



Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram

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Insight into Sutras #4

## What Is Enlightenment?

By Gurudevi Nirmalananda

Sometimes you can tell what's going on inside a person by the way they look. Their silly grin or their wrinkled brow tells you what they are thinking and feeling. Yet someone can be smiling while thinking negative or harmful thoughts. In poker and in politics, the pathway to success is to hide your true feelings. This can sometimes be true in close relationships as well.

Can you look at someone and see that they are enlightened? This is important because you want to study with the best. They can help you make rapid progress toward your own enlightenment. What is enlightenment like, both inside and outside? Fortunately, Arjuna asked this question for us:

Arjuna uvacha, sthita-prajnyasya ka bhasha samadhi-sthasya keshava  
sthita-dhiih kim prabhasheta kim asita vrajeta kim.<sup>1</sup> — Bhagavadgita 2.54

Arjuna asked, "What is the inner experience of an enlightened being? In worldly activities, how do they talk? How do they sit? How do they walk?"

The next eighteen verses are Krishna's answer. He describes the process of becoming enlightened as well as how the enlightened being lives.

By Divine Grace, all his sorrows are destroyed. With a peaceful mind, he abides in a Divine state of inner steadiness. — Bhagavadgita 2.65

Your understanding of this description begins from your own experiences of a peaceful mind. But what is "a Divine state?" These experiences are pivot points in your life. I remember being a teenager at summer camp in the mountains. I often sat in a sacred grove that had a view of the valley. It was reserved as a silent lookout point. In the beginning, the view transported me. I felt like I could almost fly across the vast terrain. I felt free.

My experience changed as I returned again, sometimes multiple times daily. It became an inner vastness that was much greater than the view. At the same time, I felt grounded, like the roots of the trees reaching into the earth for longer than I had been alive.

The inner vastness is there now. It is in me. It is in you. As you step into your own vastness and timelessness, you discover there is more than you ever imagined. You are more than you imagine yourself to be, for you don't merely experience the vastness and its source — you are that. When you live in the knowing of your own vastness, your own timelessness, your own Beingness — you are you in a whole new way. You are free.

While the Great Beings and texts give us descriptions of this great state, it is hard to put into words. It's like trying to describe the color blue to a blind person. You cannot compare it to the sky or the ocean, for they cannot see either. Thus there are two ways to describe enlightenment: 1) what it is, and 2) what it is not.

The technical term within our tradition is Self-Realization, meaning that you realize you already are Self and have always been. Your essence is Divine. Your own knowing of your own Divine Essence is deeper than thought. It is a knowing, even a feeling, but not an emotion.

You lean into your own Beingness in the same way that you float in an extra salty sea. It buoys you up, supporting your mind and heart from the inside out, no matter what life brings to you. I have floated in the Andaman Sea. It is so salty that, while laying back in the water, my ears were dry. In the Dead Sea, I sat up like I could read a book. In both, I was as relaxed as in bed.

Living in the Knowingness of your own Beingness is even easier. The Shiva Sutras describes "... the delight of knowership which the yogi experiences by continuous repose and delight within himself..."<sup>2</sup> You rest in your own Self.

Enlightenment is not normal. Normal means the norm, the state of mind and heart that most people experience. Living in the not-knowing of their own Divine Essence, they feel empty. This emptiness drives

<sup>1</sup> Arjuna uvaaca, sthita-praj~nasya kaa bhaa.saa samaadhi-sthasya ke"sava, sthita-dhiih ki.m prabhaa.seta kim aasiita vrajeta kim.

<sup>2</sup> Singh, Jaidev, Siva Sutras (1979 Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi), page 67

them to seek something to fill them up. They look outward but rarely find fulfillment. Thus they live in their reactivity, which is mostly anxiety and anger. This is the norm.

Abhilashat bahir-gatih samvahyasya.<sup>3</sup> — Shiva Sutras 1.40

Bound by anava mala (not-knowingness), ordinary individuals are driven by desire, look outward for fulfillment, and are thus carried through repetitive cycles unto lifetimes.

Enlightenment is freedom from anava mala, meaning you are no longer bound by the not-knowing. You know your own Self, so you feel full already. You are free from looking outward for someone or something to fill you up. Thus desire, anxiety and anger cannot arise. To be liberated means you are freed from the cycle of rebirth.

These are big freedoms! In simple words, freedom from fear means you can do anything, go anywhere, and be anyone you want to be. This is actually true now, but fear often holds you back. Sometimes that is a good thing. Sometimes not.

An enlightened being does not use a fear-o-meter to make decisions. They use their intelligence. Better yet, their intelligence is fueled by Cosmic Consciousness, so their decisions are illumined. Such a Master is described as living in constant bliss. Yet they are engaged in the world. Why? For the benefit of others.

Having attained the highest, being free from fear, need and greed, there is nothing they seek for themselves. Seeing the Divine in all, many Great Beings devote their lives to helping others attain freedom. The highest honor is given to them in the title, Guru, meaning spiritual teacher.

How can you tell if a Guru is worth their salt? You are used to judging the book by the cover, sizing up other people by the way they look. If you haven't met many enlightened beings, how do you tell if they are the real deal?

Instead of rating their physical beauty or sense of humor, instead of evaluating their age, skin color or native tongue, you're trying to see what their inner state is. However, if your inner state is not yet expanded, you cannot tell if theirs is.

The only reliable test is the change in you. It is a Divine Infusion that makes the difference. When a Guru awakens the energy of Consciousness within you, your spiritual progress is powered by God.

Yo'vipastho jnaahetushcha.<sup>4</sup> — Shiva Sutras 3.29

Only a yogi with mastery over Divine Shakti is capable to enlighten others.

Many Gurus can quote texts and explain Sanskrit terms and meanings. Rare are those who give you the experience described. While you can study with anyone who knows more than you, it is only the Shaktipat Guru who can give you enlightenment. Once your dormant Shakti (energy of Consciousness) is awakened, you can fly like a blazing comet in the sky.

I was fortunate to study with such a Shaktipat Master. I could tell that he gave me something that no one else gave. All the spiritual books I had read left me feeling incomplete, wanting more. Reading my Baba's books filled me up. All the other teachers I met said there was something worth attaining, but sitting with my Baba gave me my own Divine Essence. He was contagious. He emanated Consciousness like the sun emanates light and heat.

Yet he emphasized that it wasn't about him. It was about our own Self. The point was to become established in our own Knowingness of our own Beingness. And he is the one who made it possible. Not merely a door to Consciousness, he was the open doorway through which you step into your own Self. But you have to make the steps. Do more yoga.

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<sup>3</sup> Abhilaa.saadbahirgati.h sa.mvaahyasya.

<sup>4</sup> Yo'vipastho j~naahetu"sca.