. Write it down as an affirmation if you'd like and post it on your bathroom mirror. "Daffy Duck was our nation's seventh Vice President." It may take a few days, but I'm sure you'll get it down before long. Nonsense? Of course. The only possible answer is C. Why? Because it is the only one that makes sense. It can't be Daffy Duck, the artist formerly known as Prince or SpongeBob SquarePants.

So no matter what choice you wish you could believe, you can only believe the one that makes sense to you. Even if I offered you a hundred dollar bill to believe choice A rather than C, you might really want to believe it and even try to

tell me you do, but you wouldn't. And you know it. Despite your best efforts choice C is the only one you can believe. It is the only choice that makes sense.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, there are many different types of beliefs such as “I believe Clinton lied to the American people,” “I believe it will rain tomorrow” and “I believe I’ll have another beer,” and some of these beliefs are more malleable than others. But still, all of our beliefs share one common characteristic – we believe them because it makes sense to us to believe them, not simply because we consciously want to. Yes, changing your beliefs *will* change your life, but changing your beliefs isn’t up to you alone. It isn’t a question of willpower. It isn’t a question of affirmations. And it isn’t a question of understanding the benefits of changing your beliefs. It is a question of evidence. It takes evidence to change our beliefs, whether we find that evidence or it finds us.

## **THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE**

A man with inoperable cancer decides to attend an event led by a well-known faith healer as a last ditch hope to stay alive. Despite pleas from his family and his doctor to avoid the "charlatan," the man goes anyway. Though he is a little skeptical, he does feel a mysterious "something" go through his body when

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<sup>1</sup> This was actually a trick question. The real answer is not Millard Fillmore but Martin Van Buren. While the question as written helps illustrate our inability to consciously change our beliefs, it may also say something about the danger of accepting something as true solely because it appears to make sense in a given context.

the preacher pronounces him cured. The next day his doctor assures him the cancer is not only still there, but that it is, in fact, getting worse. But the man is confident he has been healed.

He begins to exercise daily, take his medication faithfully and even thanks God every day for bringing him in contact with the healer who made this all possible. Though the doctor is correct, the cancer hasn't disappeared, the man's sudden zest for life and newfound hope is truly inspiring. The doctor had given him just three months to live, he has now made it over six months and there's no end in sight. But then one day the man sees a story on television that exposes the faith healer as a fraud. His doctor and family members call him to make sure he saw the story so that he could now know the truth. He assures them he did. He feels foolish and ashamed but within days the truth sets him free; he dies in his sleep.

Though I have doubts about faith healers myself, I told you this story to make an important point. While there are clearly times when we need to know the truth about what is going on in our lives, there are just as many times when the truth is the worst thing we can know. Was the faith healer "wrong" to give the man false hope? Well, since the man experienced a sudden and miraculous new zest for life and lived twice as long as had been expected, it is hard to say it was "wrong." But what about the others the faith healer treated who weren't so lucky? Now surely he was "wrong" to give them false hope. After all, they didn't receive any benefit from his services.

Believing that something called “the truth” is the ultimate goal of enlightenment and that knowing it will set you free presents some interesting questions.

Who will decide what is ultimately true and how can we be sure they aren't lying to us? And once the "truth" is determined, how can we be certain there isn't another discovery just around the corner that will prove our current "truth" to be false? Can we ever know what is "really" true or can we only believe certain things to be true given our current understanding of reality?

And how do we address the issue of truth in art? If the goal of enlightenment is to discover “the truth,” that is, the model of thought that most accurately maps to physical reality, then wouldn't a crystal clear photograph be more valuable than, say, a “sloppy” portrait by Van Gogh? Too bad Van Gogh didn't have a camera. He could have created a more valuable (i.e. more useful) work of art and saved himself a lot of time, and perhaps an ear, in the process.

Of course this is ludicrous. There are times when a photograph is more “truthful” than a painting and vice versa. A police officer would probably find a suspect's photograph more "truthful" than an artist's rendition, whereas a patron of the arts would be the other way around. Who's right? Whose “reality” is more true? Who knows. Who cares. Perhaps the better question is, whose “reality” is most useful at the moment?

So will the truth set you free? It can. But free from what? Just remember our hypothetical cancer patient and how well the truth served him. Perhaps there are times when a beautiful illusion beats reality hands down.

## **WE CAN ALWAYS CHOOSE HOW TO RESPOND**

Imagine for a moment that I set two blocks of wood in front of you. One marked "A". The other "B". Now, I ask you to choose one. How likely are you to choose block A? How about block B? Okay, now here is the hard part. How likely is it that you will choose block C? Remember, the only choices you have in front of you are A and B. The answer? You can't possibly choose C because you aren't even aware choice C exists!

When my son, Zachary, was in the second grade, I took him to a party at a local arcade. At the day's end he had collected a handful of tickets he could redeem for prizes. As he and his friend, Rebecca, tried to pick out their prizes Zachary became upset. He discovered he didn't have enough tickets to get anything he really wanted. All he could get were a few items he couldn't care less about. Rebecca had the same problem. They stood there, struggling with their decision. I told Zachary it was time to go and to quickly make up his mind. If he couldn't, he would have to save his tickets for another time. When he asked if I thought we might ever actually go back to that arcade, I told him I didn't think so but that we might and to please hurry. He was now really stuck. Should he spend his tickets on junk or save them for a time that may never come? After a few

minutes I suggested that he might give his tickets to Rebecca. That way at least she could get something nice. In an instant his dilemma was solved and he eagerly gave his tickets away. Rebecca used them to get a little bear which she promptly named after my son. Zachary was ecstatic.

Please realize, I didn't *introduce* the concept of giving to Zachary that day. He knew what giving was all about and knew it was possible for him to do so. The problem was he wasn't *aware* of that as he was struggling to make his decision. For him to have the ability to choose giving, I had to bring that option into his awareness. Until then, he could only choose between two alternatives. And he didn't like either one.

We are no different. We do not always have a choice about how to respond to life. How can we make a choice when we aren't consciously aware that we have any options? We can't. We can only choose among the alternatives that we are aware of at any given time. And unfortunately for us, that number is often very small. Why? Because we aren't aware of very much of *anything* at any given time. Which leads us to our final half-truth.

## **WE ARE CONSCIOUS BEINGS**

This one is my personal favorite. How can anyone argue with this? Isn't it our very consciousness that separates us from the lower animals? Of course we are conscious beings. Well, sort of.

Ask yourself, at this very moment, how many things are you consciously aware of? Not how many things are you aware of now that you think about it, but how many things were you aware of at the instant I asked the question. Aside from the ideas being discussed, were you aware of the font these words are printed in or are you only aware of it now that I bring your awareness to it? Were you aware of the various background noises around you or are you only aware of them now that I bring your awareness to them? How about those things that are “really” important to you? Were you aware of any issues from your work or family life? Were you aware of the latest fluctuations in the stock market? Were you aware of the fact that there are only so many shopping days till Christmas?

Of course not. While something other than the subject of this book may have been in the background of your conscious thought, the odds are there wasn't much else there. The fact is while it is possible for us to be aware of virtually anything, at any given moment, we can only be conscious of a few select things.

So while it is true that we are conscious beings, that doesn't mean very much until we ask ourselves, what are we conscious of? And perhaps more importantly, what *aren't* we conscious of?

Now what good has it done for us to reexamine these commonly held "truths" about enlightenment and human nature? It has hopefully given us some insight into why, despite our greatest efforts, so many of us fail to better our lot in life. As long as we believe in these half-truths and strive to live up to them, we

will be doomed to a life of frustration and failure. And since we cannot live like this for long we must seek relief. Is it any wonder then that there are some who promote these misconceptions and then turn around and offer "solutions" to the problems they cause?

The only "solution" to this situation is to wake-up to the insidious nature of this never-ending cycle and refuse to play the game any longer. But this "solution" doesn't have nearly the appeal of the false-promises we've been raised to believe in. If we accept it we have to resign ourselves to being powerless little pawns in a world where unseen forces will determine the outcome of our lives. Or do we? Remember, there's always enlightenment. Not the fantasy we've been led to believe in, but the real thing. And even though it isn't the end all be all of human existence, it is enough. Actually, more than enough.

## CHAPTER 4 - ENLIGHTENMENT DEFINED

Before I try to define enlightenment I want to remind you of two critical points. First, as I pointed out earlier, *defining* enlightenment isn't going to *produce* enlightenment. Defining an experience, any experience, doesn't produce it. It simply makes it more understandable. So don't expect the definition to change your life. And second, the fact that enlightenment is an experience means that it is subjective. Like other human experiences such as falling in love, losing a loved one, or facing your own mortality, your sense of enlightenment will be yours and yours alone.

Perhaps the simplest way to describe what the enlightenment experience is like is by using an analogy. At Disney's MGM Studios in Orlando, there is a ride called, appropriately, *The Tower of Terror*. When you ride it, you are strapped into an elevator-type car which, after a short ride through a spooky old hotel, is dropped thirteen stories in a free fall. While the entire ride is entertaining, it is the momentary "jolt" when you first are dropped that turns your stomach. Some people scream with delight. Others just scream. But everyone experiences the sudden turn of the stomach that is the trademark of the ride. Experiencing enlightenment is a lot like riding *The Tower of Terror*.

When you strip away all the new age mumbo jumbo and religious connotations, enlightenment is simply a state of detachment. But detachment from what? From the ideas and concepts about life that we have come to see as

absolute, permanent truths rather than the subjective, temporary beliefs they are. That's it. The things you hear about "being one with the universe," "having a direct experience of God," and the like are merely interpretations of this detachment and only serve to complicate the concept.

So how is enlightenment like riding *The Tower of Terror*? Well, to understand that we must add one component to our definition of enlightenment and take into account that "instant" in time when a person transitions from an unenlightened state to an enlightened one. Just as one's stomach turns the moment *The Tower of Terror* drops you from the thirteenth floor, your mind "turns" when something you knew to be true instantaneously drops out from under you and you are left scrambling to make sense of what has just happened. This is not the same as acquiring knowledge through study and coming to hold a more accurate sense of reality. That is called education and it has nothing to do with enlightenment. In fact, in some ways education is the exact opposite of enlightenment. Education takes place slowly over time and rather than promoting detachment from believing in ideas and concepts, education promotes the adoption of "more accurate models of reality" as the student progresses. Like *The Tower of Terror*, enlightenment rips your psychological world out from under you in an instant and leaves you dangling in the air.

Is this pleasant? It depends on what state you were in before you became enlightened. Remember I said at the beginning of this book that if you're currently happy in your life that you should stop reading this book right away? This is why.

If things are going well for you, why shake it up? Enjoy the ride. On the other hand, if you're struggling in life and your understanding of the world is working against you, enlightenment can help you make some powerful changes. The potential power of the enlightenment experience is a direct result of the detachment that lies at the heart of the experience.

Think of it this way, normally when you experience something, you and the "something" tend to be, for a period of time, "one" in psychological terms. Or to put it another way, you are "attached" to what you are experiencing. Think of a very happy time in your life. Now, consider how you would have described your feelings to someone at the time it was happening. Would you have said, "I am experiencing much happiness at this time" or would you have said, "I am very happy"? Most of us would use the second phrase because that is exactly the way we experience our states of mind. I am sad. I am bored. I am tired. In other words, you and the state of mind are psychologically "attached" for the duration of the experience. Of course, when it comes to experiences, you can count on one thing - soon, other experiences will come along and change everything. "I am sad" becomes "I am happy." "I am bored" becomes "I am excited." "I am tired" becomes "I am energetic." As our experiences change, our attachments to them change. And this is done without our conscious participation.

The experience of enlightenment, however, is unusual in that rather than experiencing "attachment" to something and becoming identified with it, you experience "detachment" from all things and identify with nothing. Regardless of

the circumstances of your life, for that brief moment in time when you slip into enlightenment, you aren't attached to any of them. In this moment, you have power. You see through the illusions of life and are no longer bound by them. But this power is fleeting. The never-ending stream of human experience blindsides us with other thoughts and concerns and our blissful state slips away before we even realize what has happened.

So the cycle of awareness for those who haven't experienced enlightenment goes like this: attachment, attachment, attachment, attachment, ad infinitum. They do not question their assumptions about the world because they don't realize they *are* assumptions. Unenlightened people experience their assumptions as absolute facts and as such, are powerless with regards to their own thinking. Sometimes their assumptions pay off. Other times their assumptions wreak havoc in their lives and they wonder what went wrong.

The cycle of awareness for those who *have* experienced enlightenment, however, looks like this: attachment, attachment, detachment, attachment, attachment, detachment, attachment ad infinitum. Though these people also spend much of their lives in a state of attachment, there is a mysterious "something" that gets left behind whenever they have an enlightenment experience. This mysterious "something" is what sets them apart from the masses. It is what helps them every so often break the hold that attachment has on their lives and re-enter that coveted state of mind called enlightenment. The mysterious something is doubt.

# CHAPTER - 5 DOUBT AS A KEY TO ENLIGHTENMENT

Doubt is what gives us the power to change our entire perception of reality in a single instant. Those who have experienced enlightenment still see their assumptions as absolute facts just as other people do, but every so often a magical thing happens to the enlightened; they remember the detachment they felt when they experienced enlightenment and in that instant, the certainty of their current states of mind begins to give way. They are suddenly free from the bonds of their assumptions and are capable of seeing the world in a fresh way, a way that serves rather than enslaves.

Isn't the average person also capable of this? Perhaps. But, if so, it is rare. There are simply too many forces working against him.

By our very nature we tend to identify with our assumptions about reality and as a result protect them from attack as we would protect our own bodies. Consider how often we fight over our points of view even when it ultimately makes no difference who's right and who's wrong. We latch onto some thought or another, claim it as our own, then draw our swords whenever anyone disagrees. So little of what we argue about makes any real difference in the world, but it makes an enormous difference to us.

Why is it so difficult for us to admit when we are wrong? Because we so identify with our views of reality that, when *they* are wrong, *we* are wrong. Even

our language supports our identification with our points of view. The phrase we must say is "I am wrong." Why doesn't it occur to us to say, "The thought I held was wrong"? Because without being aware of it we live as if our thoughts and ourselves are the same thing.

The outside world also promotes our identification with our thoughts in order to protect its social structures. Every social group that seeks your involvement, whether it be religious, political, fraternal, or anything else, needs you to utter just one magic phrase for it to begin to exert control over you. The magic phrase is "I am." Once you utter the phrase "I am" anything, you have walked into a trap. That doesn't mean you won't get value out of the trap and it doesn't mean you are foolish for walking into it. It simply means that you are now in a trap and the only hope you have of ever getting out, should you decide you want to, is remembering how you got caught in the first place.

Until recently, I was a registered member of one of America's two main political parties. Though I rarely followed politics in the news or volunteered my time to any political causes, somewhere along the line I signed a membership card and from then on I proudly claimed, "I am a \_\_\_\_\_." For over 10 years my in-laws and I would get into bitter, ugly arguments about politics. Screaming, yelling, name-calling. As you may have guessed, everyone was split along party lines. Though we genuinely tried to avoid the arguments whenever we were together, all it took was a hint of the subject to be brought up and the fight was on. Recently I grew so disgusted with both parties that I declared myself an

Independent and an amazing thing happened. I have not gotten into one argument with my in-laws over politics even though the topic now regularly comes up for conversation. I have absolutely no need to defend "my" party and no need to bash theirs. All the effort and self-restraint in the world couldn't counteract my attachment to the label I had given myself. But the moment my label changed, everything else changed *without effort*.

Consider for a moment some of the things you may "know" about yourself. Do you "know" you *are* a Republican/Democrat, or are you simply someone who shares many of the views of one of those parties? Do you "know" you *are* a doctor/lawyer/accountant, or are you simply someone who practices one of these professions? You see, there is an enormous difference between someone who "is" something and someone who "does" something. And while the difference may seem trivial, the next time you find yourself strongly defending some point of view, ask yourself if it is a position you "hold" or one that you "are."

Fostering doubt in our assumptions can help us get out of our psychological traps. When we begin to question our assumptions, change is possible. Until that point, whatever system we find ourselves in remains intact. If we are to break through this barrier and create real change in our lives, our efforts must not be against circumstances, but against our inherent tendencies to identify with our own thoughts and assumptions as well as the onslaught of those presented to us by others. Unfortunately, this is not always easy because our assumptions don't *look* like assumptions. They look like reality.

# CHAPTER 6 - LEARNING TO SEE FOR OURSELVES

*Let every eye negotiate for itself, and trust no agent.*

*William Shakespeare*

Recently, I asked my son to join me in our kitchen for a little game<sup>2</sup>. I placed six objects on the table. A mobile phone, a comb, a pen, a paper clip, a dime and a plastic coffee cup. I quickly moved the mobile phone, comb, coffee cup and pen into one pile and the other items into another.

"I have placed these items in two different categories," I told him. Can you tell me what they are?"

Zachary shook his head.

"These are made out of plastic," I said pointing to the first pile, "and the others aren't."

He smiled and nodded his head. I then rearranged the items into two new groups and asked him, "Now what are the categories?"

After a moment he said, "Things made with metal and things that aren't?"

"Right. Now you put them in two categories and I'll guess what they are."

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<sup>2</sup> This exercise is from the excellent book *Language in Thought and Action* by S.I. Hayakawa

He must have grouped the items into about ten different categories in ten minutes. He grouped them into things you find in an office and things you don't, things you can roll on the table and things you can't, etc. He was having a blast trying to stump me, which he did often.

"Let's make this more interesting," I said. "Let's try three groups instead of two. Divide them into things made out of metal, things made out of plastic and things you'd find in an office."

He placed the dime and paper clip into one pile, then reached for the phone and pen when he suddenly stopped.

"This doesn't make sense," he said. "Does the pen belong with things made of plastic or things you'd find in an office? And what about the paper clip? Is it metal or does it belong in an office?"

"Why do they have to belong to one group or the other?" I asked.

"Because that's the way the game works. They can't belong to both."

"Why?" I asked him. "Because they can't *or* because your categories won't allow them to?"

"Let's just go back to two categories," he said. "That's more fun."

I used this game to teach him there is often more to what we see before us than what we actually see before us. I wanted to give him a sense of the total blindness our own assumptions can cause without our ever being aware of what happened. I wanted to introduce him to the advantages of questioning his own

assumptions about the world. In other words, I wanted to introduce him to the power of doubt.

As we finished playing the game, I realized that a screw was loose in the chair I was sitting in. I asked Zachary if he had a screwdriver I could use to fix the chair. He said he didn't. I asked him if he was sure. He assured me he didn't. I promptly reached across the table, picked up the dime and used it to tighten the loose screw. He sat with a stunned look on his face.

"Why didn't I see that," he asked me.

"Because you knew that a dime wasn't a screwdriver and your knowing became your reality."

In the movie, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, the main character, Jack Skellington, the leader of Halloween Town, is depressed about the monotony in his life and decides to go for a walk. He stumbles upon a strange place called Christmas Town. In order to make sense of all the odd things around him, he jumps from object to object asking himself, what's this? He ponders the snowflakes and mistletoe, the laughter and singing. Soon his enthusiasm for life is rekindled. And what caused this sudden change? The discovery of a new world.

The discovery and exploration of the unknown is one of the greatest joys in life. The moment the unknown becomes known, we begin to look elsewhere and dream of meeting new people, of seeing new places and of learning new things.

This cycle never ends. Discovery and exploration are in our nature. But then, so is blindness. Not blindness of the eye, but blindness of the mind.

On the table beside me is a large paper clip. Until this moment, it wasn't there. My awareness of it brought it into reality. Not *actual* reality of course. It surely existed prior to my noticing it, but it didn't exist *to me*. So now I sit typing at my computer with a paper clip beside me. If I stop here, soon the paper clip will recede from my awareness and cease to exist. My temptation is to do just that. Ignore the paper clip and move on in search of more exciting things. But I don't. Not this time. I pick up the paper clip and ask, what's this? It is a thin, twisted piece of metal. Again. What's this? It's a money clip. Again. If I straighten it out, it is a lock pick. It is a small back scratcher. It is a fingernail cleaner. It is all this and more. But only if I recognize this as so. As long as I see it as only a paper clip, that is all it will ever be.

And from our earliest days, this is exactly how we're encouraged to think – each thing has a “correct” identity and it is our job to learn, from others of course, what that identity is. And it is frightening how well we do our job.

Not long ago, my children and I were running some errands and they grew restless in the backset of our car. To help pass the time we began to play a little game. Each of us would select an object in the car and then ask the others what else that object could be. We quizzed each other on my travel coffee mug, a bottle of sunscreen, the console of the car and finally my mobile phone. In a matter of

minutes my phone became, among other things, a paperweight, a light reflector, a hot potato, a baby toy, and a very small umbrella. When they felt they had exhausted the possibilities, I asked them one additional question.

"Now that we know all the things it *could* be, what is it *really*?"

Without delay, they explained to me that it was really a mobile phone, but it *could* be a paperweight, a reflector, etc.

"How do you know that?" I asked them.

"Because that's what it is," my son said. "It is a phone. We're only pretending it could be those other things."

"How do you know it isn't *really* a paper weight, but we just use it as a phone?"

"Because it isn't. It's a phone."

So despite all their efforts to generate new possibilities, they were convinced that their newfound options were only imaginary, while their initial classifications were real. The coffee mug was *really* a coffee mug and not something else because that's what it was. A coffee mug. They were unable to see that it was *only* a coffee mug because that is how we chose to use it and not due to some arbiter of identity. It would be just as valid to stick a handful of pens and pencils in it and call it a pencil holder or plant a daisy in it and call it a flowerpot. Of course, being children, we can't expect them to be able to understand their mistake. It takes an adult mind to recognize such faulty reasoning and avoid being victimized by it. But, if that's the case, why don't we?

A couple of years ago I bought a car I had wanted since high school. A red, convertible, Mustang GT. It was the car of my dreams and I treated it accordingly. I kept it washed and waxed. I forbade my children from eating in the backseat. And whenever I parked it, I parked it as far as possible from other cars so that its doors wouldn't get dinged. It was my baby and I wasn't going to let anything happen to it. One day I realized how obsessed I had become and told my wife how silly I felt spending so much time and energy worrying about "a car." In that instant my Mustang was transformed from a "dream car" to just a "car." I suddenly felt better about myself and actually enjoyed the vehicle more since it wasn't demanding so much of my attention. Ah, the joy of being enlightened. But, then it happened.

As my wife and I left the grocery store one day I saw a shopping cart jammed up against my car door. I ran to inspect the damage. There was a four-inch-long crease where the cart had hit the door. That was all it took. What was moments ago "just a car" somehow transformed back into my "dream car" and I went ballistic. You name the profanity and I uttered it. My wife tried to calm me down by reminding me that I myself had said it was "just a car." How dare she throw that back in my face! Didn't she understand what was happening? Someone had damaged the car of my dreams and she didn't even care. If she had only understood the "reality" of the situation she wouldn't have taken it so lightly.

And what was the "reality" that she didn't understand? That despite the fact I once thought of my Mustang as "just a car," I didn't really believe that. To me, that was just one way of seeing it. It wasn't the *right* way.

Imagine I am your arts and crafts instructor and I give you your first assignment. You are to make a decorative ashtray for a friend. After hours of molding, baking and painting you produce a beautiful work of art. You send it to your friend and cross your fingers in hopes she likes it. She does. You receive a gracious thank you note and an invitation to her house for dinner. When you arrive, you make a quick visit to the restroom where you are horrified to see your ashtray being used as a soap dish. How foolish of your friend not to see your gift in "the right way." You consider pointing out the problem, but decide against it. No sense in making her feel stupid and hurting her feelings. If she wants to treat an ashtray like a soap dish, that's her business and not yours. But soon, things go from bad to worse.

It turns out your friend loved your gift more than you knew and decided to mass market it to the world. Before you know it, thousands have been sold and people everywhere are now mistakenly using ashtrays as soap dishes. It's amazing how easily one misconception can turn so many people into fools.

Ludicrous? Of course it is. Anyone can see that your gift isn't *really* an ashtray, but simply a baked, bowl-shaped, painted piece of clay that can be used in any number of ways. As an ashtray, a soap dish, a drink coaster, a paperweight, a

decoration, etc. And the fact that someone uses it in a certain way doesn't automatically turn the object into any particular thing. For example, using a baked, bowl-shaped, painted piece of clay as a paperweight doesn't actually turn it into a paperweight. The object hasn't changed. Only our use of it has. From here it should be clear we could apply this same logic to any object in the universe. Our seeing an object as something doesn't turn it into that particular something. Our seeing a person in a particular way doesn't make that person that way. And our seeing the circumstances of life in a particular way doesn't make them that way. Only fools would think otherwise. Unfortunately, our world is filled with fools.

When we see friends acting in ways that don't fit our image of them we ask, "Who do they think they are?" Why? Because we "know" who they are. They are the way we have them pegged. When we meet people who are members of an opposing political party we "know" what they are. They're bleeding heart liberals or radical right-wingers. When we figure out who our enemies are, they will never fool us again. They may "pretend" to change and seek to make amends, but we "know" they aren't sincere. How? Because they are our enemies and enemies don't act that way. And when we look at the circumstances of our own lives, we may realize there are other ways of viewing them, but no matter what, these other ways are never quite as valid as those we have come to "know" are true.

If we are to reclaim the power to change our lives, it isn't enough for us to generate new ways of seeing things. We must also destroy our automatic and

unquestioned confidence that we have correctly identified the things in our lives. It isn't that we should reject outright the way we have identified the things in our lives, but rather, we should keep the possibility of new identities open.

We don't need to travel to new lands, meet new people or seek out new ideas to transform our experience of life. There is more to the world around us than we can ever know. But to discover it we must continually hammer against the illusions around us, no matter how real they appear until their façade cracks and true possibility takes its place.

## **HARNESSING THE TRUE POWER OF ENLIGHTENMENT**

Seeing through the hallucinations of our everyday lives is effortless to a man when he is in a state of enlightenment. He cannot imagine ever again being fooled by the house of mirrors he sees before him. But soon, as his detachment slips away, so does his objectivity. His house of mirrors becomes brick and mortar and he gets trapped inside. Though his only true chance of escape is for him to see through the illusion, this isn't yet a possibility. He is too busy looking for the "logical" way out. He must find a key to the door, jar the window loose, or get someone on the outside to let him out. Why doesn't he simply remember it is all an illusion and be done with it? Because he has the same problem the rest of us do – when he isn't experiencing enlightenment, his world looks and feels so real to him that there is no room or time for doubt to grow. He acts on what he "knows" to be true before he ever finds out if it really is.

Imagine crossing a busy street and suddenly, out of the corner of your eye, you see a car about to hit you. Do you stop to ask yourself if it is real before jumping out of the way or do you just jump? You jump, but why? Why didn't you take just a moment to question the "reality" of the situation? Because one doesn't question reality bearing down. One gets out of its way.

Certainly there are times when it is appropriate to accept your initial assessment of things and simply react. But these times are the exception and life typically affords us the opportunity to evaluate our circumstances before we act. Unfortunately, we rarely take advantage of the opportunity, not because of the urgency of life, but because of our instinctive and unconscious acceptance of our interpretations of reality as undeniable truth. Our interpretations and assumptions are as real to us as a speeding car and it never occurs to us to question them. But this is where the enlightened man differs from his unenlightened counterpart; every so often, it *does* occur to the enlightened man to question the nature of "reality." Thus, the true power of enlightenment is not in striving to reach and maintain an impossible state of higher awareness, but in questioning our way out of the illusions of daily life.

Whereas much self-help literature encourages us to rely on instinct and intuition, these are almost certain ways of guaranteeing we will never become enlightened. Why? Because our instincts and intuitions have become little more than conditioned responses that serve those who taught us how to respond. Rather than live life through instinct and intuition, the enlightened man strives to live a

life of insight. And insight isn't automatic. It is the result of a relentless questioning of those things in life that do not serve him.

Here are three questions that can push us in the right direction:

What *else* could it be? What *else* could it mean? What *else* is happening?

These questions can break the hold of our current beliefs so that adopting new ones can become a true possibility. However, these questions are not encouraged in normal social circles because they can lead to the rejection of social norms.

These questions are deceptively simple. Unlike Zen koans they appear to be easily answered. They are not – at least not definitively. When you ask them repeatedly, you will begin to get a sense of this. The “answers” will just keep coming and coming. This is not just a sign of their difficulty. It is also a sign you are heading in the right direction.

People who refuse to blindly accept a view of “reality” that is handed to them by teachers, leaders, parents and gurus are dangerous people indeed. How can those who wish to control us do so if our behavior isn't based on a fixed, and thus predictable, model of thinking? They can't. And they know it.

Years ago, a friend of mine unexpectedly became involved with an obscure, but devout religious organization. Within a few short weeks, his behavior became rather bizarre and soon he had alienated virtually everyone who knew him prior to his conversion. If he couldn't recruit someone into his new organization he would

turn around and viscously condemn them. Not being one to get involved in such groups, I soon became one of his worst enemies. I recall one particular encounter quite well.

After a rather bitter exchange over the validity of his new beliefs, I asked him a question that horrified him beyond description.

“Maybe I’m wrong,” I said. “Maybe everything you now believe is true and everything I believe is wrong. I don’t think so, but I will at least admit to you that it is possible. Can you say the same thing to me?”

I knew the conversation was over as he stood up, collected his papers and started to leave. When he reached the door he turned and said, “Never.”

It took over a year before we discussed our religious beliefs again, because that’s how long it took him to break away from the group that had held him so tightly in its grasp.

Later, when I asked him about the conversation I just described, he told me that he had been warned that people would try to instill doubt in his mind. He had been told that people who did so didn’t have his best interests in mind and couldn’t be trusted. By asking him to at least admit that there was a possibility, however small, that he could have been wrong, I became his enemy.

In a world built on illusion, there is little room for doubt.

This lesson, if we are to learn it at all, must be learned outside the scope of the social circles we find ourselves in every day. They cannot teach it as it threatens their very existence. This is true not just of religious cults, but also of

any social organization. The stronger its members' faith is, the stronger the group is. And the introduction of any doubt, however small, is the first step in the weakening of faith.

I am not making a case against social institutions in general. Our society clearly couldn't function without them and they often make our lives worth living. Yes, we often need our churches, companies, clubs, families and other social organizations almost as much as we need food, air and water. But when our participation in them becomes detrimental to us as individuals, what are we to do then? Blindly serve the organization? Or do we begin to think for ourselves and question whether or not we wish to remain a part of it?

Doubt is the key to enlightenment and to adopt this mindset is to begin to find your own way in life.

At this point a word of warning is in order: don't expect anyone to congratulate you on learning this material. Understanding and practicing it can indeed help set you free from the psychological traps that hold you in place. But to those who benefit from you being in your current state, this is a direct threat to their understanding of reality. And threats are not taken lightly.

*So long as men praise you, you can only be sure that you are not yet on your own true path but on someone else's.*

*Friedrich Nietzsche*

## **CHAPTER 7 - ENLIGHTENMENT IN ACTION**

You will not be enlightened when you dedicate your life to ending hunger. You will not be enlightened when you give up your worldly possessions and move to Tibet. And you will not be enlightened when you become more loving and peaceful toward your fellow man. You will be enlightened when, and only when, you see through the illusions of life. Once you reach this state, you may choose to perform these or thousands of other noble tasks. But they are not required. In fact, nothing is required. Instead, how you will act in the world becomes a real choice for perhaps the first time in your life. What you do with it is up to you. Feed the hungry. Save the whales. Or build an empire.

But enlightenment is not about action. It is about seeing. And learning to see for yourself is the result of questioning the unquestionable. The more you do this, the more you will open up your world to true possibility.

### **EMBRACING CONTRADICTIONS AND CONFLICT**

While baseball may be billed as America's national pastime, it pales in comparison to our love of contradictions and conflict. The preacher caught stealing from his congregation. The politician and the intern. The mother who kills her children. We are shocked at the inherent contradictions involved and can't seem to get enough of these stories. In fact, if technology has done nothing else to improve the quality of our lives, it has given us hundreds of cable TV channels that often fill our lives with the conflict and contradictions we so desire.

But while we can't seem to get enough of the conflict and contradictions we see in others, we are obsessed with eliminating those we discover within ourselves. We want to lose weight but can't resist the chocolate cake in our refrigerators. We want to be better parents, but often catch ourselves ignoring or sometimes even screaming at our children. We think of ourselves as honest people, but then are dismayed when friends question our ethics and we realize they have a valid point. When we uncover our inner conflicts we often become paralyzed. What am I to do? What kind of person am I? As we entertain these types of questions all forward progress is stopped. For us to be able to get on with our lives we must either answer the questions or forget we asked them.

For the unenlightened man, these are his only means of moving forward since the instant he becomes aware of an inner conflict, his life stops and his battle begins. And since the elimination of one contradiction simply clears the way for another, his battle never really ends. The enlightened man recognizes this and stops making the elimination of conflict and contradiction his primary goal in life. Instead, he recognizes the potential power they hold and exercises the patience and restraint necessary to harness this power.

Early in the movie *The Patriot*, Mel Gibson's character, Benjamin Martin, finds himself squarely in the middle of an inner conflict. He is torn between honoring his own values and those of his country. He handles the conflict well enough until his unwillingness to serve his country leads to some devastating consequences in his own life. He is now distraught as he considers what part his

own actions have already played, and may continue to play, in the misery that is unfolding around him. Does he continue to honor his own inner values or does he serve the “higher good” of his nation? As he sits in agony, contemplating this question, a loving relative tries to help him resolve his inner conflict.

“You have done nothing for which you should be ashamed,” she tells him.

This person truly cares for Mel Gibson’s character and is troubled by seeing him in so much pain. She has his best interests at heart and is doing her best to help him.

Now, think of how most of us might react to her kind words. In an effort to resolve our inner conflict we might be tempted to accept and embrace her words. But with that one response we would have given away all our power. If Mel Gibson’s character had responded this way, the movie would have been over right then and there. His opportunity to become a hero would have been washed away by his relative’s compassionate words.

But, what if Mel Gibson had sought to *distract* himself from his inner conflict? Maybe he would have agreed with her and then asked her to go for a walk or have a bite to eat. That would get his mind off his troubles. But again, it would also destroy his opportunity to change his life.

No, Mel Gibson’s character doesn’t attempt to resolve his inner conflict or distract himself from it. He faces it head on.

When his relative tells him, “You have done nothing for which you should be ashamed. He responds, “I have done nothing. And for that I am ashamed.”

And it is here that his hero's journey begins. His response doesn't resolve his inner conflict and it doesn't take his mind off of it. His response turns the conflict into an inner source of energy that propels him to act. Is he still ashamed of his previous actions? Yes. Is he still aware of them? Yes. But they no longer cripple him. They empower him.

You see, the very situations we seek to resolve often contain the very keys to the power we seek, *if* we can leave them be long enough for their lessons to appear. Clearly there are contradictions and conflicts that must be handled immediately to ensure the safety of ourselves or others. But not all contradictions we become aware of are emergencies. And for those that aren't, if we can learn to entertain them and continue on in our lives in spite of them, they can become some of the greatest sources of power and wisdom in our lives.

*The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.*

*F. Scott Fitzgerald*

## **CREATING CONTEXT**

Outside my window I can see a neighbor walking his dog along our street. This is a daily occurrence and, until now, I haven't thought much about it. But, being in an inquisitive mood, I ask myself, "Besides walking his dog, what else is he doing?" Let's see.

He's exercising. He's letting his dog go potty. He's moving in an easterly direction. He's wearing out his shoes. He's wasting time he could be using for something else. He's distracting me from my writing. I could go on, but this is enough to work with. Now, let me ask you a question. Of the possibilities I just mentioned, which one is the *right* one? There isn't a right one? Okay then, which one is the *most* right? Silly question? Of course it is. There isn't *a* right answer. They are all equally right. But, they are not equally useful.

Why did I notice, without effort, "a man walking his dog," but I had to work to notice other things such as "a man moving in an easterly direction" and "a man wasting time?" Because our current thoughts and concerns determine what we see.

If my neighbor's physician saw the same thing I did, he might say, "It's nice to see my patient exercising." My neighbor's wife might say, "There he is again, wasting his time when he could be mowing our lawn." And a policeman on a stakeout in the neighborhood might say, "There is a man walking in an easterly direction." They would unconsciously frame the situation in the way that would be most appropriate given their current thoughts and concerns. You and I are no different.

Though it is certainly possible for us to generate alternative contexts for behavior, we rarely do. Instead, we typically accept the first one that arises in our mind and leave it at that. After all, what difference does it make to us whether

someone is exercising, walking his dog or wasting his time? It doesn't, unless you want to harness another powerful way of altering your reality.

Whereas most people won't give this idea a second thought, the enlightened man recognizes the awesome power it illustrates. The power of context. When you see through the illusions around you, you no longer have to discover the "correct" context in a given situation; you are free to create an *effective* context in which to act. This isn't wishful thinking. Wishful thinking is the strategy of the unenlightened. Wishful thinkers find themselves upset about a given situation and try to get out of it by repeating to themselves absurd mantras such as, "I'm calm, cool and collected" or, "This isn't happening to me." Why do they do this? Because they believe their initial assessment of circumstances is more real than anything they might come up with later and their only hope is to temporarily override the "truth" by repeating a "lie."

The enlightened man, however, recognizes the absurdity of seeing one context as inherently more *right* than another, and is thus free to accept or create a context that serves him and not enslaves him.

This reminds me of a well-known story that is often used to illustrate the power of context. Once there were two men working side by side at a construction site. One of them was grumbling as he worked, the other whistling. When asked what he was doing, the first man responded, "I'm laying bricks, what does it look like I'm doing?" When the second man was asked the same question, he replied, "I'm building a cathedral, what does it look like I'm doing."

Though their physical actions were identical, their contexts couldn't have been more different. One man's context was debilitating, the other's, invigorating. While this story is encouraging, it leaves one big question unanswered. *How* do we change the way we see things?

About three months ago I found a suspicious looking mole on my foot. Ordinarily this wouldn't have concerned me, except I have a history of skin cancer and the thought of going through that ordeal again terrified me. I looked back at the mole. Maybe it wasn't so suspicious looking after all, I told myself, then promptly put it out of my mind. But, every day after that, as I stepped out of the shower and dried my feet, the thoughts of biopsies and surgeries would return, as did my panic. I just couldn't go through that again, I told myself. It just couldn't be skin cancer. And each time the thoughts would go away. Unfortunately, the mole and the terror did not. I had to go see my doctor, but I just couldn't bring myself to do it.

As a result, my fears soon worked their way into other areas of my life. I began to have trouble concentrating at work. I started losing my temper at home and I began to have nightmares. Of course, I didn't know what was causing any of this until I tried to describe what enlightenment is like to a friend. I needed an example of how suddenly one can change his perspective. I instantly pointed to my foot and said, "It's like this thing on my foot. It has terrified me because until this very moment, no matter what I've tried to tell myself, I've just 'known' it's cancer and I'm not up for that again. Now, as I sit here with you, I realize I don't

‘know’ any such thing. And just like that, I see it as a ‘thing’ and not ‘cancer.’ And it’s much easier for me to see a doctor about a ‘thing’ than it is about ‘cancer.’”

The physical action I needed to take, that is, go see a doctor, didn’t change, only the context did. But when it did, the same action that had been so difficult suddenly became easy. But how? By simply *remembering* that one context is never inherently more right than another. The instant I ceased to “know” my instinctive context was true, I was able to choose a more useful one. And I did. It turned out my mole wasn’t malignant, but the lesson it taught me has been invaluable. There is nothing to do but remind yourself of the illusion. When you do that, you are free to choose how to face the things before you. You can also choose how to face the past.

What’s done is done. No matter how much we may wish things were different, we simply cannot change the past. This is no big surprise to most of us as it’s common wisdom that has been passed down through the ages. It would take a god to change the past and we’re not gods. So the realization that what’s done is done helps us accept the past and face the future. But, what if the past isn’t as fixed as we’ve been led to believe?

A woman I once knew had what she considered an ideal family life. She had a loving husband, great kids, and an affluent lifestyle. She would often share many of her happy memories with my wife and me whenever we would get

together. We would hear stories of her fantastic honeymoon, the birth of her children, her recent wedding anniversary and even the time her husband surprised her with a trip overseas. No matter what happened in the future, no one could take those memories away from her. After all, what's done is done right? Not quite.

It seems her husband had a secret. There were other lovers in his life and they weren't all women. When she discovered this, the very memories she had once cherished began to haunt her. Did her husband ever really love her or did he marry her to try to cover up his other life? Did he really have a few hours of work to do when they were on their honeymoon or was he seeing someone else? And who was the friend he had to visit when they were overseas? Suddenly, with her entire past in question, she struggled with what to do in the present and with what the future might hold.

No, what's done is never really done, is it? Though it is clear we cannot go back in time and alter the physical events that have already taken place, the truth is, the physical aspects of the past are only a small part of it. Our interpretation of the past often plays an even larger role in our day-to-day lives and our interpretation is *always* capable of being changed.

Many years ago an elderly lady whom I respected insulted me for no apparent reason. At that time I had dropped out of college and I explained to her that it was because I wanted to take some time off till I knew what I wanted to do with my life. I remember she laughed and then suggested that maybe I just wasn't college material. I was stunned. Why would she say such a thing? That topic of

conversation ended right then and there. She didn't explain herself and she didn't apologize. For several years I held this against her and, even though it was never discussed again, it badly damaged our relationship. But then, I discovered that what's done is never done.

About five years after this initial insult, I was explaining the story to an acquaintance who happened to be about the same age as the woman who had insulted me. But rather than consoling me, my acquaintance told me something that changed my life. He explained that, back in the 1940's, when he and this woman were about my age, many people couldn't afford college and as a result, weren't considered college material. He said they didn't consider it an insult. It was just the way things were. Then he had the gall to suggest that perhaps this woman never intended to insult me after all, but instead meant to support me in my decision. In that instant, my past changed.

If you want to see a dramatic example of how people can show up in our lives and dramatically alter our understanding of the past, rent the movie *Disney's The Kid* starring Bruce Willis. Don't be fooled by the title. This is a powerful movie for anyone, of any age, who struggles with their past. It's one of the most inspiring movies I've ever seen.

So, while we cannot change the physical events of the past, our understanding of those events *can* change and when they do, the change can ripple throughout all time, past, present and future. By unconsciously accepting the notion that what's done is done, you leave the power to change the past solely in

the hands of circumstance. But by accepting the notion that what's done is *never* done, reality becomes flexible and you can begin to change the course of your entire life. Including your past.

*Who controls the past, controls the future. Who controls the present, controls the past.*

*George Orwell*

## **CHAPTER 8 - DISCOVERING YOUR OWN KEY**

You wake up one morning and discover fresh bruises and scratches on your body. What's worse is you were alone all night so no one else could be to blame. Did you sleepwalk? Did you fall out of bed? No, you would have remembered that. There is no logical explanation for what has happened, so you try to put it out of your mind. But a few days later it happens again. Same circumstances, same type of injuries. It becomes clear that you must be injuring yourself even though you have no memory of doing so. What would you do to resolve this problem?

There are two basic approaches you can take. You can try to find some way to prevent hurting yourself the next time you fall asleep or you can attempt to become an insomniac. Though either approach would solve your problem, they aren't equally feasible. Becoming an insomniac might work in theory, but it isn't practical as a long-term solution. Taking steps to stop hurting yourself while still getting a good night's rest is your only true option. It would be foolish to try to become an insomniac. Likewise, it is just as foolish to attempt to become a "psychological insomniac" by seeking a permanent state of enlightenment.

Again, enlightenment is nothing but an experience. It comes and goes like any other. It is impossible to keep oneself in the heightened state of awareness

that is the hallmark of the enlightenment experience. Nor, should we want to. This is the discovery that changed my life.

Under my old understanding of enlightenment, the experience I had in August of 2000, though profound, was just another sign of failure. Since it didn't last, I hadn't yet reached the exalted state of "true enlightenment." If I had left it at that, I would still be looking for someone to show me the way to the Promised Land. Instead, when I came to see enlightenment as an experience and not a permanent state, I realized I had already found what I had been seeking; I *had* experienced enlightenment, there was no doubt about it. And though the experience soon faded, I realized that it was only natural for it to do so. With this one insight, what others might have had me believe was a failure, became one of the most important events in my life.

I suddenly saw two major problems with our attempting to achieve permanent enlightenment. One, like becoming an insomniac, it wasn't practical. No one, regardless of what they might tell you, can maintain an unbroken state of higher awareness. Something will eventually distract them from their bliss. Something will draw them out of their detachment and require their participation in life, even if it is nothing more than a pesky mosquito buzzing around their head. And two, if we really stop to think about it, most of us wouldn't want to be in a permanent state of higher awareness any more than we would want to be in a permanent state of anything. Why? Because even though many of our troubles stem from being in lower states of awareness, so do most of our joys.

The greatest moments of our lives often occur when we are “lost” in the activities of life. We lose ourselves in everything from books, movies, and conversation, to sports, love, sex, and war. We literally have no self-awareness during many of the greatest moments of our lives. Our focus becomes so intense, our awareness so narrow, that we become “attached” to the situation. Without this attachment, that is, without our “unenlightened moments,” these experiences would be impossible. Ultimately, if we are to maintain access to the most joyous moments of our lives, we must also risk experiencing the darkest ones as well. This is true of every man, even the enlightened one.

So what sets an enlightened man apart from others isn’t that he never falls into a lower state of awareness. He does. In fact, he spends much of his life in just such a state as he goes from one experience to the next. What separates him from others is that, when his awareness is at its peak, he marvels at the insights he finds inside that fine but narrow window of enlightenment, and every so often, is able to remember them once the experience has gone.

This is all well and good, but what if you haven’t yet had an enlightenment experience? How can you find your own source of wisdom if you have yet to experience the detachment that is required to generate it? The bad news is, until you’ve had such an experience, you can’t. The good news is, no matter what you may have been led to believe, you have already had *many* such experiences, any of which you can use to generate more in the future. The only problem is you overlooked these experiences because they didn’t look like the magical images we

have come to expect. Recognizing these experiences is the first step to tapping into your own source of wisdom – your own source of enlightenment.

An enlightenment experience doesn't have to show up with a pool of heavenly light falling on your head, harps playing in the background and swirls of incense in the air. An enlightenment experience can look very ordinary, can occur in the most unlikely of places, and can be easily missed if you don't know what to look for. And what is that? The “jolt” of a new perspective.

Earlier I asked you to remember a time when you experienced an unexpected, sudden and dramatic change in perspective. I asked you to do this at the beginning of the book rather than at the end for one reason - to demonstrate that as long as you are looking for enlightenment as it is traditionally described, you aren't likely to recognize it when it does, in fact, show up. Consider, if someone had asked you prior to reading this book to name a time when you were enlightened, would you have selected the one you did in this exercise? Probably not. And even worse, you might not have been able to select one at all thinking you had yet to have a true enlightenment experience. Not recognizing the potential in your own experience is what has driven you into the arms of gurus and other experts in the past. Now that you have identified an enlightenment experience of your own, you have something on which to build and create more such experiences in the future.

Still, to harness this power an important distinction must be made. The power of the experience you identified lies not in the new understanding that you

acquired, but in the period *in between* understandings. That is the moment of enlightenment.

If you recall the night I woke up and experienced my life in an entirely new light, you can see the very qualities of the experience I have asked you to remember. It was unexpected, it was sudden and it was dramatic. And it was these qualities that gave me the “jolt” of enlightenment. For the briefest moment in time I was in a psychological freefall as my old way of seeing life gave way and a new one had yet to take hold. This freefall was the core of my enlightenment experience, not the hour of bliss that followed. During that hour I became “attached” to the idea that my life was a gift. What a wonderful attachment. But that’s not enlightenment. Enlightenment is that moment *between* perspectives when everything you were just certain about is now up for grabs and your future is wide open.

Sounds a bit blasphemous in light of what we have been led to believe about enlightenment, doesn’t it? Where are the fireworks? Where is the chanting and the meditation? And where is the guru to take all the credit? Nowhere. There is only you and a “jolt” of enlightenment and that is all there needs to be. Until you recognize this, you will always be chasing the elusive and illusive notion of enlightenment that is always just a book, seminar or guru away. But if you stop chasing the fantasy long enough to consider the power of your own experience, you may be surprised at what you find.

Imagine that sitting before you is a mysterious old envelope. Something about it strikes you as familiar, but you can't recall what it is. You gently open the envelope and discover a delightful collection of long lost photographs from your past. There you are riding a pony. In this one you're squinting with a forced, toothless grin in your third grade class picture. Here's one of you and your best friend before he moved away and you never heard from him again. There are some photos of your old family vacations and even one of your first car. Nothing particularly earth shattering, but they do bring back warm memories. Though the pictures themselves are old and faded, some even out of focus and cracked, you hardly notice; it is the memories they evoke that count.

Now imagine the same envelope sitting before you. This time when you open it, it contains not faded old pictures from your past, but recent, crisp, full color photos of overseas vacations, black tie affairs and romantic getaways. They are the kind of pictures that take one's breath away. Each picture is in and of itself a work of art, the kind of picture you might find in a gallery somewhere. There isn't a person in the world who wouldn't find these photographs to be of higher quality and more valuable than the first ones. Not a person in the world that is, except for you. You see, these new photographs aren't yours. The beautiful, smiling faces within them belong to strangers. The exotic places where the pictures were taken are unrecognizable to you. And the beautiful memories they contain belong to others.

No matter how beautiful the new pictures are, no matter how desirable others may find them, they cannot compare to yours. The pictures from your past may be cracked, faded and out of focus; they may be of “ordinary” events in “ordinary” locations, but the memories and emotions they stir in you are strong. They are *your* memories based on *your* experiences and that is what gives them their power. We wouldn’t think of trading our own cherished family photos to someone else for new, more exciting photos of strange people and unknown lands. That would defeat the purpose of the photos themselves. Why then, do we routinely hold the experiences of others to be more beautiful, meaningful and profound than our own?

I assure you that, if you strip away all the flowery descriptions and heavenly explanations from the enlightenment experiences of others, you will find a common core: a sudden, dramatic and unexpected shift in the way they saw the world. Nothing more, nothing less. Sound familiar? Perhaps like something you may have once experienced?

No matter how ordinary your experience appears to be in light of those you may have heard about, no matter how insignificant it may seem next to the “miraculous conversions” of others, it has the one vital element that the others do not: it is yours and that is enough.

You see, in the face of an unforgiving reality, we often reach for help. We tend to hold others above ourselves and often respect their wisdom and intelligence more than our own. While there is nothing wrong with this approach,

there is a source of help that can topple all others. And what is that source? Remembering. Remembering that we have faced an unforgiving reality before, and that in an instant, it crumbled before us and left us with a new understanding of our world. And when we can remember this, we can leave the gurus behind.

Remembering that your understanding of the world can change at any moment isn't always enough to make it do so. But it is enough to generate the doubt that is necessary to begin the process. When we doubt, we begin to question. When we question, we begin to uncover new ways of seeing the world. And when our absolute certainty in our current perspective gives way, we are free to adopt the way of seeing the world that best serves our interests.

Still, there is one obvious question that must be addressed. Where's the so-called bliss of the enlightenment experience? After all, the promise of bliss is what makes enlightenment the ultimate carrot of mankind. Except for the sexual orgasm, this state of enlightened bliss may be the most sought after experience of mankind. If there isn't necessarily always bliss involved, what's the point in pursuing it?

Perhaps you didn't feel blissful during the experience you identified in our exercise. If not, how could this experience truly be referred to as enlightenment? Because, again, enlightenment is simply an experience and experience is subjective. What thrills one person may frighten, bore or even seem irrelevant to another.

As long as you equate enlightenment with bliss, you will likely be searching for a very long time. Though you may in fact feel bliss during the experience of enlightenment, it isn't the defining characteristic of the experience and it isn't always a part of it. If, on the other hand, you hold the notion that "detachment" is the core of the enlightenment experience, you will no longer need others to show you the way, for these experiences are common. You need only recognize the experiences when they occur.

## **NOW WHAT?**

It is at this point in a book that a teacher summarizes his philosophy and lays down the correct course of action for his students. In other words, he gives you "the answers" to life's great mysteries. And the acceptance of these "answers" as gospel is what causes his students to trip up before they've even left the gate. It is here that I will break ranks with the "gurus" and "masters" of the world for I will not leave you with answers, but questions. Questions that, if you will ask them regularly and seek your answers only from within yourself, will lead you to more powerful answers than anyone else could ever offer.

These questions will look familiar because I mentioned them earlier. There are three of them. What else could it be? What else could it mean? What else is happening?

They are perhaps three of the most important questions you can ever ask yourself when you're faced with confusion. Each of them helps open up a specific area in which we often become blind to the world.

“What else could it be?” helps break up the notion that the things in our lives have one, and only one, correct identity.

“What else could it mean?” helps reveal alternative meanings for the circumstances, events and symbols of our lives.

And “What else is happening?” literally broadens our awareness in any given moment.

This last question is particularly important as it runs counter to the unconscious question that drives virtually all human behavior. And that question is, “What happens next?” This is the question that holds our attention from moment to moment. What happens next? What happens next? This is the question that we seek to answer virtually every moment of our lives. Entertainment, news, gossip, the stock market. Everyone wants to know what happens next. And while this question holds “our attention,” it is the other question, namely “What else is happening?” that often holds “the answers” to our problems. This is the question that will reveal our blind spots and open up new possibilities in everything we do.

Again, these are questions you must ultimately answer for yourself. How other people would answer these questions is irrelevant to your enlightenment. It

doesn't matter what *they* think. It only matters what you can reveal to yourself by questioning the world around you.

Though it is commonly thought that great wisdom comes from studying ancient scrolls, long-dead poets and celebrated martyrs of days gone by, there is just as much wisdom available in the day-to-day circumstances of our lives. In fact, the everyday events of our lives may in fact be the greatest source of wisdom we can discover. Why? Because this source of wisdom doesn't come with convenient how-to instructions and centuries of experts proclaiming its authenticity and validity, but rather must be uncovered, translated and celebrated by no one but ourselves. In discovering the wisdom available to us in everyday life, we must learn to question, learn to see, and ultimately be strong enough to accept the lessons we learn on our own authority.

In parting, I want to remind you not to expect others to congratulate or support you in learning and practicing the ideas in this book, especially not those who benefit from the social order you are currently involved in. The more you begin to rely on your own interpretations of reality as opposed to those given to you by others, the more of a threat you become to those who benefit from your current state of affairs. When others feel they are beginning to lose control over you, it is only natural that they will try to discourage your efforts to change. They will point out consequences to your actions that you haven't considered. They will explain where your logic is mistaken and how your new thoughts are inconsistent with your past commitments. And more often than not, they will have

a point. What they say will, to a degree, make sense and that is what will make it so tempting to give in and revert back to your old understanding of reality.

Whether you do or not, is not as important as what you learn from the contradictions and conflicts you will face. Resist the temptation to take the easy way out. Sit with the discomfort long enough for the lesson to become clear. As the eighteenth century English poet John Gay once said, “When we risk no contradictions, it prompts the tongue to deal in fiction.”

Perhaps it’s time to take that risk and speak the truth. *Your* truth. The magic you’ll find within will eclipse anything you can discover listening to anyone else.