

MEETINGS WITH REMARKABLE PEOPLE

*Bodhidharma • Gautama the Buddha • Chiyono
Chuang Tzu • Dionysius • Kahlil Gibran • Gurdjieff
Heraclitus • Jesus • Krishna • J. Krishnamurti
Lao Tzu • Meera • Nietzsche • Pythagoras
Rabiya al-Adabiya • Rumi • Sanai • Socrates*

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Contents

[Bodhidharma](#)

[Gautama the Buddha](#)

[Chiyono](#)

[Chuang Tzu](#)

[Dionysius](#)

[Kahlil Gibran](#)

[George Gurdjieff](#)

[Heraclitus](#)

[Jesus](#)

[Kabir](#)

[Krishna](#)

[J. Krishnamurti](#)

[Lao Tzu](#)

[Meera](#)

[Friedrich Nietzsche](#)

[Pythagoras](#)

[Rabiya al-Adabiya](#)

[Jalaluddin Rumi](#)

[Hakim Sanai](#)

[Socrates](#)

[Afterword: Beyond History](#)

Bodhidharma

In the long evolution of human consciousness there has never been such an outlandish buddha as Bodhidharma – very rare, very unique, exotic. Only in some small ways George Gurdjieff comes close to him, but not very close – and only in some ways, not in all ways.

There have been many buddhas in the world, but Bodhidharma stands out like an Everest. His way of being, living, and expressing the truth is simply his; it is incomparable. Even his own master, Gautama the Buddha, cannot be compared with Bodhidharma. Even Buddha would have found it difficult to digest this man.

This man Bodhidharma traveled from India to China to spread the message of his master. Although they are separated by 1,000 years, for Bodhidharma and for such men there is no time, no space – for Bodhidharma, Buddha was a contemporary. Superficially there is a thousand-year gap between Buddha and Bodhidharma, but there is not even a single moment's gap in reality, in truth. On the circumference Buddha was already dead for 1,000 years when Bodhidharma arrived on the scene, but at the center he is together with Buddha. He speaks the essence of Buddha – of course he has his own way, his own style. Even Buddha would find it strange.

Buddha was a very cultured man, very sophisticated, very graceful. Bodhidharma is just the opposite in his expression. He is not a man but a lion. He does not speak, he roars. He has not the grace which belonged to Gautama the Buddha; he is rough, raw. He is not polished like a diamond; he is just from the mine, absolutely raw, no polishing. That is his beauty. Buddha has a beauty that is very feminine, very polished, very fragile. Bodhidharma has his own beauty, like that of a rock – strong, masculine, indestructible, a great power.

Buddha also radiates power, but his power is very silent, like a whisper, a cool breeze. Bodhidharma is a storm, thundering and lightning. Buddha comes to your door without making any noise; he will not even knock on your door, you will not even hear his footsteps. But when Bodhidharma comes to you he will shake the whole house from its very foundations.

Buddha will not shake you even if you are asleep. And Bodhidharma? He will wake you up from your grave! He hits hard, he is a hammer. He is just the opposite of Buddha in his expression,

but his message is the same. He bows down to Buddha as his master. He never says, “This is my message.” He simply says, “This belongs to the buddhas, the ancient buddhas. I am just a messenger. Nothing is mine, because I am not. I am only a hollow bamboo who has been chosen by the buddhas to be a flute for them. They sing; I simply let them sing through me.”



Bodhidharma was born 14 centuries ago as a son of a king in the south of India. There was a big empire, the empire of Pallavas. He was the third son of his father, but seeing everything – he was a man of tremendous intelligence – he renounced the kingdom. He was not against the world, but he was not ready to waste his time in mundane affairs, in trivia. His whole concern was to know his self-nature, because without knowing it you have to accept death as the end.

All true seekers, in fact, have been fighting against death. Bertrand Russell has made a statement that if there were no death, there would be no religion. There is some truth in it. I will not agree totally, because religion is a vast continent. It is not only death, it is also the search for bliss, it is also the search for truth, it is also the search for the meaning of life; it is many more things. But certainly Bertrand Russell is right: if there were no death, very few, very rare people would be interested in religion. Death is the great incentive.

Bodhidharma renounced the kingdom saying to his father, “If you cannot save me from death, then please don’t prevent me. Let me go in search of something that is beyond death.” Those were beautiful days, particularly in the East. The father thought for a moment and he said, “I will not prevent you, because I cannot prevent your death. You go on your search with all my blessings. It is sad for me but that is my problem; it is my attachment. I was hoping for you to be the successor, to be the emperor of the great Pallavas Empire, but you have chosen something higher than that. I am your father so how can I prevent you?”

“And you have put in such a simple way a question which I had never expected. You say, ‘If you can prevent my death then I will not leave the palace, but if you cannot prevent my death, then please don’t prevent me either.’” You can see Bodhidharma’s caliber as a great intelligence.

And the second thing that I would like you to remember is that although he was a follower of Gautama Buddha, in some instances he shows higher flights than Gautama Buddha himself. For example, Gautama Buddha was afraid to initiate a woman into his

commune but Bodhidharma got initiated by a woman who was enlightened. Her name was Pragyatara. Perhaps people would have forgotten her name; it is only because of Bodhidharma that her name still remains, but only the name – we don't know anything else about her. It was she who ordered Bodhidharma to go to China. Buddhism had reached China 600 years before Bodhidharma. It was something magical; it had never happened anywhere, at any time – Buddha's message immediately caught hold of the whole Chinese people.

The situation was that China had lived under the influence of Confucius and was tired of it. Because Confucius is just a moralist, a puritan, he does not know anything about the inner mysteries of life. In fact, he denies that there is anything inner. Everything is outer; refine it, polish it, culture it, make it as beautiful as possible.

There were people like Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, Lieh Tzu, contemporaries of Confucius, but they were mystics not masters. They could not create a countermovement against Confucius in the hearts of the Chinese people. So there was a vacuum. Nobody can live without a soul, and once you start thinking that there is no soul, your life starts losing all meaning. The soul is your very integrating concept; without it you are cut away from existence and eternal life. Just like a branch cut off from a tree is bound to die – it has lost the source of nourishment – the very idea that there is no soul inside you, no consciousness, cuts you away from existence. One starts shrinking, one starts feeling suffocated.

But Confucius was a very great rationalist. These mystics, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, Lieh Tzu, knew that what Confucius was doing was wrong, but they were not masters. They remained in their monasteries with their few disciples.

When Buddhism reached China, it immediately entered to the very soul of the people ... as if they had been thirsty for centuries, and Buddhism had come as a rain cloud. It quenched their thirst so immensely that something unimaginable happened.

Christianity has converted many people, but that conversion is not worth calling religious. It converts the poor, the hungry, the beggars, the orphans, not by any spiritual impact on them but just by giving them food, clothes, shelter, education. But these have nothing to do with spirituality. Mohammedanism has converted a tremendous amount of people, but on the point of the sword: either you be a Mohammedan, or you cannot live. The choice is yours.

The conversion that happened in China is the only religious conversion in the whole history of mankind. Buddhism simply explained itself, and the beauty of the message was understood by the people. They were thirsty for it, they were waiting for something like it. The whole country, which was the biggest country in the

world, turned to Buddhism. When Bodhidharma reached there 600 years later, there were already 30,000 Buddhist temples, monasteries, and 2 million Buddhist monks in China. And 2 million Buddhist monks is not a small number; it was 5 percent of the whole population of China.

Pragyatara, Bodhidharma's master, told him to go to China because the people who had reached there before him had made a great impact, although none of them were enlightened. They were great scholars, very disciplined people, very loving and peaceful and compassionate, but none of them were enlightened. And now China needed another Gautama Buddha. The ground was ready.

Bodhidharma was the first enlightened man to reach China. The point I want to make clear is that while Gautama Buddha was afraid to initiate women into his commune, Bodhidharma was courageous enough to be initiated by a woman on the path of Gautama Buddha. There were other enlightened people, but he chose a woman for a certain purpose. And the purpose was to show that a woman can be enlightened. Not only that, her disciples can be enlightened. Bodhidharma's name stands out amongst all the Buddhist enlightened people second only to Gautama Buddha.

There are many legends about the man; they all have some significance. One legend is that when he reached China – it took him three years – the Chinese emperor Wu came to receive him. His fame had reached ahead of him. Emperor Wu had done great service to the philosophy of Gautama Buddha. Thousands of scholars were translating Buddhist scriptures from Pali into Chinese and the emperor was the patron of all that great work of translation. He had made thousands of temples and monasteries, and he was feeding thousands of monks. He had put his whole treasure at the service of Gautama Buddha, and naturally the Buddhist monks who had reached China before Bodhidharma had been telling him that he was earning great virtue, that he will be born as a god in heaven.

Naturally, his first question to Bodhidharma was, "I have made so many monasteries, I am feeding thousands of scholars, I have opened a whole university for the studies of Gautama Buddha, I have put my whole empire and its treasures in the service of Gautama Buddha. What is going to be my reward?"

He was a little embarrassed seeing Bodhidharma, not thinking that the man would be like this. He looked very ferocious. He had very big eyes, but he had a very soft heart – just a lotus flower in his heart. But his face was almost as dangerous as you can conceive. Just the sunglasses were missing; otherwise he was a mafia guy!

With great fear, Emperor Wu asked the question, and Bodhidharma said, "Nothing, no reward. On the contrary, be ready to fall into the seventh hell."

The emperor said, “But I have not done anything wrong – why the seventh hell? I have been doing everything that the Buddhist monks have been telling me.”

Bodhidharma said, “Unless you start hearing your own voice, nobody can help you, Buddhist or non-Buddhist. And you have not yet heard your inner voice. If you had heard it, you would not have asked such a stupid question.

“On the path of Gautama Buddha there is no reward because the very desire for reward comes from a greedy mind. The whole teaching of Gautama Buddha is desirelessness and if you are doing all these so-called virtuous acts, making temples and monasteries and feeding thousands of monks, with a desire in your mind, you are preparing your way towards hell. If you are doing these things out of joy, to share your joy with the whole empire, and there is not even a slight desire anywhere for any reward, the very act is a reward unto itself. Otherwise you have missed the whole point.”

Emperor Wu said, “My mind is so full of thoughts. I have been trying to create some peace of mind, but I have failed and because of these thoughts and their noise, I cannot hear what you are calling the inner voice. I don’t know anything about it.”

Bodhidharma said, “Then, four o’clock in the morning, come alone without any bodyguards to the temple in the mountains where I am going to stay. And I will put your mind at peace, forever.”

The emperor thought this man really outlandish, outrageous. He had met many monks; they were so polite, but this one does not even bother that he is an emperor of a great country. And to go to him in the darkness of early morning at four o’clock, alone ... And this man seems to be dangerous – he always used to carry a big staff with him.

The emperor could not sleep the whole night: “To go or not to go? Because that man can do anything. He seems to be absolutely unreliable.” And on the other hand, he felt deep down in his heart the sincerity of the man, that he is not a hypocrite. “He does not care a bit that you are an emperor and he is just a beggar. He behaves as an emperor, and in front of him you are just a beggar. And the way he has said, ‘I will put your mind at peace forever.’

“Strange, because I have been asking,” the emperor thought, “of many, many wise people who have come from India, and they all gave me methods, techniques, which I have been practicing, but nothing is happening – and this strange fellow, who looks almost mad, or drunk, and has a strange face with such big eyes that he creates fear ... But he seems to be sincere too – he is a wild phenomenon. And it is worth the risk. What can he do – at the most he can kill me.” Finally, he could not resist the temptation because the man had promised, “I will put your mind at peace forever.”

Emperor Wu reached the temple at four o'clock, early in the morning in darkness, alone, and Bodhidharma was standing there with his staff, just on the steps, and he said, "I knew you would be coming, although the whole night you debated whether to go or not to go. What kind of an emperor are you – so cowardly, being afraid of a poor monk, a poor beggar who has nothing in the world except this staff. And with this staff I am going to put your mind to silence."

The emperor thought, "My God, who has ever heard that with a staff you can put somebody's mind to silence! You can finish him, hit him hard on the head – then the whole man is silent, not the mind. But now it is too late to go back."

And Bodhidharma said, "Sit down here in the courtyard of the temple." There was not a single man around. "Close your eyes, I am sitting in front of you with my staff. Your work is to catch hold of the mind. Just close your eyes and go inside looking for it – where it is. The moment you catch hold of it, just tell me, 'Here it is.' And my staff will do the remaining thing."

It was the strangest experience any seeker of truth or peace or silence could have ever had – but now there was no other way. Emperor Wu sat there with closed eyes, knowing perfectly well that Bodhidharma seemed to mean everything he said. He looked all around – there was no mind. That staff did its work. For the first time he was in such a situation. The choice ... if you find the mind, one never knows what this man is going to do with his staff. And in that silent mountainous place, in the presence of Bodhidharma, who has a charisma of his own ... There have been many enlightened people, but Bodhidharma stands aloof, alone, like an Everest. His every act is unique and original. His every gesture has his own signature; it is not borrowed.

He tried hard to look for the mind, and for the first time he could not find the mind. It is a small strategy. Mind exists only because you never look for it; it exists only because you are never aware of it. When you are looking for it you are aware of it, and awareness surely kills it completely. Hours passed and the sun was rising in the silent mountains with a cool breeze. Bodhidharma could see on the face of Emperor Wu such peace, such silence, such stillness as if he was a statue. He shook him and asked him, "It has been a long time. Have you found the mind?"

Emperor Wu said, "Without using your staff, you have pacified my mind completely. I don't have any mind and I have heard the inner voice about which you talked. Now I know whatever you said was right. You have transformed me without doing anything. Now I know that each act has to be a reward unto itself; otherwise, don't do it. Who is there to give you the reward? This is a childish idea.

Who is there to give you the punishment? Your action is punishment and your action is your reward. You are the master of your destiny.”

Bodhidharma said, “You are a rare disciple. I love you, I respect you, not as an emperor but as a man who has the courage just in a single sitting to bring so much awareness, so much light, that all darkness of the mind disappears.”

Wu tried to persuade him to come to the palace. He said, “That is not my place; you can see I am wild, I do things I myself don’t know beforehand. I live moment to moment spontaneously, I am very unpredictable. I may create unnecessary trouble for you, your court, your people; I am not meant for palaces, just let me live in my wildness.”

He lived on this mountain whose name was Tai ... The second legend is that Bodhidharma was the first man who created tea – the name “tea” comes from the name Tai, because it was created on the mountain Tai. And all the words for tea in any language are derived from the same source.

The way Bodhidharma created tea cannot be historical but is significant. He was meditating almost all the time, and sometimes in the night he would start falling asleep. So, just not to fall asleep, just to teach a lesson to his eyes, he took out all his eyebrow hairs and threw them in the temple ground. The story is that out of those eyebrows, the tea bushes grew. Those were the first tea bushes. That’s why when you drink tea, you cannot sleep. And in Buddhism it became a routine that for meditation, tea is immensely helpful. So the whole Buddhist world drinks tea as part of meditation, because it keeps you alert and awake.

Although there were 2 million Buddhist monks in China, Bodhidharma could find only four worthy to be accepted as his disciples. He was really very choosy. It took him almost nine years to find his first disciple, Hui Ko.

For nine years – and that is a historical fact, because there are ancientmost references, almost contemporary to Bodhidharma, which all mention that fact although others may not be mentioned – for nine years, after sending Wu back to the palace, he sat before the temple wall, facing the wall. He made it a great meditation. He would just simply go on looking at the wall. Now, looking at the wall for a long time, you cannot think. Slowly, slowly, just like the wall, your mind screen also becomes empty.

And there was a second reason. He declared, “Unless somebody who deserves to be my disciple comes, I will not look at the audience.”

People used to come and they would sit behind him. It was a strange situation. Nobody had spoken in this way; he would speak

to the wall. People would be sitting behind him but he would not face the audience, because he said, “The audience hurts me more, because it is just like a wall. Nobody understands, and to look at human beings in such an ignorant state hurts deeply. But to look at the wall, there is no question; a wall, after all, is a wall. It cannot hear, so there is no need to be hurt. I will turn to face the audience only if somebody proves by his action that he is ready to be my disciple.”

Nine years passed. People could not find what to do – what action would satisfy him. They could not figure it out. Then came this young man, Hui Ko. He cut off one of his hands with a sword, and threw the hand before Bodhidharma and said, “This is the beginning. Either you turn, or my head will be falling before you. I am going to cut off my head too.”

Bodhidharma turned and said, “You are really a man worthy of me. No need to cut off the head, we have to use it.” This man, Hui Ko, was his first disciple.

Finally when he left China, or intended to leave China, he called his four disciples – three more he had gathered after Hui Ko. He asked them, “In simple words, in small sentences, telegraphic, tell me the essence of my teachings. I intend to leave tomorrow morning to go back to the Himalayas, and I want to choose, from you four, one as my successor.”

The first man said, “Your teaching is of going beyond mind, of being absolutely silent, and then everything starts happening of its own accord.”

Bodhidharma said, “You are not wrong, but you don’t satisfy me. You just have my skin.”

The second one said, “To know that I am not, and only existence is, is your fundamental teaching.”

Bodhidharma said, “A little better, but not up to my standard. You have my bones; sit down.”

And the third one said, “Nothing can be said about it. No word is capable of saying anything about it.”

Bodhidharma said, “Good, but you have said already something about it. You have contradicted yourself. Just sit down; you have my marrow.”

And the fourth was his first disciple, Hui Ko, who simply fell at Bodhidharma’s feet, without saying a word, tears rolling down from his eyes. Bodhidharma said, “You have said it. You are going to be my successor.”

But in the night Bodhidharma was poisoned by some disciple as revenge, because he had not been chosen as the successor. So they buried him, and the strangest legend is that after three years he was found by a government official, walking out of China towards the

Himalayas with his staff in his hand and one of his sandals hanging from the staff – and he was barefoot.

The official had known him, had been to him many times, had fallen in love with the man, although he was a little eccentric. He asked, “What is the meaning of this staff, and one sandal hanging from it?” Bodhidharma said, “Soon you will know. If you meet my people just tell them that I’m going into the Himalayas forever.”

The official reached immediately, as fast as he could, the monastery on the mountain where Bodhidharma had been living. And there he heard that he had been poisoned and he had died ... and there was the tomb. The official had not heard about it, because he was posted on the boundary lines of the empire. He said, “My God, but I have seen him, and I cannot be deceived because I have seen him many times before. He was the same man, those same ferocious eyes, the same fiery and wild outlook, and on top of it, he was carrying on his staff one sandal.”

The disciples could not contain their curiosity, and they opened the tomb. All that they could find there was only one sandal. And then the official understood why he had said, “You will find out the meaning of it; soon you will know.”

We have heard so much about Jesus’ resurrection. But nobody has talked much of the resurrection of Bodhidharma. Perhaps he was only in a coma when they buried him, and then he came to his senses, slipped out of the tomb, left one sandal there and put another sandal on his staff, and according to the plan, he left.

He wanted to die in the eternal snows of the Himalayas. He wanted that there should be no tomb, no temple, no statue of him. He did not want to leave any footprints behind him to be worshiped; those who love him should enter into their own being – “I am not going to be worshiped.” And he disappeared almost into thin air. Nobody heard anything about him – what happened, where he died. He must be buried in the eternal snows of the Himalayas somewhere.

Gautama the Buddha

Gautama the Buddha represents the essential core of religion. He is not the founder of Buddhism – Buddhism is a by-product – he is the beginning of a totally different kind of religion in the world. He's the founder of a religionless religion, he has propounded not religion but religiousness, and this is a great radical change in the history of human consciousness. Before Buddha there were religions but never a pure religiousness. Man was not yet mature. With Buddha, humanity enters a mature age. All human beings have not yet entered into it, that's true, but Buddha has heralded the path; Buddha has opened the gateless gate.

It takes time for human beings to understand such a deep message. Buddha's message is the deepest ever. Nobody has done the work that Buddha has done, the way he has done it. Nobody else represents pure fragrance. Other founders of religions, other enlightened people, have compromised with their audience. Buddha remains uncompromised, hence his purity. He does not care what you can understand, he cares only what the truth is. He says it without being worried whether you understand it or not.

In a way this looks hard; in another way this is great compassion. Truth has to be said as it is. The moment you compromise, the moment you bring truth to the ordinary level of human consciousness it loses its soul, it becomes superficial, it becomes a dead thing. You cannot bring truth to the level of human beings; human beings have to be led to the level of truth. That is Buddha's great work.

Gautama the Buddha has started a spirituality that is nonrepressive and non-ideological. That is a very rare phenomenon. The ordinary kind of spirituality, the garden variety, is very repressive. It depends on repression. It does not transform people, it only cripples them. It does not liberate people, it enslaves them. It is oppressive, it is ugly. Remember this: Buddha is non-repressive. And if you find Buddhist monks to be repressive, they have not understood Buddha at all. They have brought their own pathology into his teachings.

And Buddha is non-ideological. He gives no ideology because all ideologies are of the mind. And if ideologies are of the mind, they cannot take you beyond the mind. No ideology can become a bridge to reach beyond the mind. All ideologies have to be dropped,

only then the mind will be dropped.

Buddha believes in no ideals either – because all ideals create tension and conflict in man. They divide, they create anguish. You are one thing and they want you to be something else. Between these two you are stretched, torn apart. Ideals create misery, ideals create schizophrenia. The more ideals there are, the more people will be schizophrenic, they will be split. Only a non-ideological consciousness can avoid being split. And if you are split how can you be happy? How can you be silent, how can you know anything of peace, of stillness?

The ideological person is continuously fighting with himself. Each moment there is conflict. He lives in conflict, he lives in confusion because he cannot decide who really he is – the ideal or the reality? He cannot trust himself, he becomes afraid of himself, he loses confidence. And once a man loses confidence he loses all glory. Then he is ready to become a slave to anybody – to any priest, to any politician. Then he is just ready, waiting to fall in some trap.

Why do people become followers? Why are people trapped? Why do they fall for a Joseph Stalin or an Adolf Hitler or a Mao Zedong? Why in the first place? They have become so shaky, the ideological confusion has shaken them from their very roots. Now they cannot stand on their own, they want somebody to lean on. They cannot move on their own, they don't know who they are. They need somebody to tell them that they are this or that. They need an identity to be given to them. They have forgotten their self and their nature.

Adolf Hitlers and Joseph Stalins and Mao Zedongs will be coming again and again until and unless man drops all ideologies. And remember, when I say all ideologies, I mean all ideologies. I don't make any distinction between noble ideologies and not so noble. All ideologies are dangerous. In fact the noble ideologies are more dangerous, because they have a more seductive power, they are more persuasive. But ideology as such is a disease, exactly a disease, because you become two: the ideal and you. The "you" that you are is condemned, and the "you" that you are not is praised. Now you are getting into trouble. Now sooner or later you will be neurotic, psychotic or something.

Buddha has given a non-repressive way of life, and non-ideological too. That's why he does not talk about God, he does not talk about heaven, he does not talk about any future. He does not give you anything to hold on to, he takes everything away from you. He takes even your self. He goes on taking things away, and finally he takes even the idea of self, I, ego. He leaves only pure emptiness behind. And this is very difficult.

This is very difficult because we have completely forgotten how to give. We only know how to take. We go on taking everything. I “take” the exam and I “take” the wife. I even “take” the afternoon nap, a thing which cannot be taken, you have to surrender to it. Sleep comes only when you surrender. Even a wife, a husband, you go on taking. You are not respectful! The wife is not some kind of property. You can take a house – how can you take a wife or a husband? But our language shows our mind. We don’t know how to give – how to give in, how to let go, how to let things happen.

Buddha takes all ideals away, the whole future away, and finally he takes the last thing that is very, very difficult for us to give – he takes your very self. Leaves a pure, innocent, virgin emptiness behind. That virgin emptiness he calls nirvana. Nirvana is not a goal, it is just your emptiness. When you have dropped all that you have accumulated, when you don’t hoard anymore, when you are no longer a miser and a clinger, then suddenly that emptiness erupts. It has always been there.

That emptiness is there. You have accumulated junk so the emptiness is not visible. It is just like in your house you can go on accumulating things; then you stop seeing any space, then there is no more space. A day comes when even to move in the house becomes difficult; to live becomes difficult because there is no space. But the space has not gone anywhere – think of it, meditate over it – the space has not gone anywhere. You have accumulated too much furniture and the TV and the radio and the piano and all these things are there – but the space has not gone anywhere. Remove the furniture and the space is there; it has always been there. It was hidden by the furniture but it was not destroyed. It has not left the room, not for a single moment.

So is your inner emptiness, your nirvana, your nothingness.

Buddha does not give you nirvana as an ideal. Buddha liberates instead of coercing. Buddha teaches you how to live – not for any goal, not to achieve anything, but to be blissful here, now. He teaches how to live in awareness. Not that awareness is going to give you something – awareness is not a means to anything. It is the end in itself, the means and the end both; its value is intrinsic.

Buddha does not teach you otherworldliness. This has to be understood. People are worldly and the priests go on teaching the other world. The other world is also not very otherworldly, it cannot be, because it is just an improved model of the same world you live in now. From where will you create the other world? You know only this world. You can improve it, you can decorate the other world better, you can remove a few things that are ugly here and replace them with a few things you think will be beautiful, but it is going to be a creation out of your experience of this world. So your

other world is not very different, it cannot be. It is a continuity. It comes out of your mind; it is a game of your imagination.

You will have beautiful women there – of course more beautiful than you have here. You will have the same kinds of pleasures there – maybe more permanent, stable, but they will be the same kinds of pleasures. You will have better food, more tasty – but you will have food. You will have houses – maybe made of gold, but they will be houses. You will repeat the whole thing again.

Just go into the scriptures and see how they depict heaven and you will find the same world improved upon. A few touches here and a few touches there, but it is not in any way “otherworldly”. That’s why I say the otherworldliness of other religions is not very otherworldly; it is this world projected into the future. It is born out of the experience of this world. There will not be misery and poverty and illness and paralysis and blindness and deafness. Things that you don’t like here will not be there, and things that you like will be there, and in abundance. But it is not going to be anything new.

But all your scriptures talk about heaven – and their heaven or paradise is nothing but the same story. It may be printed on better art paper, with better ink, by an improved press, with more colorful illustrations, but the story is the same; it cannot be otherwise.

Buddha does not talk of otherworldliness or the other world. He simply teaches you how to be here in this world. How to be here alert, conscious, mindful, so that nothing impinges upon your emptiness; so that your inner emptiness is not contaminated, poisoned; so that you can live here and yet remain uncontaminated, unpolluted; so that you can be in the world and the world will not be in you.

The otherworldly spirituality is bound to be oppressive, destructive, sadomasochistic – in short, pathological. Buddha’s spirituality has a different flavor to it – the flavor of no ideal, the flavor of no future, the flavor of no “other world”. It is a flower here and now. It asks for nothing, all is already given. It simply becomes more alert so you can see more, you can hear more, you can be more.

Remember, you are only in the same proportion as you are conscious. If you want to be more, be more conscious. Consciousness imparts being. Unconsciousness takes being away. When you are drunk you lose being. When you are fast asleep you lose being. Have you not watched it? When you are alert you have a different quality – you are centered, rooted. When you are alert you feel the solidity of your being, it is almost tangible. When you are unconscious, just dragging by, sleepy, your sense of being is less. It is always in the same proportion as the consciousness.

So Buddha's whole message is to be conscious. And for no other reason, just for the sake of being conscious – because consciousness imparts being, consciousness creates you. And it creates a you so different from you that you are, that you cannot imagine. A you where “I” has disappeared, where no idea of self exists, nothing defines you ... a pure emptiness, an infinity, unbounded emptiness.



The word nirvana is a negative word. Literally it means “blowing out the candle”.

Gautama Buddha used the word for the ultimate state of consciousness. He could have chosen some positive word, and in India there were many positive words for it. *Moksha* – freedom, liberation. *Kaivalya* – aloneness, absolute aloneness. *Brahmanubava* – the experience of the ultimate. But he chose a strange term, which has never been used in a spiritual context: “blowing out the candle”. How can you relate it with a spiritual experience?

Buddha says your so-called self is nothing but a flame, and it is being kept burning through your desires. When all desires disappear the candle has disappeared. Now the flame cannot exist anymore; the flame also disappears – disappears into the vast universe, leaving no trace behind it; you cannot find it again. It is there but it has gone forever from any identity, from any limitation.

Hence Buddha chose the word nirvana rather than realization, because realization still can give you some egoistic superiority – that you are a realized person, that you are a liberated being, that you are enlightened, that you are illuminated, that you have found it. But you remain.

Buddha is saying “you” will be lost – who is going to find it? You disperse, you were only a combination of elements, now each element goes to its original source. The identity of the individual is no more. Yes, you will exist as the universe ...

So Buddha avoided any positive word, knowing the human tendency, because each positive word can give you a feeling of ego. No negative word can do that; that's why it remains unpolluted. You cannot pollute something which is not. And people were very much afraid to use the word. With a deep inner trembling ... nirvana. Thousands of times Buddha was asked, “Your word nirvana does not create in us an excitement, does not create in us a desire to achieve it. The ultimate truth, self-realization, the realization of God – all those create a desire, a great desire. Your

word creates no desire.”

And Buddha said again and again, “That is the beauty of the word. All those words that create desire in you are not going to help you, because desire itself is the root cause of your misery. Longing for something is your tension. Nirvana makes you absolutely free from tension; there is nothing to desire. On the contrary, you have to prepare yourself to accept a dissolution. In dissolution you cannot claim the ego, hence the word remains unpolluted.”

No other word has remained unpolluted. Its negativity is the reason – and only a great master can contribute to humanity something which, even if you want, you cannot pollute. Twenty-five centuries ... but there is no way. Nirvana is going to dissolve you; you cannot do anything to nirvana.

It is certainly the purest word. Even its sound, whether you understand the meaning or not, is soothing, gives a deep serenity and silence, which no other word – god-realization, the absolute, the ultimate ... no other word gives that feeling of silence. The moment you hear the word nirvana it seems as if time has stopped, as if there is nowhere to go. In this very moment you can melt, dissolve, disappear, without leaving any trace behind.



When Buddha was born, the great astrologers said to the king, “We are afraid, but you have to be made aware of it: this newborn baby is either going to become a *chakravartin*” – a *chakravartin* means one who rules over the whole world – “or he is going to become a beggar who owns nothing.” Two extremes ...

The king was old and this was his only son, born in his old age. He asked the astrologers how to prevent him from becoming a beggar and renouncing the world. Those astrologers had no idea of the mind and psychology. Astrologers may have ideas about faraway stars, whose light takes millions of light years to reach the earth ... And what foolishness, that man thinks his fate, his destiny, is determined by all these millions of stars so far away! There is a reason why astrology has remained significant: it gives you great satisfaction to think that the whole universe is interested in you. Even the faraway stars are trying their best to do something to you; you are not an ordinary person, you are not nothing.

Those faraway stars are not even aware of you, cannot be, but your ego feels tremendous satisfaction. Astrologers have been exploiting this since the very beginning of man. Of course, they exploit you, you have to pay for it, but it seems worth paying them; they are giving you a big ego. You are bigger, far more important,

than the biggest star in the sky. They are all just revolving around you!

But those poor astrologers were not even as intelligent as Sigmund Freud. They told the king, "If you want your son not to renounce the world, then a few arrangements have to be made."

In India there are three clear-cut seasons in the year. Since the atomic explosions around the world, that has changed; otherwise, every year on the same day the rains would begin, and on the same day they would stop. On the same day the winter comes, and after four months on the same day it stops. For centuries it has been absolutely certain. Now it is not so, but in Buddha's time it was certain. Buddha's father made three palaces, one for each season. For summer, a palace in the hill station: cool, beautiful, green. Every care was taken that Buddha would never become disappointed with the world. For winter, a warm and cozy atmosphere was made in the palace.

The astrologers told the king, "From the very beginning let him be surrounded with beautiful girls, so by the time he becomes a young man he has all the beautiful girls of the land." They even went into details: that he should not see any old man, because in his seeing an old man the question could arise in him, "Is this the destiny for everyone?" Never allow him to see a dead body. Keep him absolutely unaware of the realities of life, keep him in a dreamland. Their argument was, when he has everything, why should he renounce?

The greatest physician of the country was looking after him. Even the gardeners in the king's garden were told that Buddha should not see a flower withering away or a leaf turning pale. In the night, everything that indicates death had to be removed. He should see only beautiful flowers that are always young. He should see only green leaves that are always green.

And this the king could manage. He managed it – and his management backfired. Those idiotic astrologers had no idea of a simple fact: that if you give a man everything and keep him unaware of all that is ugly around, soon he is going to be fed up. Soon he will start thinking, "Is this all? Then tomorrow is going to be the same, and the day after tomorrow is going to be the same. What is the point?" He will become bored. And that's what happened. Buddha became bored with unchanging beautiful women, unchanging beautiful flowers. How long can your mind keep silent? The astrologers were the reason why Buddha renounced the kingdom. If he had been allowed to live just the ordinary life of every man, perhaps there would have been no Buddha. In a way, the astrologers unknowingly did a great service to humanity.

The story is beautiful. There used to be an annual festival in the capital, and the prince who was going to be king used to inaugurate it, declare it open. It lasted for a few weeks – all kinds of things, all kinds of athletic games, shows. Buddha was going to inaugurate this youth festival in his 29th year. On the way to the festival, every care was taken – but existence has a way to reach you. You cannot remain completely closed in a grave, unless you are dead. If you are alive, there are bound to be loopholes from where existence will enter and make you aware of the reality. The astrologers and the kings could not be more intelligent than existence itself.

Every care was taken that on the way from the palace to the festival stadium, no old men should be seen, no dead bodies should be carried – nothing that could create a questioning in Buddha. But you cannot avoid reality for long. As the chariot was going towards the festival grounds, Buddha saw an old man. The old man was deaf and he had not heard that today he was not to pass on this road, he was to remain in the house or go somewhere else. He was deaf, he could not hear it, so just as usual he came out of his house; he was going to purchase something from the market.

Buddha, for the first time in 29 years, saw an old man just on the borderline of death. He asked his charioteer, “What is the matter? What has happened to this man? I have never seen anything like this!”

The charioteer loved Buddha just as his own son. He could not lie. He said, “Although it is going against the orders of your father, I cannot lie to you. You have been prevented from seeing people getting old. Everybody gets old – I will get old. This is the way of life.”

Buddha immediately asked, “Am I also going to be old one day, just like this man?”

The charioteer said, “I have to say the truth to you: I would like that this should not happen to you, but it is the law of nature; nothing can be done. Just as from childhood you have become a young man, from youth you will become one day old too.”

And then, just then, somebody died. Now you cannot prevent death. You cannot order death, “You are not to happen on this road, you can happen anywhere else.” Death is not in your hands. Somebody died, people were crying, and the dead body was there.

Buddha asked, “What has happened? Why are people crying?” He had never seen anybody crying, he had never seen anybody with tears; he had never seen anybody dead. He asked, “What has happened to this man? He is not even breathing!”

The charioteer said, “This is the second stage. First you saw the old man. Soon death will come to him too. It has come to this man.”

Buddha asked, “Am I also going to die one day?”

The charioteer – afraid of the king, but he must have been a man of some integrity – said, “Truth is truth, nobody can deny it. Your father the king is going to die, I am going to die, you are going to die. Death begins the day you are born. After birth there is no way to escape death.”

And just then they passed a sannyasin, a wandering seeker. Astrologers had said to the king, “Your son should not be allowed any contact with sannyasins, because those are the people who have renounced everything. Those are the people who teach that this world is illusion, that all your desires are going to lead you nowhere, that you are simply wasting your life, and death is coming close by every moment. Sannyasins have to be avoided.” And for 29 years Buddha had no notion that there were people who were trying to find something beyond life and death.

This red-clothed sannyasin looked very strange to him – a man who has not seen a sannyasin his whole life, for 29 years, is bound to be inquiring. He said, “And what about this man? I have seen people, but nobody wears a loose robe like this, with a begging bowl in his hand. What kind of man is he?”

The charioteer said, “This man has understood that beauty is going to turn into ugliness, that youth is going to turn into old age, that life is going to turn into death, and he is trying to find out – is there something eternal? Is there something which is not affected by youth, by old age, by death, by disease? He is a sannyasin, he has renounced the ordinary world. He is a seeker of truth.”

They were just reaching the stadium. Buddha said to the charioteer, “Turn back – I am not going to the youth festival. If youth is finally going to become old age, disease, death, and if this is going to happen to me, then I have lost 29 years uselessly. I have lived in dreams. I am no longer young, and I am no longer interested in being the prince. Tonight I am going to renounce this world and be a seeker of truth.”

What the astrologers had advised the king looked like common sense ... but common sense is superficial. They could not imagine a simple thing: that you cannot keep a man for his whole life unaware of reality. It is better to let him know from the very beginning; otherwise it will come as a big explosion in his life. And that’s what happened. That very night Buddha escaped from the palace where everything was available.



Buddha tried to find the truth for six years continuously, and no man has tried as totally as Buddha did. He made every effort

possible, he went to every master available. There was not a single master Buddha did not go to. He surrendered to every master, and whatsoever was said he did so perfectly that even the master started feeling jealous. But every master finally had to say to Buddha, “This is all I can teach. And if nothing is happening I cannot blame you, because you are doing everything so perfectly. I am helpless. You will have to move to some other teacher.”

This rarely happens because disciples never do everything so perfectly. So the master can always say, “Because you are not doing well, that’s why nothing is happening.” But Buddha was doing so well, so absolutely well, that no master could say to him, “You are not doing well.” So they had to accept defeat. They had to say, “This is all we can teach, and you have done it and nothing is happening, so it is better you move to some other master. You don’t belong to me.”

Buddha moved for six years, and he followed even absurd techniques when they were taught to him. Somebody told him to fast, so for months he fasted. For six months he was continuously fasting, just taking a very small quantity of food every 15 days, only twice a month. He became so weak that he was simply a skeleton. All flesh disappeared, he looked like a dead man. He became so weak that he couldn’t even walk. He finally became so weak that he would close his eyes to meditate and he would fall down in a fit.

One day he was taking a bath in the river Niranjana, just near Bodhgaya, and he was so weak that he couldn’t cross the river. He fell down in the river and he thought that he was going to be drowned; it was the last moment, death had come. He was so weak he couldn’t swim. Then suddenly he caught hold of a branch of a tree and remained there. And there for the first time the thought came to his mind, “If I have become so weak that I cannot cross this ordinary small river in summertime when the water has gone completely, when there is no more water and it is very small, just a little stream – if I cannot cross this little stream, how can I cross this big ocean of the world? How can I transcend this world? It seems impossible. I am doing something stupid.”

What to do? He came out of the river in the evening and sat under a tree, which became the bodh tree, and that evening when the moon was coming up – it was a full-moon night – he realized that every effort is useless. He realized that nothing can be achieved, the very idea of achievement is nonsense. He had done everything. He was finished with the world, with the world of desires. He was a king and he had known every desire, he had lived every desire. He was finished with them, there was nothing to be achieved, there was nothing worthwhile. And then for six years he had been trying all austerities, all efforts, all meditations, yoga, everything, and nothing

was happening. So he said, “Now there is nothing more except to die. There is nothing to be achieved, and every concept of achievement is nonsense; human desire is but futile.”

So he dropped all effort that evening. He sat under the tree, relaxed, with no effort, no goal, nowhere to go, nothing to be achieved, nothing worth achieving. When you are in such a state of mind, mind relaxes – no future, no desire, no goal, nowhere to go, so what to do? He simply sat, he became just like the tree. The whole night he slept, and later on Buddha said that for the first time he really slept that night – because when effort is there it continues in sleep also. A person who is earning money and who is after money goes on counting even in his dreams, a person who is after power and prestige and politics goes on fighting elections in his dreams. You all know that when you are sitting for an examination in the university or college, in sleep also you go on doing the examination; again and again you are in the examination hall answering questions. So whatsoever effort is there it continues in sleep – and there is always some effort for something or other.

That night there was no effort. Buddha said, “I slept for the first time in millions of lives. That was the first night that I slept.” Such a sleep becomes samadhi. And in the morning when he awoke he saw the last star disappear. He looked. His eyes for the first time must have been mirrorlike, with no content, just vacant, empty, nothing to project. The last star was disappearing, and Buddha said, “With that disappearing star I also disappeared. The star was disappearing and I also disappeared” – because the ego can exist only with effort. If you make some effort the ego is fed – you are doing something, you are reaching somewhere, you are achieving something. When there is no effort how can you exist?

The last star disappeared, “And,” Buddha said, “I also disappeared. And then I looked, the sky was vacant; then I looked within, there was nothing – *anatta*, no self. There was no one.”

It is said that Buddha laughed at the whole absurdity. There was no one who could reach. There was no one who could reach the goal, there was no one who could achieve liberation – there was no one at all, no entity. Space was without, space was within. “And,” he said, “at that moment of total effortlessness I achieved, I realized.”

But don't go to relax under a tree, and don't wait for the last star to disappear. And don't wait thinking that with the last star disappearing you will disappear. Those six years must precede the disappearance. So this is the problem: without effort no one has ever achieved, and with only effort no one has ever achieved. With effort coming to a point where it becomes effortlessness, realization has always been possible.