

# *Enlightenment*

*Because Our Lives Depend on It*

by

Michael Mendizza

Is enlightenment some far off mystical state, eternal bliss, found somewhere over the rainbow, or is enlightenment right here, right now, on the street where you live? Are you enlightened? Is the bus driver or the woman doing yoga at the gym? Was Buddha enlightened, or Jesus, or Rumi? What about Socrates? The Oracle of Delphi was a woman. Was she enlightened?

Who cares about enlightenment? Most struggle just to make it through the day. Half of the people living on the planet don't have clean drinking water. Environmental pollution, traffic jams, suicide bombers, shabby schools, poor health care, wars, rising prices, two jobs, longer work weeks, lying politicians. Who has time to be enlightened?

As the world heats up so do the challenges we face. Our challenges are becoming bigger, faster and more complex. These problems can't be solved at the level that created the problem. Conflicts between cops and robbers, Republicans and Democrats, Arabs and Jews, unions and corporations, street gangs, husbands and wives, emanate from the categories that define their relationships. One has to go beyond the category that caused the problem to see the problem clearly and from that expanded position ask penetrating questions.

If you and I, ordinary people, don't see beyond the level that causes our problems, their expanding weight, complexity and intensity will crush us. We have no choice. The time has come for each of us to become enlightened, not in a cave, not on the shores of the Ganges, in some temple or monastery. We haven't the time. We must become enlightened right here, right now, as we meet the day-to-day challenge of living.

We have created most of the challenges we must now solve. We are the problem. Our habit, however, is to try to fix the problem out there. Most are like the man in the Sufi story standing under a street lamp. A friend approaches and asks, "What are you looking for?" "My keys," shouts the man under the lamp post. "Where did you lose them?" asked the friend. "In the dark." "Then why are you looking here?" "Because here is where the light is..." Like a dog chasing its tail we keep looking in the same places and never find what we are looking for. We remain stuck at the level of the problem.

Our failure to see beyond the problem prevents us from discovering that we are the problem. The source is a particular state of mind we call "normal." Our normal state produces a steady stream of inner images, thoughts, assumptions, feelings and beliefs with their implied conflicts and confusion. We then use the same state of mind to sort out the confusion this state creates. The more we try to solve the problem the deeper and more complex our problems become. And we have remained in this normal state, like a donkey tethered to a post, for thousands of years.

The Tibetans have a phrase, *Lhag Thong*, to describe a state that sees beyond appearances, a state they call "transcendent insight." The famous Sanskrit mantra *gate, gate, paramgate, parasamgate, Bodhi, Swaha* honors this transcendent state. "Oh wisdom that sees beyond, beyond even the concept of beyond, to thee homage." Enlightenment is this state of perception that sees beyond the limitations of our own conditioning, our memories, ghost feelings, thoughts, beliefs and the conflicts they create.

We might think of enlightenment as a “reset-button,” one that evaporates the conflicts and confusion created by our normal way of seeing. Hit the switch and the body/mind instantly “reaches beyond” the confusion it creates. And in this original state we see and respond to the world exactly as it is. Nice idea. Now where is the button?

Joseph Chilton Pearce chose *The Biology of Transcendence* as the theme for his latest book. Joe claims that the vital force that drives biology, and by implication the human experience, is transcendence. Transcendence means “overcoming limitation and constraint.” Transcendence is an action word, a verb.

Physicist David Bohm and J. Krishnamurti describe insight and intelligence as states of relationship that evokes a deeper response than one’s conditioning. Insight and intelligence are too subtle to be bound by the limitations imposed by this conditioning. “We can’t catch the wind in a paper bag,” insisted Alan Watts. Our conditioned mind is the paper bag. “The name that can be named is not the eternal name,” proclaims the first line of the *Tao Te Ching*. The word is not the thing. Insight and intelligence are not concepts. They are states of perception, moving. Insight and intelligence are verbs.

The essential point about verbs is that the actions they describe take place now, in the present moment. Krishnamurti said simply – “the future is now.” “All time, the past, the present and the future, is contained now. You can see this point for yourself,” he said. “I am what I have been. If I don’t change now I will be tomorrow exactly what I am now.” The state of my relationship to this moment creates the next, which is the future. The future is now.

This insight represents a radical shift in perception and values. We create the future by the way we relate to the present. Our relationship to the world, moment by moment, expresses in the body and mind as different states - curious, afraid, horny, lazy. Like a river each of us is defined this moment by the ebb and flow of our changing states of relationship. My life, your life, all of life, is “state specific.”

We literally *Touch the Future* by the way we relate to the present. A change this moment creates a different future. The transformation we seek must take place now. Now is the only leverage we have. Nothing else works.

Most aren’t focusing on the state of their relationship this moment. We are too busy trying to change the future, change our husbands, our wives, our children, trying to change our mothers. This “normal” state keeps us trapped at the level of the problem we are trying to fix. We are the dogs and we are the tails we are chasing.

Where is the reset button that evaporates this confusion and restores the body and mind to its natural order? Trying harder only causes us to chase our tails faster. Pouring more information into the system creates the illusion that we have multiple tails to chase. Effort, will, more data are parts of the pattern that causes the problem. Using the pattern that created the problem to solve the problem is insane. “Beam me up, Scotty.” Take me to another level, to a state that transcends this compounding confusion. Hit the reset button and do it NOW!

Somewhere in the bible appears the phrase, “Be Yee transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Translation – go to the next level. Break the pattern that is causing the confusion and its conflicts. Transcend the pattern. Transcendence is a verb. Verbs describe actions. The reset button must be an action that happens now.

What action can take place this moment that will break the pattern that creates the problem? We call the pattern that is crushing us normal. Normal is normal because it is, well, “normal.” Normal is home base. Normal is what feels safe, familiar. Normal is the pattern we keep repeating. Normal is the groove in a record, if you can remember back that far. The needle we call attention tracks in well established grooves. Normal is made up of assumptions, millions of little habits, conditioned reflexes.

Bohm referred to this collection of habits as the “reflex system.” Reflexes are predetermined responses, based on past conditioning, that operate mechanically. Tap the knee and the leg jerks. Conscious attention and intelligence were not needed.

The leg jerked mechanically in response to a trigger, a stimulus. Most of our behavior, the way we live our lives, our personal identity and self image, all the things we call normal, are defined and driven by the reflex system.

Reflexes are great. They help us stand up, walk across the floor, tie our shoes, ride a bicycle, talk to our neighbor, drive a car. Reflexes begin as intelligence but slowly all the intelligence is squeezed out. Watch how this happens. When learning anything new, we give complete attention to the experience. We touch, taste, smell, wonder, test, and explore. This entrained energy and attention etches new neural networks in the brain. We repeat the pattern, tying our shoes, until we can do it with little or no attention, no real intelligence. The pattern becomes a reflex. Day after day, year after year we build new neural networks in response to new challenges. We repeat these patterns, adding to the collection of reflexes we call normal.

Reflexes are automatic. Reflexes are habits. Like a hairball this steady accumulation of reflexes takes on a life of its own. In no time thousands, perhaps millions of reflexes begin firing every day. This automatic firing of reflexes stimulates the brain, which responds by creating a corresponding flow of internal images.

Responding to the imagery generated by reflexes, the brain abstracts another type of image, that of a “creator” creating, a “thinker” who thinks. This second level of imagery abstracted from the first is so convincing that we soon believe there is a permanent entity, a “doer,” causing and controlling all this activity. The source of most of our problems does not come from the first, primary layer of images; it comes from the second layer, abstracted from the first.

Being the creators of everything we do, this abstracted image takes on supreme importance. Survival depends on preserving and protecting the integrity of this image. If someone questions the appropriateness of our behavior we experience this as a direct assault on the captain of our ship, which is “I.” On close examination we discover that the all important thinker/doer, the image we call me, myself and I, is a mirage created by the wake of automatic reflexes rippling through the ocean of our consciousness. Most never see this, however; they are too busy looking for their keys under the lamp post.

It is not the brain’s fault that it creates all these images. Creating images is a unique function that distinguishes a brain from other organs. Each major brain system creates a different type of image. The sensory motor brain creates sensory images. We call the images created by the limbic regions of the brain feelings and emotions. The neo-cortex creates symbolic and metaphoric images. All three systems and several others flood consciousness with different types of images twenty-four-seven. Survival depends on the integrity, the accuracy, and the truthfulness of these images. No wonder we defend them as if our life depended on it, because it does.

As we learn and grow, the reflex system expands. This growth increases the flow of inner imagery automatically generated by the system. Conflicts in the reflex-data-base are inevitable. These create a disturbance requiring attention, what we might call routine maintenance. More reflexes demand greater energy and attention to maintain the system. Vital energy and attention once invested in learning and performance turn inward, marking the end of what Ashley Montagu called the “genius of childhood.” Gradually this transfer of resources from learning to maintenance and defense of the reflex system curtails development. Personal growth stops. We begin chasing our own tail. The faster we run, the more stuck we get at the level that created the problem.

This pattern, the normal state of our body and mind, is fertile ground for conflicts. Like a computer virus, the source code that creates most of our problems is woven into this pattern. What is needed is a quality of energy, an action that generates a different state of perception. What is needed is *Lhag Thong*, transcendent insight, passionate energy and attention to see beyond the appearances created by the reflex system.

This passionate energy and attention affects the body and mind like a magnet placed under iron filings affects the relationship each particle of iron has to the next. A small coherent force brings a large chaotic pattern to order.

Neither the reflex system nor the iron filings can bring about this change, no matter how hard they try. An energy or state that is “beyond” level that created the problem is needed. Enlightenment is the effect this passionate energy and attention has on the particular state of body and mind we call “normal.” Bohm and Krishnamurti call this passionate energy and attention intelligence. They call the expression of intelligence in the body-mind, “insight.” Insight and intelligence can’t come from the conditioned level in which we live most of our lives. The reflexive mind can’t produce intelligence or insight. It can allow it however, invite it, by recognizing the limitations of its own conditioning.

How do we remove this virus from our operating system? What action can take place this moment that will break the pattern that keeps creating the problems that are crushing us? How do we access and gather the energy and attention necessary to transcend and transform the normal state in which we live, because our lives depend on it?

Next time...

*Michael*

For more on insight, intelligence and the reflex system please see David Bohm:

Print:

<http://ttfuture.org/services/visionaries/Dbohmnindex.html>

Audio:

[http://ttfuture.org/services/publications/d\\_audio\\_bohm.htm](http://ttfuture.org/services/publications/d_audio_bohm.htm)

Book:

Bohm: Thought As A System