

The following section on Enlightenment is an excerpt from *The Roar of the Tigress*, page 13-16, Shasta Abbey Press, 2000. This book is drawn from the many lectures of the late Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett that had been taped and transcribed. The late Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy did a masterful job of editing these talks into this book.

Enlightenment: It's Not What You Look For; It Might Be What You Find

by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett

What, then, is this “enlightenment” that the Buddha found? Understand that the Buddhist world has been stuck with the word “enlightenment” for two-thousand-odd years. That has been very unfortunate, because the Buddha did not go out to look for enlightenment; He was not trying to “get a spiritual experience”. He went out to find the reason for birth, old age, decay, and death. In other words, to put it in Zen terminology, he had the first koan in existence: “Why is there misery in the world? Why is there suffering? How do I get out of it?” He was trying to escape from life instead of accepting that life exists and being able to rise above it. In trying to escape from it, He could find nothing; in accepting it, He found all. His koan is the same koan, which we dress up in various ways, that every one of us brings to Zen training; “How can I escape living? How can I escape dying? This same koan appears at every turn. We can call it what we like, we can use what terminology we like, but it is the same question as Shakyamuni Buddha’s. And we have to solve it by the same method: by first accepting it and then transcending it.

As I said, Shakyamuni Buddha did not go out to look for enlightenment; He went out to look for the cure of suffering and by accident, He found the Eightfold Path which was the method that got over the problem. By accident He got something else: He got peace of mind. The only way I can describe it accurately to you is by this story: supposing you’ve got a caveman who wants to break a stone, so he goes on slamming it with another stone and nothing happens. One day, by accident, he has a bright idea: he fits the second stone to a piece of wood, and so he makes a hammer with which he breaks the first stone. He did not set out to make a hammer, he set out to break a stone. By accident he got the hammer—that is, enlightenment. That’s how you “get” it, and that’s what it is: it’s the bonus you get for doing something about you.

If all you’re looking for is the bonus, you’re not going to get it, because the thing that matters is doing something about you, doing something about the inner wall. You built it: you pull it down. You made the mess of you: you have to clean it up. If the pond is muddy and you can’t see the moon of Zen, it is because you polluted it. In this day of environmental concern, you should get the point of that loud and clear. If you pollute the water, it will not reflect the moon. We put all the daft ideas into our own skulls: we have to throw them out. Shakyamuni Buddha tried all sorts of ways; He had to go back to the naive mind of the child to find the purity and the stillness, and the iron, with which to live life.

And when you realize the true extent of this purity and stillness, you realize your position in the scheme of things and you know the awe-fullness of the Unborn. You “see” the world as if through an ever-changing kaleidoscope that can see the Buddha in everything. This is what is meant by the line in our Morning Service scriptures which says, “The wooden figure sings and the stone maiden dances.” And the fence posts sing and dance: they all glorify the Eternal. To be able to see Buddha

Nature in all things, to be able to see the spirit in all things (for it exists in all things), this is what is meant by enlightenment. It is not something that will make you a better ballet dancer, or a better writer, or a better this, or a better that, although it may very well do that. That's a bonus; that's not what you've done it for. Bonuses exist, but they must not be taken as the purpose for which you train. That's not what you go to study Zen for, or what you go to study any religion for. You go there because you are so fed up with you that you are ready to give up everything in order to know the Eternal, to know God!

I can remember saying, many years ago, to a Christian monk who was asking why I wanted to go into monasticism, "Well, at least it will help me get rid of my sins", and I was sixteen or seventeen at the time. He said, "You think that's what you go into a monastery for—you've got another 'think' coming!" Yes! I thought it might help me to be a better person, but when I really analyzed it out, I discovered that this did not go nearly far enough: what I wanted was what at a later date I came to call "the perfection of Zen". I was willing, eager, to give up "me" completely, which is to want to know God, or the Eternal. And when you sit in meditation, that is what you sit for. If you sit down to meditate today, know that that is what you are sitting there for. There are ways and ways in which you can be helped in doing this, and later on we hope to show you how they work, but you need to know why you are sitting there.