

Conscious Being

Reading Eleven: The Law of Radiance

From Chapter 9 of Conscious Being

Enlightenment Is Our Natural State

It is the birthright of each and every one of us to live an awakened life. Most religions and spiritual traditions teach us that we need to adopt a certain belief system or follow some prescribed steps in order to attain a state of enlightenment. A long-held belief about awakening is that only a small number of people, destined to become gurus or spiritual teachers, can attain it. It is certainly true that until recent times only a small minority of people on the planet had attained this state of full self-realization. These saints, mystics, and spiritual masters were seen as “special.” And they certainly were, at the time. However, times are changing.

We are now living in an era of rapid acceleration of the phenomenon of spiritual awakening. The truth is that awakening is absolutely available to every single human being on the planet right now, because enlightenment is our most natural state. When we strip away all the concepts and ideas we have learned over our lifetime—about ourselves and how we view the world—we uncover the simple truth. We discover who we have always been—pure consciousness. Before the accumulation of ideas, we were pure awareness. We are still pure awareness. This awareness simply witnesses life, as it unfolds, through and around us. There is nothing we need to do, or believe, to become enlightened. We simply remember who we essentially are. We already are that which we seek.

Here is a beautiful story that illustrates this. The story was related to me by a friend who knew a young couple who had just birthed their second baby. They noticed that their older child, then four years of age, was sneaking into the newborn's room at night. Curious what the four-year-old was up to, they decided to install a video camera in the baby's room so they could observe what was happening. To their surprise, they discovered the older child was visiting the baby and saying: "Please tell me about God...I'm beginning to forget." This child had the awareness that his innate sense of wholeness was already slipping away. And he realized that the baby was capable of reminding him of what he was forgetting.

Enlightenment is actually a very ordinary state. It is also an extra-ordinary state. It feels elevated because it is not burdened by all the weighty ideas and beliefs we had previously amassed. When we come to realize the truth of who and what we are, we are no longer limited by the false sense of identity within which we had previously been confined.

Our natural state of freedom is restored. There is no longer anything to fear. The deep peace of our true nature is revealed to us. We are no longer run by the programs in our mind—that is, our learned ideas about who we are and how we "should" live, including our concepts of "right and wrong," and "good and bad."

We have remembered that we are pure consciousness. Consciousness simply is. It is not for or against anything. It simply is everything. When we are fully self-realized, we naturally speak and act as love. We could not possibly do anything else.

Our True Nature

Experiencing ourselves as love is the most natural thing in the world. The path to remembering ourselves as love is one of dismantling or unlearning everything we have been taught that contradicts this truth. Self-realization is nothing more than coming into alignment with what we inherently are already. Throughout our lives, we have received messages that taught us otherwise. Often at a young age, we come to the conclusion that we are less than whole and perfect, that we are less than love. For the most part, children believe the messages they hear. That is because their minds have not yet developed the analytical ability to question them. Even though some messages were counterintuitive, a young, undeveloped mind cannot help but believe what it is told, especially when it is a repeated message. This creates a distorted or false self-image. It's like looking into one of those funhouse mirrors that pulls one's image way out of shape. When, as children, we received feedback that we were bad, that there was something wrong with us, that we were lacking in some way, it's as though we were looking at a distorted reflection and believing it to be true.

The messages that created a false self-image might have come from family members, friends, school teachers, or other authority figures that we assumed were wiser than us. These messages continue as we grow into adulthood, getting layered upon and often reinforcing those messages we received as children. However, when we wake up to the reality of who we are, we see that we were given those messages by people who were themselves living in a state of forgetfulness about their true identity. They were not capable of always mirroring an accurate reflection to us.

As we remember our true identity, we realize that all of our experiences have been part of our journey from unconsciousness to consciousness. There is nobody to blame. Everything happened exactly as it did. We have been part of the evolution of consciousness, waking up to itself. In order to experience light, we have to experience darkness. Without darkness, we cannot appreciate light. Darkness has no power. It is merely absence of light.

Disengaging the Mind

The realization of our true nature can happen in an instant. It can happen at any moment. However, often when we catch a glimpse of it, our mind quickly reasserts itself. Sometimes we experience a prolonged state of wakefulness before our mind takes back its control. These glimpses of our natural state arise in the space between our thoughts. They happen the moment we stop identifying with our thoughts. The shift of focus, from the content of our mind to the space in which our thoughts arise, is the shift from separation to oneness. No matter what we are thinking, thought is thought. Awareness is not affected by thought. As long as we identify with our thoughts, we are identified with what is changing and temporary. With a slight change of focus, we can shift our identity to what is changeless and permanent.

It is often said that the only thing we can rely on is change. This is certainly true if our focus is solely on the physical dimension of life, which includes our mental and emotional states. Everything physical is subject to change. And our thoughts and emotions are subject to change. It seems as though we are currently experiencing more rapid change in our lives than ever before. Our jobs, relationships, finances, and living situations are all less

stable than they once were. It is evident that security cannot be found in external circumstances. But when we shift our focus to what is changeless—awareness itself—we can experience the only true security there is. When we cultivate an awareness of pure consciousness, we are in touch with what is eternal. In this heightened state of awareness, we simply witness the ever-changing events in “relative reality,” yet stay grounded in a greater, or ultimate reality.

When I was in my late 30s, I lost everything that I had worked so hard to achieve. Without much warning, everything I had strived for and accumulated was gone. Despite feeling devastated, one of the gifts of this experience was that I no longer had anything left to lose. Therefore, I had no reason to fear loss of anything. From this experience, I was able to separate out my true self from my material possessions and from the circumstances of my life. I was aware of the “I” that did not change when everything around me completely changed. I then decided that if I was going to rebuild my life, I was going to do it from the inside out, not the outside in. I knew that everything outside of me could be taken away in an instant. I had to find a way of recognizing my true foundation.

In his book, *The Second Book of the Tao*, Stephen Mitchell states, “The master knows that in looking forward there are endless possibilities, but looking backwards, there’s only one.” The truth of this statement became vividly clear to me and I realized I no longer needed to regret the past. I was also no longer identified with the “things” that inevitably change in life.

The Illusion of Separateness

We have all been conditioned to divide our experiences into “good and bad,” or “right and wrong,” as illustrated in the following analogy. Say you are rowing a boat down a river and another boat hits yours. If you look over and see that nobody is in the other boat, nobody is to blame for what happened. But if your boat is hit by another boat and you look over and see someone in that boat, your conditioned mind may immediately blame that person for your experience. Your ego wants to make the other person responsible for “what they did” to you. However, from a different perspective—a perspective of oneness—that other person is part of the natural world, part of the oneness of life. He is no guiltier than nature itself. When we stop dividing the world into “us and them,” there is no longer anyone to blame for our uncomfortable experiences. We take full responsibility for how we respond to life.

If we take an honest look at our lives, right now, we can allow ourselves to see where we divide our world into “us and them” or “right and wrong.” In other words, we can see where we hold biases or judgment about others. It then becomes clear how we create every single division or separation in the world we inhabit. We create it with the power of our perception. When we believe these thoughts, the division feels real. When we believe it’s real, our system generates emotions to match the beliefs. We assume our emotion is confirmation of the truth of our belief. But our belief creates the emotion. This is how we create our individualized reality. It’s how we create feelings of superiority and inferiority, the desire to blame or harm another, feelings of hatred, or fear of a perceived other.

Attaining enlightenment requires that we be willing to examine and make an honest appraisal of our perception. It's possible to discover the lens through which we are seeing life. It entails accepting what we find and working with it. There is a certain familiarity and comfort about continuing to perceive the world in the way we have always perceived it. It can be difficult, and sometimes painful, to confront the darker aspects of ourselves. But, we can claim more of our light only by being willing to walk through the dark and uncomfortable places we encounter within— not by avoiding them or trying to maneuver around them. The only way out is through.

The Truth about Karma

Karma is not an outside force. It is repetitively thinking the same idea about ourselves and about the world and getting the same results. It feels like it's coming from outside of us. In actuality, we are imprinting our thoughts, attitudes, intentions, and beliefs—whether they are conscious or unconscious—upon the world, and receiving them back in return. If we believe that we are fundamentally flawed or inferior, then life will seem to reflect that reality back to us. We will see it in our circumstances, and in the people we encounter and how we interpret what they say to us. If we are convinced that we don't deserve, or are not capable, life will seem to confirm that to be true.

That will happen again and again until we change the program or the lens through which we are looking. If we feel confident and know that we can achieve our highest goals, our belief and corresponding actions will allow that to be reflected back to us in our lives.

Quite often, people come into the New Thought or New Age movement and simply “redress” old concepts and call them new. The idea of a “cosmic 2x4” is a perfect example of this. A cosmic 2x4 is seen as the universe sending us a message or teaching us a lesson when we do not “properly” surrender our individual will.

People simply change the name of a punishing God to something that sounds different. I am not saying that life does not include growth opportunities in the form of difficulty. I am just offering the possibility that it is not an outside force “doing this” to us. More accurately, it is an opportunity to come into alignment with our true nature.

Each of us is accountable for how we view our world. Nobody else has the power to change the internal workings of our minds and hearts. However, surrounding ourselves with people who support and encourage our evolving perspective can be enormously powerful. It is comparable to planting ourselves in fertile soil that nurtures our growth. The world in which we live is a world of our own making. The world does not actually exist “out there.”

The relationship we have with our world is the relationship we have created in our minds. No other world exists. The world we perpetuate is the world we perpetuate in our minds. It is also the world we model for others who live within our field of influence. When we choose to step into the reality of oneness, we immediately inhabit that world of connectedness with all things, based on love.

That world already exists, within us, and it is available to us at any given moment. We choose it—or not—moment to moment. We show love by

being conscious of the words and actions we use to respond to life, in the present moment. If we are not awake enough to consciously choose our response, an unconscious or automatic response, based on our past conditioning, will emerge and dictate the conditions of our lives.

Shining Our Light

To enlighten means to “shine light upon.” When we are living an awakened life, rather than looking for love outside ourselves, we live as light, as love. Each of us has this innate ability to shine love and light upon any situation we encounter that lacks it, that is in need of it. In the awakened state, we are no longer waiting for someone or something outside of us to provide the light or love we have been seeking. No matter what situation we find ourselves in, when we have remembered who we truly are—consciousness itself—we naturally shine our light upon that which we witness. From this place, we no longer play a victim role. We know ourselves to be inviolable.

In the awakened state, we understand that not everyone has yet come to recognize the reality of who and what they are. We may be around others who have not yet realized their freedom to choose the kind of world in which they live. We know that we always maintain our freedom to choose—and that it is not for us to impose our choice on others. Each of us arrives at self-realization in our own time. Once we have fully arrived there ourselves, we have a natural, compassionate understanding for those who have not. By radiating our light, we serve as a reminder and an inspiration to others who have not yet remembered their true essence.