

## Being Moved From Entitlement To Enlightenment



***If you awaken in our time, you awaken with a sob. ~Stephen Jenkinson***

Spiritual awakening has different definitions, depending on whom you ask. For the purposes of this article, I am referring to the inimitable discovery, a deep and intuitive knowing, that no separation exists between oneself and the rest of existence. Regardless of terminology, the point I want to make is that crossing that threshold into awakened life doesn't, as some may want to believe, mark the end of the spiritual journey, nor does it mark the end of suffering, one's own or of the planet. It actually marks the *potential* dawning of a whole new level of accountability that one has as an awakened human being living on the planet. Awakening is akin to a return to kindergarten in the School of Life where one must discover anew the implications of and responsibilities that come along with the *knowing* that one is not separate from the rest.

I say "*potentially*" marks a new beginning because a person's newly awakened awareness of his or her oneness with All in no way automatically dictates that that person will respond courageously or even stop to notice...*really notice* by seeing and feeling into...that the world she or he inhabits, and is inextricably a part of, is burning furiously underfoot. Awakening is a state of potentiality, not an

end in and of itself. It's an opportunity to be grasped as easily as it is to be ignored.

It is indeed the experience of awakening to Oneness that throws wide open a window of possibility for our oh-so-long-awaited planetary transformation to occur. Sadly, however, most people awakening today, and there are many, still make the mistake of believing that awakening is the answer to the world's ills and that merely by "being enlightened", all the bad stuff in the world will be magically whisked away and peace and harmony will prevail for ever more. In actuality, I believe that such variations of magical, wishful thinking about enlightenment constitute a more accurate answer as to why the flames of our demise burn brighter and hotter with each passing day.

Waking up to the oneness of All is a gift bestowed upon any human being who is fortunate enough to receive it but it is actually only *part* of the gift and it presents a unique opportunity; the possibility to receive the other part of the gift which is the *choice* to see and understand the immense destruction taking place on the planet, to *feel* the great accompanying suffering, and then to *respond*. A sense of responsibility is born of the recognition that *there is no separation between the one that suffers and the one that witnesses the suffering* and he who bears witness to the destruction is also being destroyed; that the witness is also dying and becoming extinct. At that awakening point, one has in a sense passed through an initiation ordeal where the rules of the game of life have fundamentally changed. Not external rules, like ones that a company makes for its employees, or the type that a government makes to maintain control in a society. Rather, I'm speaking of natural or soul rules or laws that if not abided by, begin to reek havoc, ultimately manifesting as disturbances in the psycho-emotional field of an individual or culture. Whether one chooses to understand and *respond* depends largely on one's courage, ambition and resourcefulness because, as is true when passing through any new stage of human development, there is a learning curve whereby one must figure out how the world operates at that level of consciousness. Awakening is not synonymous with graduating with a Ph.D. but contrarily, rather, with each new developmental phase that we pass through, we are metaphorically re-enrolled in kindergarten.

Awakening to the realization that separateness is an illusion is *the* quintessential moment in one's life to get up off the yoga matt or the meditation cushion and choose to look directly at one's burning home and feel how much it hurts to see one's loved one's dying en masse, and to feel the clean air being sucked from one's lungs forever. This and only this willingness to face reality head on will, hopefully, compel a person into meaningful action and thus into a kind of true awakening that is *obviously* for the good of all, rather than one that professes to be so but lacks in any substantive response other than the cultivation of an expanded flowery vocabulary and bragging rights to recycling and "green" consumerism.

It is entirely possible, and all too apparent, that our awakening means little without our choice to bring our new found non-dual consciousness *down into* our fleshy bodies where we will undoubtedly be made uncomfortably aware of our limitations, pains, temporality and finitude (mortality), if only by witnessing the carnage around us. Without this choice, and it is a choice, we will keep on, as individuals and as a culture, doing what already *hasn't* been working all along: We'll continue distracting ourselves with any number of habits or addictions in order to bliss out and continue "floating", dissociated and disembodied, either subtly or not so subtly above the earth, much like a balloon (*enlightened* by helium), neglecting our humanness, and engaging in magical thinking infused with florid beliefs that our positive thoughts, ample love vibes, and some wonder technology or illusive "they" will swoop in to save humanity and the world in the final hour, just like in the movies...when really, *we are the ones we've been waiting for*. It will be a very fine day when that one liner really sinks in and becomes more than just a super hip new age affirmation.

I argue that the only way to truly realize this "*we are the ones*" level of embodied awakening (and I'll say it again) is by seeing, feeling, and dropping into the pain of being a human being on the planet at this time; that is: the pain we feel as a result of recognizing that we are not separate from all that is being destroyed, and that *we* are in fact dying, or rather, *being killed*. This is what ultimately impels any living creature to act. It's the sense that its life force is being drained from it and it must do what it must do in order to stay alive and regenerate. Such a natural response is in accordance with a deep biological instinct to survive. I believe it's that simple in theory, but seemingly not so easy in practice. Denial is a mighty force to be reckoned with.

In the end, most inhabitants of the western world remain in denial of their inherent interconnection with All, merely through their avoidance of anything that remotely reminds them of their mortality (pain, discomfort, suffering, etc.), and they endure, much to the detriment of *The Whole*, self-selectively abdicating the responsibilities of their true nature as rescuers with a deep and powerful purpose. Instead, most wait, hoping that somebody or something "out there" will come and make everything all better again. This way of viewing life and reality permits one to remain in denial, oblivious of feelings of guilt or shame, and in a state of blissful ignorance at best, and a state of apathetic paralysis at worst. Arguably, the increasing prevalence of anxiety, depression, and violence in our society in recent years can be interpreted as a response to a socially sanctioned form of self-repression that is signaling an *intrapersonal* revolt and an attempt *of* the Self to balance and ground itself in reality rather than fantasy.

Sadly, I fear, that the luxuries, so abundantly available to those who have grown up in the twilight of western industrial civilization, have left the masses spoiled and misguided, coming to equate "quality of life" with the amount of things one has; knowledge one possesses; friends one can brag; and techniques or

strategies one has acquired for feeling good or at least better than the next guy. Access to abundant, cheap energy has provided for a lifestyle of excess and plentitude never before seen on the scale we witness today and has contributed to the cultivation of a deeply ingrained sense of entitlement and attachment to an overly optimistic, not at all realistic panglossian outlook on life where the pursuit of blissful, transcendent experiences are encouraged, whether to numb or to awaken, yet fiercely to the adamant exclusion of life's necessary but not so pleasant other half: limitation, decay, pain, finitude, and death.

Accustomed to, expectant of, and insistent upon feeling good at all costs, even at the expense of the systems that literally sustain us and the cultural mores that ground us as a society and a species in the living, breathing world, our lives have become a myriad of strategies for avoiding the very pain that could and would set us on the path to a truly engaged, regenerative and awakened life, if only we would just relax and feel into it. But it's obviously not that easy and honestly, I can't say I really blame anyone for shutting out the harsh realities of the world today. I can barely keep my eyes open myself. In the end, however, I believe that waking *down* and *feeling into* is as important as, if not *more* important than waking *up and transcending* if our species and all others on the planet are to have a fighting chance at surviving for another seven generations. But it *is* a choice. Period.

If we finally decide that it's more important to conduct ourselves as if the future that our children and grand children will live into really matters, we will heed this advice. If not, we, along with our children, will perish as we go forth looting and annihilating the already tattered and diminished remains of their future inheritance in order that we might keep the painful reality of our lives at bay... just... a... little... while... longer.

If there ever was one, *now* is the time to let ourselves *be moved* from entitlement to enlightenment.

**Jonathan Stein's** work is largely informed by transpersonal psychology and eco-psychology. He offers counseling, coaching and guidance based in a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of all life. Jonathan helps people move through confusion and pain to meet the many challenges of modern day life with courage, confidence, resilience and heart.

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