

WHAT IS REALIZATION?

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It seems that no matter what the question or problem, the answer or remedy always seems to be "awareness," to develop more awareness. It is no wonder the word Buddha means awareness. He was all about it.

Awareness does not come in a box or a can. You can't buy it except perhaps momentarily with drugs, but the price paid for a trip is greater than money, and you can't even have it for long.

What is amazing to me is that there is such a thing as an awareness that does not come and go, but stays. It is called realization, and it is not considered enlightenment or anything like it. Don't confuse the two. And dharma realization is no different than any other kind of realization.

Imagine you are tinkering with some new gadget and can't figure out how to make it work, and then you realize how it works. That's realization. From that moment onward you always know how to operate the gadget because of your realization. You finally realized how to work it.

It is no different with meditation. Once you realize how meditation works, you can really start meditating and that without a doubt. And soon you can meditate on the cushion or off.

Zen Buddhism makes a big deal of this initial realization and they call it "Kensho." They too differentiate kensho from enlightenment, just as the Tibetans do. The Tibetans call it "Recognition," and recognition is the result of what is called the "Pointing out instructions" by your lama or teacher.

It is common for beginners to only have heard about enlightenment and going for enlightenment, but in reality it is a two-step process, first recognition and then meditation, the path to enlightenment. You can't ride a bike without knowing how to do it. Once you realize how to ride a bike, you can ride to wherever you want to go. It is the same with recognition and enlightenment.

With Tibetan Buddhism you first have to recognize something about how the mind works, and then you can work it. Recognition is essential, after which the path to

enlightenment opens up and can be travelled.

So I mention this not to complicate matters, but to inform those interested that when it comes to enlightenment, it is a two-step process, not the one-step we might imagine. If we are practicing meditation in order to become enlightened without having first recognized how the mind works, we are in for a long haul.

We "practice" meditation until we recognize just how the mind works and then we stop practicing and actually start meditating for real. Don't confuse practicing meditation with meditation. They are very different, just like practicing scales on a guitar is different from playing music. That is an apt analogy.

In my own experience the key thought that I was missing all those years is this: I thought I was meditating all that time, when what I actually was doing was "practicing" meditation. Like striking steel to flint, all we get is sparks until something catches fire. In meditation, recognition is the catching fire, and once lit the fire just burns. But until fire, it is all practice, all preliminary.

So the reason for my writing this is to disappoint those of you who think you are meditating when you are in fact practicing meditation. And to gently suggest that until we are enlightened, we could have no idea of what enlightenment is like.

It is not like practicing music, where we can put on a CD and hear what music sounds like. With enlightenment there is no CD, DVD, or anything else that we can play to get an idea of what enlightenment, the goal of our meditation, is actually like.

And in my own case, I found that the greatest obstacles to meditation were my own preconceptions about what meditation was supposed to result in, i.e. some kind of enlightenment experience. Yet I had zero accurate idea of what such enlightenment might be, although of course I compared any experience I might have when practicing meditation against what I imagined a good result was supposed to be, and was usually disappointed. Do you think that helped?

Because I had never first recognized how the mind works, much less worked the mind toward true enlightenment by actually meditating, my own expectations were the greatest obstacle to realizing anything and making progress. So what is my point?

My point and my suggestion is that it is helpful to understand that practicing meditation is practice and not meditation. Further it is very useful to investigate and admit that you have little to no idea what enlightenment actually is, and that you are just practicing

(treading water) until you get the hang of it, until the real thing comes along.

Getting the hang of it can take a long time, indeed. That is why we have dharma teachers and, hopefully, a teacher tailored to our needs who can point out to us the true nature of the mind, and how it works.

Once we have recognition and realize how the mind works, we instinctively know just what to do and in a very real sense our teacher's job is finished. This is what the pointing out instructions in Buddhism are all about.

I bring this up only to hopefully dissuade you from practicing endlessly, thinking you are meditating, when in reality you don't yet know how.

Knowing we don't know is a good first step to actually knowing. If we think we know, when we don't, it makes it very difficult to ever know.

RESTING

Sitting quietly,
Properly,
With tongue to teeth,
My body invites,
The mind.
To be,
At ease.

October 2, 2011



[Photo of a statue of the great Mahasiddha Tilopa.]