

WHAT IS
ENLIGHTENMENT?

Enlightenment is regarded as the highest state in spiritualism. Every spiritual aspirant longs to attain enlightenment. But how long should one practise to attain enlightenment?

10 years?

12 years?

20 years?

Or lifelong?



A story about King Janaka

King Janaka was once listening to the lessons contained in the Vedantic scriptures. In one of the scriptures it was said that one can get enlightenment in the time it takes to put one leg on one side of the saddle of a horse,

and the other leg on the other side of the saddle, while mounting the horse. In short, one can get enlightenment within seconds.

‘Is this true?’ Janaka asked his teacher who was teaching him the Vedantic scriptures. Unfortunately, the teacher was not an enlightened master so he was unable to give a clear answer.

Janaka was very eager to verify the truth of the saying in the scripture. He asked every such teacher to verify the truth of the saying. But no one could give him a satisfactory answer, until he met the sage Ashtavakra. When this sage made Janaka realise the truth, the King immediately understood that yes, it is possible for one to get enlightened within seconds. In fact, he then attained enlightenment himself within seconds.

Like King Janaka, is it also possible for us to attain enlightenment within seconds?



Krishnamurti on enlightenment

J. Krishnamurti, in his earlier talks, used to say the same thing about gaining enlightenment:

“You are planting a seedling of grape. You water it; nurture it and maintain it. The grape plant grows and after a certain period of time it gives grape fruits. But it takes time. You have to wait for the fruit. But I am telling you something different. I ask you to come with the grape seeds and after the end of my talk for an hour, you may return home with grape fruits. It needs no time to produce fruits. You may get enlightenment instantaneously.”

However, in his later talks, he put it differently:

“I am talking to you for more than 60 years. You are also listening to my talks for years. But you have not changed. Where is the mistake? Who is responsible?”

Krishnamurti was sure that no time is required for the change i.e. for enlightenment and so he asks where the mistake lies.

While we practise so many different spiritual methods for years, and while we are sincere and earnest in our practice, nevertheless, enlightenment continues to evade us. Why is this so?

If it is true that one can attain enlightenment within seconds, then why are we not getting enlightened?

Yet, the Vedantic statement is true; it is not false. The fact is that we are delaying our enlightenment only because our approach to it is wrong.

And why is our approach wrong? Are we not practising it on the instructions of reliable persons? Are they not adept and trustworthy? Are their instructions wrong?

Such persons are correct to a certain extent. Their instructions are powerful and useful and quite beneficial for spiritual aspirants. But they help to a certain extent by helping prepare an aspirant for enlightenment.

All spiritual practices give us some level of experiences. The experiences may be heavenly and marvellous.

But enlightenment does not occur as an experience, because enlightenment is not an experience.

All experiences last for a certain period because that is their nature. They occur and then fade away. But this is not so in the case of enlightenment.



Enlightenment, once it comes, does not fade away – it lasts forever

If someone gets enlightenment, he needs no practice to retain it. That is the nature of enlightenment.

Is there any special practice for enlightenment then?

There is no connection between enlightenment and spiritual practices. No practice will take one to enlightenment. All practices result only in various blissful experiences.

If spiritual practice is not of any use, then what is the way to enlightenment?



**Enlightenment comes only by way of
'understanding'**

We have to understand what enlightenment is, and what are the blocks preventing it.

Just the understanding of what is enlightenment, itself brings enlightenment. Understanding the 'truth' of enlightenment acts instantaneously to bring enlightenment.

If one understands what enlightenment is, that is all that is needed. One does not need any practice or meditation on the 'idea' obtained through the understanding. The understanding itself is action. One cannot separate action from understanding.

What is the nature of such understanding? Does it require great intelligence? Does it come only to mature minds or to wise people? Does it need great intelligence?

No.



Everyone can have the ‘understanding’

It is very simple. The intelligence needed for understanding a simple story is enough for the understanding of enlightenment.

Now what is the nature of this understanding which brings enlightenment? Is it intellectual or practical?

Let's take an example:

If I want to come to your house, I will ask about the way to reach there. You give me the directions to it – the street, the location, the landmark if any, and the colour or any distinctive feature of your house. This gives me an idea about how to get there. Thus far, it is only an intellectual idea about the way to your house. Then when I go to your house, I get to physically see the house, its structure, the location, and the way to it.

So, first I get an intellectual idea about your house. Then later, when I visit it, I get the actual, first-hand knowledge about it.

Intellectual knowledge is different from actual, practical knowledge. Intellectual knowledge is imaginary; practical knowledge is realistic.

Does this also apply in the case of that understanding, which brings enlightenment?

No!



Understanding of a different kind brings enlightenment

In the understanding which brings enlightenment, there is no such distinction between intellectual understanding and practical understanding.

In the case of reaching the house, first there is the intellectual understanding of the house. Thereafter, we get the actual and practical understanding. Intellectual understanding comes first and after that comes actual understanding. This is the pattern in the case of worldly activities.

But in the case of getting enlightenment, there is no difference between intellectual and actual understanding.

It is purely intellectual and nothing else. Intellectual clarity alone is enough for enlightenment. There is no actual clarity apart from intellectual clarity.

We have so many false ideas about enlightenment and these delay our own enlightenment. The intellectual idea of enlightenment itself blossoms as enlightenment.

We may take another example:

Let us take the example of a schoolboy solving a sum in Maths. The working out of the sum is totally intellectual. He solves it only through an intellectual process. Similarly, the understanding of the nature of enlightenment is also purely intellectual.



Buddha's enlightenment

The enlightenment that happened to Buddha is regarded as rare. But it happened in seconds under the Bodhi tree. It was not an ordinary enlightenment. Even today it is considered to be extraordinary. That is because after that he did not have any doubts about anything. He became a light for himself and for others.

But this extraordinary enlightenment is actually an ordinary one. Even you and I can attain it easily, within seconds.

We need not concern ourselves whether it is possible or not for us to attain the state of Buddha within the span of our life.

It is possible – and possible within seconds. If we know what is meant by enlightenment, the very knowledge of what enlightenment is will be enough to attain it.



Many things have been written about enlightenment

This is how spiritual books describe the role of 'Atman':

"We take ourselves to be this body and mind. But we are not so. We are something more. We are really the 'Atman' beyond body and mind. Atman is the base of our body and mind. Since we have our mind functioning outwardly, we think that we are mere body and mind. Therefore we do not have any idea or knowledge about Atman that is ourselves.

If we are able to divert our attention inwardly towards ourselves into the root of ourselves, we may be able to realise our real being – the Atman that is ourselves. It is enlightenment, if one could know oneself as Atman. This is 'Gnana'. So understanding our real nature is enlightenment."

"We are dreaming in our sleep. In the dream, for example, we are caught in a dangerous situation along with our friends. We have to escape from the danger. At this instance somebody is knocking at the door. At once we wake up from sleep and the dream also ends there. We come to realise that we are not in danger and feel no necessity to disturb our friends. We know that we are lying safely in our bed in a

secure room. In the same way the Atman is always safe and pure. It is only in a dreamlike state we feel that we are in danger.”



What does all this point to?

It is obvious from the above quotes that the Atman is pure and self-illuminating. From their description, we come to know something about Atman and its purity.

But it does not give us enlightenment, because enlightenment is different.

One can get enlightenment if one knows what enlightenment is. The very knowledge of what enlightenment is brings enlightenment. So, for the time being, do not rely upon the descriptions of the scriptures about what is enlightenment.

We feel that we are ordinary human beings with all our good and bad qualities. So, naturally we feel that we cannot attain enlightenment until we are free of our bad qualities. We think we can get enlightenment

only after purification of our heart and mind. So we struggle towards that.

It is said that Buddha himself did many meditational practices, undertook many penances and followed severe austerities. It was only after that, and after the purification of his heart and mind, that he attained enlightenment.

But in truth, neither the quality of the mind nor the quality of the heart blocks our enlightenment. It is our conclusions that keep blocking it.



Our conclusions are the only obstacles to our enlightenment

How do they block enlightenment?

We already have some idea about what enlightenment is. Not only that, we also have so many ideas about various things. For example, we have ideas about what is good and what is bad. We have some ideas about various meditation techniques and their effects, ideas about life,

death, life after death, sin, karma and so on. In the same way we have various ideas on religion and spirituality told to us by many spiritual heads and enlightened individuals.

Our ideas about all of them put together have formulated our conclusions, and we feel that these are correct.

Unless we are free from our conclusions, we cannot take any new step.

As all our conclusions are only intellectual, it is not very difficult to free ourselves from them. If we stubbornly hang on to our conclusions, we can never extricate ourselves from them.

We must be somewhat liberal and lenient and open about our conclusions, so we can entertain and understand new ideas.

Enlightenment itself is an intellectual process. This fact itself cannot be accepted by many people, because they have some other fixed ideas about enlightenment. At present we need not confuse ourselves with this statement as we will be dealing with it in detail, later in the book.

Are there any basic requirements for enlightenment?

Yes, there are some basic requirements for the understanding which brings enlightenment. These are:

1. The aspirant must have an earnest interest in the spiritual life. (It is not necessary that he should have done many hard meditational practices.)
2. He must be somewhat familiar with the books available on spirituality. (It is not necessary he must have mastered all the spiritual literature. It means he should have some basic knowledge of it.)
3. He must have an open mind to accept reasonable ideas. He should not be adamant about the ideas and conclusions that he has arrived at in his mind.
4. He should not entertain the pessimistic view that he cannot attain enlightenment in this lifetime.

If one has the above basic requisites, he can easily attain enlightenment and liberation – within seconds.

Since such enlightenment involves no practice, the question of time does not arise. Time is necessary only

for practice and effort that will give us some experiences. The experiences may be illuminating and marvellous, but they will not give enlightenment.

What is required is only an intellectual understanding of what enlightenment really is.

So we need not delay in attaining enlightenment.

