

What is Awakening?

Let me start first by saying what awakening is not. It's not a set of ideas or adopting the right dogma; it's not a philosophy; it's not even religious. It's a shift of perspective, a shift of identity, from what we thought we were to the recognition of what we really are.

Most of us growing up in this culture have come to the conclusion, without ever questioning it, that what we are is a separate individual; this body, this mind, this set of experiences, walking around in a great big world trying to get by as best we can, trying to accumulate a few pleasures along the way, trying to avoid some painful situations, and trying to make the best of it. Trying to get by until we die. We're brought up to believe that we are is this limited being.

But that wasn't always the case.

When we were first born, several months old, there was no conception about what we were. There was just a wide-open, total in-awe, curiosity about what was happening around us. And it was all happening without labels; without thought. We were just taking it all in. And as we grew into childhood, we developed a sense of ourselves as separate individuals. It started out with mom and dad, or whoever, telling us what our names were, what their names were, and it went on from there. As teenagers, we developed an identity; and, as adults, we've developed a more sophisticated identity.

Awakening is really the recognition that we are beyond all of that. It's really a shift of identity into finding out that what we are is something that could be called "formless consciousness." But just to give it a name is to give it another concept. The only important thing is when we discover what we are for ourselves, not as a philosophy and not as a belief. Belief in this endeavour is like kryptonite. Awakening is really the direct discovery, in our own experience, and to our own satisfaction, of what we are. It's really the search to answer the question, "What am I?" And that search can lead us to a point of what can be called awakening.

Awakening isn't a permanent high state; it's not a permanent blissful state. Contentment and bliss can be involved, but it's really a transition from a life that we thought we were living as an individual to finding out that we are larger than that yet including that. It's really the end of the search (the seeking phase) when we find out that our innermost urge which was seeking to answer the question, "What am I?" turns out to be what we are – what we are already. It's a surprising discovery, a hilarious discovery. We find out what we may have spent years looking for was what was present all along.

Once we find that which we were seeking, seeking obviously ends. There's no point in continuing to seek that which has already been found. But that doesn't mean that our spiritual journey is over. It's actually the end of one journey, "seeking," and the beginning of another journey that could be called "awakened life," or, more simply, "life lived truly, or even more simply, Life."

That's the invitation. As I said, it's not a moment of bliss, although that can be associated with it. But those fireworks will fade like any other experience and what's left is just a knowingness of a mysterious awareness that we all are, and that we all are already. That's the incredible discovery that awaits us all. The gift has already been given. It only awaits us to notice.