

Enlightenment

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Enlightenment

The Buddha's Enlightenment

Some time, in the far distant past, there was an ascetic named Sumedha. He was one of the greatest, if not the greatest, ascetic in all of the world. He was renowned throughout India as a very spiritually advanced individual. One day he came down from the mountains and heard that the Buddha had arisen. He thought to himself, "Surely, if I listen to the Buddha's teaching, I will be able to free myself from suffering." At that time the people were clearing a path for the Buddha to walk, and he thought, "Well this would be a great act of merit," and so he joined them.

When he saw the Buddha coming, however, he realized that with his great spiritual attainments he could himself become a Buddha. Instead of listening to the Buddha's teachings, he could make a vow to one day be just like that, a Buddha. So, instead of waiting to listen to the Buddha's teaching, he lay himself down in the mud, and determined that his body should be a bridge across the uneven muddy landscape. Even though he would probably die as a result of being trod on by all these monks, he determined to sacrifice his life as a sign of his commitment to becoming a Buddha himself. Dīpaṅkara Buddha saw him lying there and said to the monks, "You see that ascetic lying in the mud? One day he will become a Buddha."

And then for four *asaṅkheyyā* and 100,000 great aeons, this ascetic was born and died and born and died, spending countless lifetimes cultivating the perfections. The time that it took for Sumedha to become enlightened was four *asaṅkheyyā* and 100,000 great aeons. The word *asaṅkheyya* means uncountable. But to get an idea of what it's like, suppose you had a pit, 16 kilometers wide, 16 kilometers across, 16 kilometers deep, and every hundred angel-years someone were to drop a grain of rice into the pit. A hundred years as an angel is about three and a half million human years. So every three and a half million years, if one were to drop a grain of rice into the pit, then eventually the pit would fill up with rice. Once it was full, suppose someone were to take a grain of rice out every three and a half million years. The pit would become full and empty again before an *asaṅkheyya* was out. An *asaṅkheyya* is longer than that. Four *asaṅkheyyā* and 100,000 great *kappā* is how long it was before the moment of the Buddha's enlightenment — a long time.

In his last birth, the Buddha-to-be was born as Siddhattha in Lumbini and grew up in Kapilavatthu. After twenty-nine years, he left home, practiced with two teachers and tortured himself for six years before coming to Bodhi Gaya under the Bodhi tree and realizing that neither torturing himself nor engaging in sensual pleasures was the way to find enlightenment. He found the Middle Way.

He spent all night under the Bodhi tree. In the first watch of the night, he remembered his past lives. He remembered he'd been so many things. He'd been a human. He'd been an animal. He'd been a god. He'd been an angel.

In the second watch of the night, he started to think about what it means to be reborn. Not just the fact that we are born as many different things, but that there are reasons why we're born in different ways. He saw beings arising and passing away according to their karma, the state of their minds, the habits, and the qualities of mind that they cultivated. He could see how these things affected people. He was able to understand how beings were reborn as they are.

In the third watch of the night, he understood cause and effect. Not just in terms of births and deaths, but also how it occurs from moment to moment. *Avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā* — people, because of their ignorance, because they don't see what they're doing, sometimes do good things, and sometimes do bad things, floating around aimlessly on an ocean of *samsāra*.

Then he saw more precisely, *saṅkhāra-paccayā viññāṇaṃ; viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpaṃ*, etc. Consciousness leads to experience, and experience leads to craving, which leads to clinging, which leads to becoming, which leads us to create and to be reborn. It was based on that understanding, in brief, that he was able to free himself from the causes of suffering, and therefore free himself from suffering, attaining enlightenment.

What Enlightenment Is Not

It's important to understand what enlightenment is not, as there are many different ideas, even within Buddhism itself, of what enlightenment means. For example, many types of Buddhism talk about putting aside one's own freedom from suffering, and putting aside one's own attainment as a means of enlightenment. The problem with this sort of view is that it is unable to bring about a meaningful goal. It rests on two assumptions: first, that you could ever come to an end of helping, meaning you could possibly help everyone, and second, that it actually helps someone to interact with them without being enlightened yourself. The assumption is that you, yourself, not being free from suffering, should free someone from suffering, or that you, yourself, not being free from ignorance, should help someone become free from ignorance. The reality of it is that your interactions with other unenlightened people are going to be good and bad, dependent on your own defilements, ignorance, etc. This is why without people doing the sort of thing that the Buddha did, you see the world constantly going back and forth between good and evil.

Another thing that is not enlightenment is the path and the practice that we're doing. We have to understand that our practice isn't enlightenment. There is often an idea that the benefit we get from mindfulness meditation, from seeing clearly, is somehow the goal of the practice. Sometimes we present mindfulness meditation in such a way that it appears that the peace and clarity that come from being mindful is the goal, and that enlightenment is therefore somehow a gradual process. Not to say that our practice is disconnected from enlightenment, but enlightenment is not the practice itself. What we practice when we practice mindfulness is called

the preliminary path. We're practicing all of the qualities of the Eightfold Noble Path, we're practicing in line with the Four Noble Truths, but all of it could disappear if we were to stop practicing. Furthermore, it's not powerful enough to categorically and completely change the perspective of the mind. It is like heating up two pieces of wood when you want to light a fire. The heat is the same and there might even be smoke but until you have the ignition you can't say that you've lit the fire. And as soon as you stop, the heat starts to disappear.

What Enlightenment Is

Enlightenment is the clearest possible experience of reality, so it is very much related to our experience of mundane reality. It's not something esoteric or remote or mysterious. When our clarity of mind becomes perfect, then it has the power to free us from suffering. It has the power to give rise to a moment of insight where we are perfectly in tune with the Four Noble Truths.

Our practice of fully understanding suffering, of abandoning the origin of suffering, practice of becoming free from suffering as a result, and practice of cultivating the path — all of these things build and build and eventually we see everything that arises is *dukkha*. We see that nothing is worth clinging to, that there is nothing that can satisfy us. There's nothing that we can attain or obtain that will bring us true happiness. The objects of our experience are not worth engaging in and not worth giving rise to craving for. We see how our craving leads to suffering.

As a result of seeing the truth of how craving leads to suffering, we have a moment where our minds cease all craving and release us from the incessant arising of experience — seeing and hearing and smelling and tasting and feeling and thinking. We have a moment where we're perfectly in line with the Eightfold Noble Path. Our way of looking at the world is perfect — right view, right thought and so on. There are no imperfections to our perception.

More About The Buddha's Enlightenment

When we talk about the Buddha's enlightenment, we mean two things: the ability that the Buddha had to present or teach this, and the actual realization of it for himself. When the Buddha realized enlightenment, he became free from suffering. But he also understood what it was that he had attained. That is why we talk about the difference between someone who follows the Buddha and someone who becomes a Buddha. For all of us, we have followed after the Buddha. We have undertaken the practice according to his teaching. He has set forth the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path, and we follow accordingly. But we ourselves don't necessarily have the ability to explain and describe the practice to others. Our practice doesn't allow us to explain or understand clearly what the Four Noble Truths are. There is often confusion about the difference between becoming a Buddha and the follower of the Buddha. We have to understand that the experience of freedom from suffering is the same. The Buddha

quite clearly explained that there's no difference between his freedom from suffering and our freedom from suffering. There's no difference between his freedom from defilements and our freedom from defilements. But he also had the clarity and the depth of mind to be able to teach, to understand, and to pass it on. That's the difference.

Enlightenment and Practice

And so, enlightenment is not a hard thing to understand. It's the culmination of practice. It's good to give rise in our minds to this concept of enlightenment that many people are wishing for, striving for, and making vows to attain. But likewise, it's important in our practice to focus on the cause. The cause is what we call the preliminary path — that is the practice. Enlightenment is never the practice; enlightenment is never the focus of practice — it's simply the perfection of practice. As they say, "Practice makes perfect," and that's a good summary of the Buddhist path.

For someone who is content with simply being mindful without putting out effort until they realize enlightenment — that's not enough; for someone who puts aside enlightenment to stay in the world to help others — that's ignoring the fact that to free someone from suffering, you have to be free. You have to be able to engage with them in a way that is free from the causes of suffering, and most importantly you have to understand that enlightenment is something that comes from within you. You can't enlighten someone else. You can't share your enlightenment, and ultimately your enlightenment is not going to allow you to help everyone.

We put enlightenment up as an ideal of perfection that we're working towards. We should understand suffering and not suffer from it. We should understand the things that cause suffering and not let them cause us suffering. We should see how our clinging to things — liking them, disliking them, trying to fix them, and all of the defilements in our mind are only causing us suffering. We should let go and let our minds become free from suffering. We should cultivate further and further the qualities that allow us to become free from suffering — the wholesome qualities of right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Stages of Enlightenment

Regarding our practice, we have what we call the four stages of enlightenment.

For a person who hasn't practiced to the extent that they're able to have this experience of letting go, their old habits of mind are merely repressed and can always come back. We can change for the better by practicing meditation, but we can also change back to our old selves if we stop meditating in this life or the next.

But a person who attains enlightenment, that one moment where their experience of reality is perfect, that person changes their foundation of experience and existence. It is called *gotrabhū*, which means changing your lineage, family, or bloodline. You're no longer part of the old family of ordinary individuals. You're a different kind of person.

1. The first type of enlightened person we call a **sotāpanna**. Simply having an experience of enlightenment once means you've entered the stream. The Buddha said such a person will only be born a maximum of seven more lifetimes. They've given up wrong view because they've seen what is right. They've seen something about reality that has no limit — meaning it applies to the entire universe. Everything ceases. When you have this experience of cessation, there is nothing that is left out, nothing that does not cease, or is not subject to cessation. Everything that arises is subject to cessation. They have no doubts. They have no doubt about this because they've seen it for themselves and have no confusion about what is right practice and what is wrong practice. They have no belief that there are other rituals, prayers, austerities, or anything else that might be a part of the path, or a precursor to enlightenment. They've practiced seeing clearly, and they've come to understand that enlightenment simply means a moment of clear experience where the mind lets go, making no connection with anything at all. There's no contact with seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling or even cognizing. There's no mental or physical arising and no memory of it. It's beyond memory. You don't even remember it happening, but you know it happened after the fact. You know it happened, but you don't know what it was, because there was no memory, no perception, and no apperception.
2. **Sakadāgāmin** is the second stage of enlightenment. Such a person will only be born one more time at most, because they've experienced cessation repeatedly to the point where they have reduced clinging almost to the point of eradication. They have not eradicated it, but they've reduced it so much that you could say of such a person they only have one more lifetime's worth of it.
3. The third stage of enlightenment is **anāgāmi**. An *anāgāmi* has eradicated aversion and sensual desire. By further clarity and further experience of cessation, they have come to the point where there's no more potential for anger in them. There's no more potential craving for sensuality. They've eradicated it through understanding. *Anāgāmi* means they won't come back. They will be reborn in the higher *Brahmā* realms but never again as a human or angel.
4. And the fourth stage of enlightenment we call **arahant**. *Arahant* simply means one who is worthy. When an *arahant* passes away, there is no returning. There is no coming back. There is no further arising of mental or physical experience. Such a person has done away with ignorance. They've done away with conceit. They've done away with any kind of mental clutter or chatter. They've done away with any desire for even intellectual or spiritual pursuits. They've attained the same freedom from suffering as the Buddha. They still live and continue their current life. They still teach. They still help. But like the Buddha, when their physical body dies, there is no more arising for them.

Without the Buddha's enlightenment there would be no *arahants*. Without the *arahants* there would be no practice of mindfulness to this day. There wouldn't even be people thinking of putting aside enlightenment if there hadn't been a Buddha who gained enlightenment. Buddha means one who is enlightened or one who is awakened. And it's an apt name because that is the focus in Buddhism. It's not on worship, ritual, or moral precepts. The focus is on wisdom, understanding, and enlightenment.

Factors of Enlightenment

The factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅgā*) are the positive qualities of mind one will experience as a result of the practice. For people who are looking for a sign that the practice is progressing, these are signs that the practice is working as expected. If these qualities are increasing, then you can be confident that your practice is improving. And once these are perfect, once these seven factors are fully mature, then there will be the arising of the path, and one will enter into *nibbāna*.

It's important to note that obsessing over results is problematic. It's a sure way to get in your own way of realizing these factors. Also, note that you don't really cause them to arise at all. A big problem people have with results is: how do you make them arise? You want wisdom; how do you turn it on? You want the calm and peace; where's the switch? Where's the dial to turn it up? What do I do to create these things? The answer is you don't. They are a sign that your practice is going well, that your practice is progressing, but they'll only come if you're actually practicing mindfulness meditation. Another way of looking at these is that they are the qualities which are required to give rise to seeing clearly (*vipassanā*).

1. The first factor is ***sati*** or what we translate as mindfulness. There shouldn't be much need to explain this one, but I will talk a little bit more later about the importance of *sati* and how this set really highlights it. It's sort of the key that you turn that leads to the rest of them.
2. Number two is investigation of *dhammas* (***dhammavicaya***). It's probably the most difficult to understand. The commentary, I think, gives a good explanation of what it is:

There are good things and there are bad things — karmically good, karmically bad. Right and wrong counterparts of bright and dark things. And an abundance of right reflection on them, is the reason conducive to the arising of the non-arisen enlightenment factor of the investigation of dhammas.

The investigation of *dhammas* means the observation, and the results of being mindful. Once you're mindful, you start to see right from wrong; basically, that's all it's saying. So, enlightenment comes from this discerning, observing, and judging. This is sort of a natural judgement. We talk about being non-judgmental, but really, mindfulness is a lot about being judgmental. It's just not based on likes or dislikes. It's based on observation and wisdom. It's based on seeing things as they are —

“This leads to my detriment. This leads to my benefit. Though I want to be happy, this leads me to be unhappy. Though I don't want to suffer, this leads me to suffer.” Through mindfulness, we see that certain habits conflict with themselves. We do something, thinking it will make us happy, and it doesn't make us happy. That makes it internally inconsistent. It's not doing what it's expected to do. As you naturally see this through being mindful, it gives rise to wisdom. Again, this is not something that you have to evoke. It's something that you should see arising as you're practicing the four *satipaṭṭhānā*. You should start to see this discernment arising. You'll start to see wisdom arise because you're investigating, looking at things, and understanding them. If you're focused, you start to observe how certain states are productive and certain states are obstructive and problematic. That's *dhammavicaya* — this state of mind that is able to see what is good and what is bad.

3. Next is ***virīya***. As you cultivate mindfulness and you start to see things as they are, through successful practice, there will arise an increasing amount of energy. In the beginning it is common to struggle due to lack of energy. As you practice, you start to increase in energy, and are able to walk and sit for longer periods of meditation. Your mind gets better able to leap out to the object and be aware of the object rather than just reciting mantras and letting your mind wander. As you practice, your energy level should increase.
4. Number four is rapture (***pīti***). As I understand, the Christians use the word rapture to mean something fairly specific, but when you're enraptured by something, there's an excitement, like when you get in a groove. It's the quality of a habit. *Pīti* is when you get caught up by something, for example rocking back and forth while sitting in meditation. Rapture can get in the way of your practice. It's not problematic in and of itself, but you can easily get caught up in it if you are not mindful of it. *Pīti* is the state of getting in a groove so you get caught up by your experience. And in a good way, as a factor of enlightenment, it means getting in the groove of mindfulness. You'll find as you progress that practice becomes smoother; mindfulness becomes easier. In the beginning, of course it's a struggle to be mindful. *Pīti* is this getting in the groove, getting caught up in the practice as it starts to come naturally.
5. Next, we have tranquility (***passaddhi***). This is one that meditators expect most, I think, in the beginning. The meditator will be looking for it, waiting for it to come, and eventually wondering why it hasn't come yet. But if they stick with the practice, eventually they'll be reassured by the fact that their mind does become more tranquil. They will become less distracted, more focused, and less diverse in their experiences. There will be fewer thoughts about the past, the future, and about random things as the mind becomes organized and calms down. You should see this through the practice. Again, with all of these factors, they're necessary. Without any of these, it's very difficult to see clearly. Your mind needs to be tranquil in order to truly see clearly. So that's what we're aiming for. If your mind is not tranquil, you have to look at those things that are distracting you. By being mindful of them, you naturally let them work themselves out. It's a natural process. *Passaddhi* isn't something that you can force.

6. **Samādhi** or concentration — once you calm down, your mind is able to focus. It's able to see things clearly. When you see things in the beginning, your mindfulness is weak. You note something but are easily distracted. Concentration is very firm. Concentration is what keeps and strengthens your awareness on the object, to the exclusion of everything else. When you're able to focus on one thing, even just for a moment, there's a strength there. There's a clarity. There's a completeness where nothing else is distracting you. *Samādhi* is that factor that keeps you with the object of your attention.
7. Finally, we have **upekkhā**, which is equanimity. It's important to differentiate between a forced state of equanimity where you repress your judgments and partialities, and the natural state of equanimity that comes from seeing things clearly. When you get to that point where you're able to observe all experiences impartially — everything that you see, hear, smell, taste, feel, and think — when your experiences no longer trigger reactions, then there's an equanimity that arises along with that. Once you understand that everything arises and ceases momentarily, any attachment or desire or aversion you might have had towards those objects disappears. Reaction doesn't arise because the objects of experience are just not worth reacting to. They arise and they cease moment after moment. Anything that you might hold on to — what would be the point of that? What would be the benefit? It would just cause stress and suffering, because the object would be gone the next moment. You start to see how little our emotions have to do with the intrinsic nature of experiences. We're left in the lurch reacting to something that's already gone. When you have reached this state of equanimity, that's really the pinnacle of insight. That's where the *bojjhaṅgas* have really come together — not through forcing equanimity, but through seeing clearly. When you see that you're becoming more equanimous, it's a sign that you're progressing. Eventually, you get to the point where you're totally equanimous, and you just see things as they are. It is kind of a suppression, because if you stop practicing, it will all come back. But during that time you really are ready to see things as they are. When you reach that pinnacle, and you do see experiences just as they are, that's when the experience of *nibbāna* is evoked, and with it true change. After experiencing *nibbāna* there is no need further to suppress the defilements; they'll be gone — not all of them at once, but piece by piece through seeing *nibbāna* again and again, through realizing cessation of suffering. There will be a gradual cutting off of defilements, permanently.

So those are the seven *bojjhaṅgas*.

Balancing the Factors of Enlightenment

When cultivating the factors of enlightenment, it's important to note which ones are lacking. In what aspects is your meditation practice lacking or weak? The Buddha separated the factors of enlightenment, apart from mindfulness which is always important, into two groups based on whether one is overly-energetic or overly-focused.

Not counting mindfulness, there are six factors. The first three factors, investigation of *dhammas*, energy, and rapture, have to be increased if you're overly-focused or lacking energy. If you're too focused or if you don't have enough energy, you'll get tired and lazy. Your mind will become unwieldy. At that time, a meditator should apply mindfulness to address the imbalance. If you're tired, say to yourself, "Tired, tired..." Just knowing that you're out of balance, that you're drowsy or lazy, will adjust your practice for you if you keep that in mind.

If you're distracted, you have to cultivate the last three factors: tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. You see how you're lacking in these, because your mind is distracted. When you remind yourself, "Distracted, distracted..." you improve your focus and move more towards a tranquil state of equanimity.

As long as you're practicing mindfulness, all the other factors should become balanced naturally. You shouldn't have to artificially cultivate them. But it's good to know and it's good to be aware of imbalances. Sometimes they can be out of balance, if there is too much of one. Only mindfulness is always beneficial.

Gradual Enlightenment

The Buddha said, "I do not say that the attainment of profound knowledge comes straight away; on the contrary, it comes by gradual training, a gradual doing, a gradual practice."

So, it's not about sitting in meditation and suddenly becoming enlightened; it's about getting to the perfect state of mind. The perfect state of mind is not about what you experience. In fact, the perfect state of mind is often associated with the worst experience. It is common for meditators to become enlightened when they die, when they are sick, or when they are in excruciating pain. Not everyone who dies, gets sick, and has pain will become enlightened, but these things are great catalysts for an ardent meditator to help them see clearly.

Ajahn Tong talks about four types of *samasīsi*, which means "enlightenment at the same time." You become enlightened at a time when you're sick, when you die, when you have great pain, or when you change your postures. It is a mistake to think one is close to enlightenment just because meditation is comfortable and blissful. There are many reasons why meditation may be comfortable or blissful. At the moment of enlightenment there will still be the arising and ceasing phenomena that are impermanent, suffering, and non-self, but one will be perfectly equanimous about them, experiencing them, seeing them for what they are — "This is this. This is this" — without any of the reactions that they previously had. It's just like your ordinary experience, minus all the attachments and reactions. So it will be an ordinary experience.

You can become enlightened just watching the stomach, "Rising, falling," and then you just see suddenly impermanence, suffering, or non-self very clearly, and the next moment, the mind lets go. The gradual practice is transforming our ordinary experience from reactionary to non-reactionary. That's it. From reactionary to objective. Once we effect that transformation, once we are completely objective, that last moment will be one of complete objectivity, where we say, "It's not worth it," and we let go. No more clinging. That's the Path.

Enlightenment's about changing our habits of reactivity. Our reactivity is a habit that we've built up through countless repetition. Habits cannot be turned off; they must be worn away. You have to cultivate new habits, habits of mindfulness, which takes time. Enlightenment actually does happen in a moment; it's that moment where you finally get it. But you don't just fall into it like a pit or a well. You have to get there, like climbing a mountain. And when you get to the peak, that's it.

Q&A

Q: What is it like to be enlightened?

This is something everyone is curious about. First of all, people want to know what it's like so that they know whether it's something that might be worth attaining themselves. Also, they want to know how far they are from it. They want to know in order to point themselves in the right direction. Even when we are not enlightened ourselves, we can emulate enlightened beings. Emulation is like when we keep the five precepts. When we don't kill — well, enlightened beings naturally don't kill. For the unenlightened, it's something you have to work at. So you emulate enlightened behavior. A cynic might call this "faking it." You know the saying, "Fake it till you make it." There's something to that. It gives you a roadmap and some markers to live by. You can know when you're acting like an enlightened being, and when you're not, so you can know what you have to change.

I can think of two lists of characteristics of what it is like to be enlightened.

The first one is my favorite. Sāriputta says something about the Buddha, and the Buddha asks, "So you have faith in me, that I'm enlightened?" and Sāriputta said, "No, I don't have faith in you, that you are enlightened." And the Buddha went away. Sāriputta was the Buddha's chief disciple, so the unenlightened monks were disturbed because they misunderstood what he meant. Sāriputta didn't mean that the Buddha wasn't enlightened. He knew that the Buddha was enlightened, but it wasn't out of faith. So, they started talking about this. "Oh, Sāriputta has no faith in the Buddha!" and the Buddha heard them talking and said, "Yes, that's right. He's faithless" and gave this verse: "*assaddho akataññū ca sandhicchedo ca yo naro hatāvakāso vantāso sa ve uttamaporiso.*"

You really have to know Pāli to get the joke. It's probably the closest the Buddha came to outright humor. Colloquially the verse means, "Faithless, ungrateful, a burglar, someone with no opportunities, hopeless — this is the height of humanity."

1. *Assaddho* means someone who doesn't have to believe anyone, in regards to what's important. They have no faith in the Buddha because they know. It's knowledge; it's no longer belief. Faith is much stronger in the mind when you actually know it, so it still is faith, but in a conventional sense we wouldn't call it faith because you actually know.

2. *Akataññū* is a play on words. It usually means *a-kataññū* — one who doesn't know what was done (for oneself, i.e. one who is ungrateful). But you can also split it *Akata-aññū* — one who knows that which is not made or that which is not produced. There's only one thing that is not made, not produced, and that is *nibbāna*, the *akatadhamma*. It's not made; it's not produced; it's not caused. So Sāriputta is someone who knows *nibbāna*.
3. *Sandhicchedo* is a term conventionally used to refer to someone who breaks locks and steals things. But here, it refers to the chain of *saṃsāra* — the chain of causation. Because of ignorance, there is karma and because of karma, there is consciousness, birth. If you cut that chain, if you cut out the ignorance, then there is no karma. Because there is no karma, there is no rebirth. Because there's no rebirth, there is no suffering, and so on. There's no craving. Because there's no craving, there's no clinging. No clinging means no becoming and so on. Sāriputta cut this chain.
4. *Hatāvakāso* is someone who has no opportunity — in this case, opportunity for more arising, especially of defilements. In an enlightened person there is no opportunity for more karma, or for more becoming. Everything they do is just functional. There's no opportunity for defilements to enter their mind. No opportunity for Māra, for evil. You can't hurt such a person. You can't trigger them. You can't instigate them.
5. *Vantāso* is someone who is hopeless — here it means someone who doesn't hope. Someone who hopes still wants things. Meditators hope that tomorrow the pain will go away. "I had a bad day today. I hope that tomorrow is a better day," or "I had a really good day. I hope tomorrow is just like today or even better." So, here's a reminder for you: abandon all hope. "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here." Being without hope means being without wanting. If you have no hope, then you're already perfect. It's really that simple. The only way to be happy is to stop wanting and therefore to stop hoping. Hope will always be a vulnerability. Hope is a detriment because it means you're discontent. It means you're not fully present here — objective with reality. You're biased, partial, and therefore subject to disappointment. Sāriputta had no hope because he had no wanting for anything.
6. *Sa ve uttamaporiso* — this is the height of humanity.

There's another list in the Paṭisambhidāmagga that gives a list of qualities of an *ariya*. An enlightened being is one who:

1. Doesn't get angry. Sāriputta was famous for this. There's a good story of a monk who heard that Sāriputta didn't get angry and that everyone was praising Sāriputta. So, he thought, "I'm gonna test this." He took a stick and when Sāriputta was walking, he actually came up behind him and just hit him across the back with the stick. Sāriputta just turned around and looked at him and then kept walking. He didn't get angry.

2. Doesn't get angry back. It means to not hold on to the anger. Compared to getting angry, holding on to anger is a worse evil. In a meditation center, certainly people will get angry at each other and that's something that, to some extent, we have to allow. It is only when we react to each other's anger that we create conflict. So, a sign of enlightenment is not creating conflict by allowing others their moments of imperfection.
3. Doesn't look down on people. They are not condescending, arrogant, or conceited. An enlightened being doesn't have any attachment to themselves, and no reason to harm others, because they don't cling to themselves. There's no holding yourself as higher than someone else.
4. Is pure. An enlightened being doesn't have anger, greed, or delusion; their minds are pure — going to that which is pure, which is *nibbāna*. They enter into states of purity where they become free from suffering.
5. Has right view. Right view to some extent is just knowing that what the Buddha taught was right, but most importantly it relates to the Four Noble Truths — to know that nothing is worth clinging to, that our suffering comes from clinging to things.
6. Is wise. What right view does for you is that it allows you wisdom of many different kinds. You find that you're able to solve all your worldly problems much better. There are still challenges but wisdom allows you to see them for what they are. They are not difficult in the same way because you realize the true problem is never with your experiences or your situation; it's with your reactions. You're able to look at a situation objectively because you're not hating it or loving it, you're observing it. Therefore, you can see what most other people overlook. They tie themselves in knots to get what they want, and to get away from what they don't want. An enlightened being has the wisdom to see problems as merely experiences and so they don't suffer because of them.

Q: Do you need someone else to enlighten you?

No. You can realize the truth by yourself. The universe has a certain nature, and when you come to understand this nature, when you come to understand how the universe works, that's enlightenment, and it can come to anyone.

It's of course far easier when you learn from someone who has already become enlightened or is on the path to becoming enlightened. There are many stages whereby you are able to let go, see freedom from suffering, get a glimpse of it, and start to open yourself up to this realization. To learn from a person who has attained some or all of these stages is obviously far easier than trying to find it on your own.

Enlightenment is realizing the nature of the universe and the nature of reality. This is directly related to an understanding of happiness and suffering. Understanding suffering leads

us to become free from suffering. It leads us to give up those attitudes and behaviors that are causing suffering. So it's not a realization about the nature of the cosmos, galaxies and solar systems, physics, the Big Bang, and so on. It's specifically a realization which frees you from suffering. It's a realization that comes from study and practice — study of one's self and study of reality. As you look at reality, your emotions, your addictions, and so on, you come to understand them by simply seeing them for what they are. It's a realization that there's nothing worth clinging to, that our attachments are not leading us anywhere closer to happiness, they are only leading us to misery, dissatisfaction, and further addiction.

Q: Why don't we hear about enlightened beings today?

Well, you're not talking to the right people I guess. There's a lot of people out there who do talk about people becoming enlightened, *arahants*, or *Buddhā*. The problem, perhaps, is that enlightened beings tend not to talk about their own enlightenment. An enlightened being is disinclined to talk about their own enlightenment. Even a *sotāpanna*, someone who has just begun on the path to enlightenment, is disinclined towards bragging or announcing their enlightenment. So even Buddhists don't hear about it.

Q: Does enlightenment exist within us all?

Do you agree or disagree that enlightenment already exists in all of us, without having it taught by an outside influence?

No, it doesn't. Realization is something that has to come to you. It's something that has to arise in the mind. It's not something that is already inside of you. Either you've realized it or you haven't. If you've already realized that, then you're enlightened. If you haven't realized it, then you're not enlightened.