

ENLIGHTENMENT AND LIBERATION - A SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVE
(Published in *The Chitrapur Sunbeam*, Vol.No.VI, Nov '99, Issue No.11, pp.28-31).
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Our spiritual tradition speaks extensively about the phenomena of Enlightenment and Liberation, but we do not see these conditions mentioned anywhere in scientific or medical books. Do these conditions then really exist? Are they scientifically compatible? Religious literature describes Enlightenment as the loss or disappearance of `ahamkara' or ego. *Ahamkara* is the sense of separate individuality or `doership.' According to our scriptures, the average person is imbued with a false sense of separateness or doership (*kartrutva*), which is the separate `me' (*aham*). Where there is the me, there is the `other,' and where there is the other, the Upanishads say, there is fear (and psychological suffering). But is normal life really possible without the ego? And if so, can a person discharge all his worldly duties in that state?

We Chitrapur Saraswats should have no difficulty in at least accepting that such a condition exists, for we have been specially privileged in having such a person live amidst us for over half a century, namely Swami Anandashram. But can we explain this state in scientific terms?

So far this has not been done. But we can now show that such a state is scientifically compatible, and moreover, that it is not a strange, hallucinatory, magical state, but rather a most practical and real condition which can be demonstrated and explained in precise medical and psychological terms. We can show that the Enlightened or Liberated person is not a strange freak of nature, but the most normal, sane, uncomplicated human being that there can ever be. Briefly, we can explain it as follows.

Let us trace the development of an average individual from early life. As a baby, a person is not aware of himself as a separate entity. As the child grows into an adult human being, there is a progressive evolution of his nervous system and there finally comes a stage when the person is consciously aware of himself, as apart from his surroundings. As language and verbalized thought develop, this awareness can be expressed in symbolical form, and the perceiving organism is then labelled as a `me,' and automatically the rest of the world as `other.' This is where the split starts. When there is the separation of a `me' from the `other,' there is simultaneously a separation of interests – the interests of the `me' as against the interests of the `other.' This is where the conflict begins. The illusion of the `me,' which is the illusion of separateness from the rest of mankind, forms the basis for a host of `me-based' conditioning which drive the average man's activities in life. Most of our routine actions are based on the presumption of the existence of a `me' as a separate entity, and with the constant calculation of how such activity would affect that `me.' It is our me-based conditioning which gives us a picture of things as they `should be.' When the `me' is perceived to be adversely affected by something, psychological suffering is the result. Thus psychological suffering is fundamentally based on the primary illusion of the existence of an `I' or 'me' as a separate entity (separate from the `other' – which is the rest of the world), with separate interests. Physical pain even animals experience, but psychological suffering is unique to the

human race. Man is a thinking animal, and this is the price he pays for his intellectual development.

However, a rare human being sees through this illusion of a separate 'me,' and he is then said to be Enlightened. He then sees life in a completely different perspective. He no more sees life from the limited, restricted, false, individual perspective of the illusory 'me.' Instead, he sees it in its Totality, as it really is, in its 'suchness.' Enlightenment results in a complete transformation in his life (*paraavrutti*), and initiates a process of deconditioning from the effects of the me-illusion. This process finally culminates in a state completely devoid of me-based conditioning, and this state is known as Liberation, because such a person is then liberated from the psychological suffering that persecutes the rest of mankind. The Liberated One has no idea of 'what should be.' He reacts appropriately to the 'what is,' and that's that. Thus, whereas the average man is subject to psychological suffering, the hallmark of the liberated person is that he is entirely free of it.

We can summarize the entire process as follows:

Higher functions of CNS → Conscious awareness → language and verbalized thought → Illusion of a 'me' as a separate entity → Me-based conditioning → Psychological or avoidable (or me-based) suffering.

The Liberated One, on the other hand, is devoid of the 'me'-illusion and is therefore totally free of (or 'liberated' from) psychological suffering.

ENLIGHTENMENT (Self-realisation, Awakening, *satori*, *jnana*, *atma-jnana*) can be defined as the clear and deep intuitive understanding or perception of the absence of the 'I' or 'me' as a separate, autonomous entity. That is, it is the loss of *ahamkara*. It is not the mere belief in or the intellectual understanding of this truth, but its actual perception.

Post-enlightenment, the me-based conditioning built up over the years begins to be reversed, that is, the process of deconditioning starts. The end-point is Liberation – totally unconditioned living.

LIBERATION (*moksha*; *mukti*; *nirvana*) is the natural culmination of the process of deconditioning initiated by Enlightenment. The Liberated One is called a *Jivanmukta*. Liberation can be said to have occurred when the individual is totally devoid of me-based conditioning.

The characteristics of a Liberated One are:

1. Complete absence of the 'I'-illusion (*ahamkara*).
2. Total absence of me-based thinking, and hence of psychological suffering.

3. Loss of the sense of continuity of time (which is mainly in our minds). That is, there is no sense of 'psychological time' as opposed to 'chronological time' (J.Krishnamurti). It is the sense of continuity of time which gives a 'past' and a 'future' to the image of the 'me,' and thus gives it life. But in actuality, all there exists, is the Present. The past and future exist only in our minds (memory and imagination respectively). Whereas the ordinary person's mind is constantly occupied with these, the mind of the Liberated One does not wander unnecessarily into the past or the future. Therefore, his mind remains in the present, the *ekakshana* – the 'Eternal NOW' – quite naturally, effortlessly, by 'default,' so to speak.

4. That is why such a person is said to be 'living in the present.' But he does not do this by a volitional act (as one may do by trying to 'concentrate on the work in hand'). To the Liberated One, 'living in the present' happens as a matter of course – that is his natural way of life.

5. As he is wholly in the present, he is totally absorbed in whatever he may be doing at the moment – a fact regularly observed about Swami Anandashram.

6. Also, he savours the Present fully, undistracted by extraneous thoughts. That is why the scriptures describe him as a '*Mahabhogi*' as well as a *Mahayogi*.

7. Emotions, when they do occur, are fleeting, and they leave no mark – 'like a line traced on water' (Swami Anandashram).

8. The Liberated One is compassion incarnate. Actually, compassion is inversely proportional to the sense of 'otherness' felt by a person. Since the Liberated One has lost the dualism of 'me' versus the 'other,' he does not see anyone as 'other.' Compassion is therefore the natural, spontaneous result. He does not cultivate compassion as a virtue. Since he sees no one as 'other,' he feels for them as naturally as one would feel for oneself. The state of the Liberated One is described as *Sahaja Samadhi*. This is not to be confused with *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, which is a state of trance brought about by intense meditation and in which all thought is suspended. *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* is essentially a temporary state of trance. *Sahaja Samadhi*, on the other hand, is the state of a person who is totally devoid of me-based thinking, who is totally unconditioned, and is totally one with, at home with, the universe. His mind knows no conflict. He remains in that state whatever he may be doing. It is not a state of trance, not a temporary state, and not dependent on any method or technique (as is *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*). *Sahaja* means effortless, natural or spontaneous. *Sahaja Samadhi* is thus a way of life. It is the way of life of a person who has irrevocably lost his separate 'me.'

These, then, are in very brief, just a few of the characteristics of the Liberated person. This is just a brief exposition to show that these conditions can be defined and explained in scientific terms. The actual details of the scientific explanation would be beyond a brief article such as this, but suffice it to say here that every detail of the condition can be thoroughly explained in medical and psychological terms. Surely, the day must come, and soon, when these phenomena will enter the scientific texts.

