

Spiritually Incorrect Enlightenment – Dr. Linda Palter – 08-18-2013

Oh boy, I'm going to talk about enlightenment today! Enlightenment is one of those words, like "god" or "love" that has all sorts of different connotations in people's heads. But I am going to be talking about a specific, actual paradigm shift. A paradigm is a model, a way of explaining something. Most everybody shares the same top level paradigm, which is that we live in a universe made of matter, energy, space, and time. Since everyone agrees on that, we don't have to discuss it, everyone already gets it. Duality, meaning you and me, observer and observed, cause and effect, this is also part of the dominant paradigm.

So enlightenment is when that paradigm suddenly isn't an obvious truth anymore. And describing what now seems obviously true is hard to do, because you have to talk cross-paradigms. So there is a lot of reliance on metaphors, and a lot of apparent paradoxes. It is the top paradigm, which means that everything I am going to say is going to disagree with everything you know to be true, which is probably why enlightenment has never gone viral. And since I have acknowledged that you will disagree, maybe now you can just temporarily tune out your arguments and suspend disbelief for a little while. Just because I am going to explain a completely different way of seeing the world. And I think I will begin with the metaphor that came to me when I first attained enlightenment.

Imagine a gigantic tree, with a huge trunk, millions of branches, and billions of leaves. Each leaf can look out and see the other leaves, but it can't look down and see that it is connected to a twig. So it appears to any one leaf as if every single leaf is a separate individual. Enlightenment is the moment you suddenly look down and see the twigs and branches and trunk, and realize that you and every single other leaf is one and the same tree.

But wait a minute, did I actually claim that I was enlightened back there? Uh-huh, and I will get around to telling you that part, but first we need to define enlightenment a bit more. It is the realization that there is no you and I, no observer and observed, but rather, everyone and everything is all the same energy. We can call this non-dual awareness. And when you look at the appearance of duality everywhere and you know it isn't real, you think, this must all be some sort of illusion, or dream. So we could call this waking up from the dream state, or maybe, lucid dreaming. Non-dual awareness, waking up, lucid dreaming, are all good terms for enlightenment. Or, there is this old metaphor:

Ocean waves are rolling in towards the shore. And one wave says to another, "Have you heard waves talk about a vast ocean of water?" And the other wave says, "I've heard talk like that, but I have never seen the ocean, I don't think it is real. And the waves imagine that they have these brief lives, and then they crash into the beach and perish, and they never know they are all part of the ocean.

Here is another. Imagine a really big piece of paper. It represents the universe, incomprehensibly vast and complex. And then put a tiny dot on the paper, the smallest speck you can. It represents your consciousness. This is how most people see the universe. Enlightenment? Just switch the labels. The huge sheet of paper is consciousness, and everything else in the universe is the tiny speck.

Here is another way to discuss enlightenment. Everybody has an ego, which in this sense means all the beliefs, experiences, fears, traumas, biases, and ideas you carry around with you. It is a huge, dense, many-layered onion of beliefs. Enlightenment is peeling off and discarding every belief which is untrue, layer by layer, until nothing is left but the truth. So another word for enlightenment is truth-realization. But a more accurate, if more awkward, term is untruth unrealized. Because you don't have to learn anything new, you just get rid of the falsehoods. This is an important way to talk about enlightenment because it is how you get there. Metaphor moment: Reality is the sun. Your ego is a dense cloud bank. Enlightenment is clearing away the clouds so you can see the sun. The sun has always been there, the clouds never actually affected it, you just didn't see it clearly before. That is an important part of the story to keep in mind. The sun, the truth, consciousness, is unchanged no matter how clear or cloudy, no matter how enlightened or befuddled we are.

Everyone who has had this paradigm shift describes it in similar ways. Here are some quotes from other enlightened people:

* It is in the infinite ocean of myself that the mind creation called the world takes place. (Ashtavakra Gita)

* Consciousness is the screen on which all the pictures come and go. The screen is real, the pictures are mere shadows on it. (Ramona Maharishi)

* We are all figments of the same imagination. (Gary Hopkins)

* Suffering means you are having a bad dream. Happiness means you are having a good dream. Enlightenment means getting out of the dream altogether. (Jed McKenna)

* The you that you think of as you is not you, it's just the character that the underlying truth of you is dreaming into existence. Enlightenment isn't the character, it's the underlying truth. (Jed McKenna)

* You're living in the holodeck. (Star Trek)

So, if you think maybe you kinda get what I'm saying, does that mean you are enlightened now? Well, it is sort of like reading the menu instead of eating the meal. Enlightenment isn't about believing what someone says, it is about not believing anything and seeing the sun in the cloudless sky yourself.

Maybe this is a good time to tell you some of the other things that enlightenment isn't. It is not a state of perpetual bliss, love, and peace, although it generally is pretty peaceful. It is not the ability to manifest every desire simply by desiring it. It isn't perfect health, ESP, astral projection, or immortality. These are things that many spiritual seekers want, and therefore many spiritual teachers claim they sell, but none of them are enlightenment. Enlightenment does not require a guru,

swami, savior, or god. It is not dependent on any belief system or religion, it does not require chanting, fasting, prayer, or pilgrimage. It is simply the removal of all the garbage we each carry around with us.

OK, back to my earlier claim that I am awake. Way back when I was still in high school, I learned a kind of post-traumatic stress release, which I practiced on and off for the next 35 years. It was a way of finding subconsciously held beliefs and letting them go. Sometimes I did it fairly intensively, often very occasionally. Then about 4 years ago, a patient asked me what I thought about enlightenment, and I answered with this pre-enlightenment metaphor: I think life is a game, I said. I think it is all a monopoly game, say, and everyone thinks the game is reality, and it is all there is. And enlightenment is when you suddenly realize the game is a game, and maybe you glimpse the kitchen table. And maybe the most enlightened have an idea that maybe there is more, a vast unknown called a kitchen, but nobody has a clue what, if anything, is beyond the kitchen door. She said, "You have to read these books." The books are a trilogy by Jed McKenna, about his waking up. In them, he says he became obsessed with the search for truth. He examined, and rejected, every belief he had that he couldn't prove was true. Which, it turned out, was all of them. This sounded about right to me, as I had been doing much the same thing, off and on, all these years. But what McKenna said that was important to me was, it isn't just some beliefs, it is **every** belief that you have to let go. Our egos, our dense masses of false beliefs, are what create and perpetuate our experience of this unreal reality. So then I started working on it full time. Every single day, for several hours a day, I worked on letting go of beliefs. It took about a year full time, added on to the 35 years part time.

And one day I was done. And even though I knew exactly where I was going, when I got there it was the funniest, best, surprise punch line you could imagine. I realized I really wasn't a unique individual leaf, I was a part of a tree. For just a moment, this shift felt like the biggest, most important thing a person could do, and then right away I cracked up because I realized it was utterly insignificant. It was just opening my eyes, just clearing away the clouds. I hadn't changed at all.

There is a famous Chinese poem that goes, "Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water." Because really, enlightenment changes nothing. It doesn't make you rich, famous, able to pick winning lottery tickets in a single bound. It hasn't given me perfect health, perfect weight, or perfect teeth. All these things are part of the illusion, the dream. And enlightenment is just saying, hey, look, we're dreaming.

But it is just as correct to say that enlightenment changes everything, because the clouds are gone. A million false beliefs are gone. And what I am talking about is subconscious crap, mostly intensely negative, all untrue. It is really good stuff to get rid of. It is the source of your buttons, your fears, it is why you overreact sometimes, why some things seem to never really heal. When I

say that nothing you believe is true, you immediately think about your conscious awareness, and you think, how can she say that? You can name a hundred facts you think are true. But those surface beliefs, they are like the thin onion skin on the onion. Peel them off to get to the huge onion of subconscious crap underneath. It is stuff that every person is engulfed in their whole life, and since it is below conscious awareness and evaluation, we all mistake it for reality our whole lives. Clear out every last bit of that stuff, and nothing is ever really seriously bad again. In fact, nothing is ever seriously real again. My perception and experience is that all life is one life, and everything that appears otherwise is illusion.

That new viewpoint was my clear, intense reality for about a year. And then, much to my complete surprise, I would notice that gradually, the dream would occasionally feel realer again. I can always just focus and be aware of non-duality, but if I don't pay attention I can also doze off a little into the dream. Which is fascinating and surprising to me, and verifies that there is more beyond the kitchen door than anyone can imagine.

Enlightenment requires no learning, it is entirely a subtraction process. Anyone can do it. The exact instructions are, examine every belief you have. Discard every one that you can't be sure is true. Keep going, don't stop until you are done. These beliefs are mostly subconscious, so you have to use some effort and concentration to get them all, and they have a lot of emotional content, so it is helpful to have a technique or system for releasing them. It may take a couple, three years if you work at it full time and you don't give up before you are done. And while it is true that it is a complete transformation, it also changes nothing, so you may or may not be interested in putting that sort of effort into it.

If you are, read Jed McKenna's trilogy, and see me for additional tips and techniques. There are other good writers on the topic, but Jed talks about how to get there in a pretty straightforward way. If not, then let me suggest that what most people actually want is the menu, not the meal. That is, books about this other paradigm are popular, but working your way through every belief is not so much. But even if you just understand the idea, it can help you take things less seriously and less personally. Which can make life go that much more smoothly.

Anybody here ever play Dungeons and Dragons? I used to play, the human version, not the computer game. You create a character that you play, a wizard or elf or warrior. And you go off on dangerous adventures, mostly by rolling dice. It is fun and entertaining, even when your pretend character gets hurt or killed. Because, of course, you know it's pretend. Life is a D & D game. Life is an amazing 3-D movie. It is the holodeck. It is the Matrix. Real reality is that we are all the same ocean, the same tree.

There is no shortage of pain and loss and sadness in any person's life. There is tragedy aplenty to go around. But you can go to a tragic movie, or a violent movie, and it might make you

cry, but you go and enjoy it because you know it isn't real. And if you know, even just suspect, that this so called reality is actually just flickering lights on a screen, it doesn't change anything but it changes everything.