

The headline message: you don't have to meditate to wake yourself up from a zoned out, zombie state of mind. This book shows you how to do it on your own, without teachers or special postures or spiritual 'exercises.' Start right away!

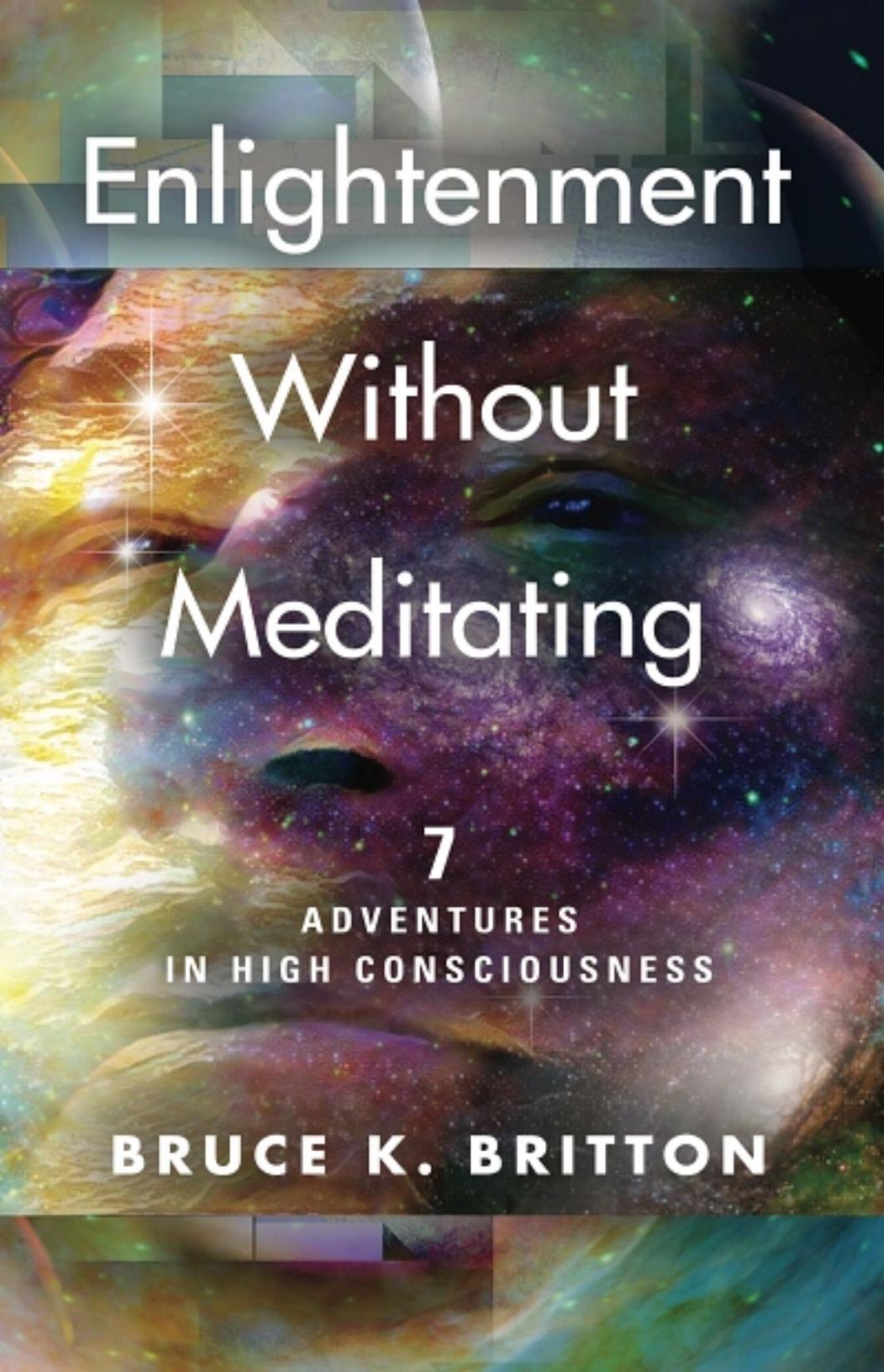
Enlightenment Without Meditating: 7 Adventures in High Consciousness

By Bruce K. Britton

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Enlightenment

Without
Meditating

7

ADVENTURES
IN HIGH CONSCIOUSNESS

BRUCE K. BRITTON

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From Buddha in *Apadana* I 7-14¹

Pratyekabuddha:

Enlightened on their own...

In this whole world, there is no one except myself equal to those enlightened
on

their own...

These attain insight alone...

fully and perfectly enlightened all by themselves! ...

Whose intelligence is very sharp ... powerful are their minds,

their minds are exalted,

seeing the highest and deepest truth, they are like lions...

illuminators of the world,

shining like pure solid gold, undoubtedly worthy of any gifts in this world.

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Prologue

I first experienced enlightenment when I was fourteen, which is why I wrote this book.

My enlightenment was triggered the night before by a powerful and biting premonition of death combined with a strong aversion to daydreaming, which was taking over too much of my life.

The next day was my day off from my summer job at the Rockland County Summer Playhouse, and I spent it wandering around in the woods there. My method was to keep my mind in a fully conscious state. From the outside, it would appear that I was standing still, walking around, and stopping in succession. But inside, determined to make the most of what time remained in my life, I was trying to remain fully conscious.

This instantly resolved into an intense immersion in awareness of my sensory experience at the highest level of detail second by second. This included full consciousness of my seeing, hearing, body sensations and mental sensations. That is, during my sensory awareness, at any fraction of any second, I was fully conscious of my physical environment (trees, grass, breezes, etc.), or of my body and its muscular movements, or of my mind and its movements, or of my consciousness itself.

From time to time without my noticing it my mind would start to wander out of the fully conscious state, and I would slip into a daydream. I would only discover this when I woke up from the daydream. At that point I knew that I had drifted from the fully conscious state.

When that happened, I would immediately stop moving and look directly at my mind. When I looked directly at my mind, I experienced two things simultaneously. One was that it was completely empty of everything and the other was that it was completely full of consciousness. I'm aware that this may seem inherently contradictory.

After this, one of two things would happen. Either I would stay in the consciousness/emptiness state, or I would return to my immersion in sensory awareness. In both cases, I would later wake up from a mind-wandering daydream. Then as before, I would immediately look directly at my mind and experience the consciousness/emptiness state.

Then the whole process would repeat. This went on all day long, about sixteen hours, except for the time during my lunch, my nap, and my dinner. During and after this experience, I was convinced that this process would be of paramount importance in my life.

Among other things, I also noticed changes during the experience in my perception of time, and I was permanently persuaded of the importance of *mind* in the scheme of things.

I later learned that this experience was strikingly similar to what William James described in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* as the characteristics of mystical experiences:

Noetic quality — Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule, they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time.²

I have described my experience of that day in a dialogue that I have moved to Appendix 2, as I thought it best to get straight to the point, which is how *you* too can experience enlightenment.

Introduction

The headline message of this book is that you can experience enlightenment on your own without meditation. This has been well known since Buddha, who was very clear on this and so were his followers at the time. When he was asked how long one would have to meditate to get enlightened, he replied with this:

...for seven years...
...let alone seven years... for six years... five years...
four years... three years... two years... one year...
...let alone one year...for seven months... six months...
five months... four months... three months... two months...
a month... half a month...
...let alone half a month... for a week...³

You can see where he's going with this.

But this has been forgotten in modern mindfulness practice. Many Western teachers advise their students to meditate every day for as many years as possible. I lost my trust in organized traditional teacher-centered meditation methods, because I found by experience that they don't work. Yet, instead of meditating, there are practical and easy to use methods that you can use on your own to experience enlightenment quickly and easily. This book explains all that.

The book is written in dialogue format: questions and answers and comments. All of these really occurred, sometimes in discussions with others and sometimes in discussions with myself. I have arranged them to make experiencing enlightenment as easy as I can. For simplicity, I call the questioners 'P' for participants. The book is written as if a group of Ps asked me how to experience enlightenment on their own as soon as possible, and we talk back and forth about how to do that.

There are four sections. Section 1- **Getting There Right Away Now**—unfolds seven ways to experience enlightenment on your own as soon as possible. Section 2 – **The Baby on the Battlefield**, demonstrates

how to tackle obstacles. Section 3 – **Being Here Right Away Now**, itemizes nine benefits and rewards of enlightenment. Section 4 -**You Can Go Wherever You Want!** unpacks what can be done after experiencing enlightenment.

Appendix 1 lists many terms for enlightenment. **Appendix 2** describes the day I experienced enlightenment, and the aftermath. **Appendix 3** provides details about the Observer self. Finally, there is a reference list of the sources of information I used, an Index of Sages, a brief author biography, my acknowledgements, and the endnotes.

Section 1: Getting There Right Away Now

From the only real point of view, of my realization, there is not value or anti-value, but that all things are fit to be used for this realization.⁴

Benoit

P: You call it ‘high consciousness’ in the title... High consciousness has a nice ring to it. Is that the same thing we’re asking about? We said ‘enlightened.’

Well, let’s find out. How about I tell you what I mean by enlightened, and we can check if that is the same as what you mean. I’ll do it two ways. First, I’ll define it with some synonyms. Instead of enlightened, or high consciousness, I could just as well have used words like these: *fully conscious, fully aware, fully awakened, fully present, sparkling awareness, the simple feeling of being, the sheer is-ness of being, I-am-ness*, many other names. (I put a list of various names in Appendix1.)

Second, I’ll give you some operational definitions, which specify what operations are necessary to do something, in this case what operations are necessary to experience enlightenment. I give seven operational definitions next in this Section.

(Pause for discussion among the participants)

P: Thank you very much. That really clarifies the situation. We agree that when we say ‘enlighten’ we mean the same thing as you do.

So, this takes us to the question that you asked: How to experience enlightenment on your own as soon as possible.

P: Yes. Our question is “How do I get there?”

This is what I know: You can experience enlightenment by going through any of the adventures in Section 1.

Once you've done it the first time, you can do it again.

You don't need any free time to do it.

You don't need any particular place to do it.

You don't need to be doing any particular activity.

In particular, you don't need to meditate to experience enlightenment.

If you want to do it on purpose, all you need is the intention to do it.

Also, if you can, it helps to activate your parasympathetic nervous system. It's the peaceful and receptive part of my nervous system. It's called the 'rest and digest' system, or sometimes the 'feed and breed' system. Sound good?

P: And why do we need to do that?

If I'm not in the parasympathetic system, the only other choice is the fight/ flight system, more fully called the 'fright/ freeze/ fight/ flight/ faint' system, which is the sympathetic nervous system. I have to switch to the sympathetic nervous system when it's dangerous to feed or digest or rest or breed. To be absorbed in high consciousness would be dangerous when I should be in the sympathetic nervous system fighting or fleeing.

P: Did you say we can get to the parasympathetic nervous system?

Yes. It's easy. First, I have to have the intention to do it. Second, I need to be sure I'm in a safe place where no fighting or fleeing is needed. Then all I have to do is take three deep breaths in this specific way: each out-breath has to last for the same number of seconds as its previous in-breath. So, I have to count—'one thousand one, one thousand two' and so on. When I say deep breaths, I mean very deep, breathing in all the way into my chest and abdomen all the way down to my pelvis. I'm breathing in slowly and counting and then slowly letting it out and counting and then doing it again, and then again, three times in all.⁵ Once you get good at it, you can sense clearly when your body flips over into the parasympathetic nervous system. You'll like it there. Try it now.

(P's do breathing exercise)

P: I think we got it—a little bit. What's next?

You could just do what I did in my original experience, which was to decide to be fully conscious and then keep at it all day. [At this point I described to them the day when I experienced enlightenment and its immediate aftermath. A summary of this is presented above as the Prologue. The transcript in full appears below as Appendix 2. When I refer to that day in what follows, I use the capital letter *E* as in 'Experience' to distinguish it from other meanings I give to the word experience.]

What I did is what Buddha did too. But that method may not be for you. That is why I'm giving you other tricks to get to the state of high consciousness. I call them 'tricks' because they're a little bit quirky; the conventional term is 'skillful means.'

First Trick: Perceiving Existing

Hubert Benoit (ouu-Bear ben-WAH) (1904—1992 CE) became a French psychoanalyst, after being a surgeon and a French war hero. Much influenced by Japanese Zen, he uses the word *Satori* to refer to what you called 'enlightenment.'

Benoit says that if we repeatedly and faithfully carry out a particular "inner gesture" then we will realize that "Each of us lives in the state of *Satori* and could not live in any other way."⁶ His books are about what causes "our illusion of not living in the state of *Satori*. We will see that they are our imaginative-emotive processes."⁷

P: What does he mean by imaginative-emotive processes?

Benoit, writing mostly in the 1950s, used movies as a root metaphor. My main obstacle to full consciousness is little imaginary movies where I am the star, usually movies of imaginary social interactions. These daydreams are my imaginative-emotive processes.

Here's how it happens. As in my Experience, I am standing still or slowly walking along in a state of full consciousness, which is consciousness of the real world of the trees and the grass and the sky and

the sound of the breeze, and my body and mind. Then suddenly I wake up to the real world and looking back in my memory of the last few seconds I see the last part of the movie that had replaced the real world.

(Murmurs among the participants)

P: Wait. We're not following you! You left something out.

Yes, I did leave something out, and I did it on purpose to make a point. I wanted you to notice, and you did. I'll clarify by saying it all again, but at the place where I left something out, I'll put in stars, like this, *****, and then I'll explain what the stars mean. Here goes:

As in my Experience, I am standing still or slowly walking along in a state of full consciousness, which is consciousness of the real world of the trees and the grass and the sky and the sound of the breeze, and my body and mind. ***** Then suddenly I wake up to the real world and looking back in my memory of the last few seconds I see the last part of the movie that had replaced the real world.

What the stars mean is that without noticing it I had dropped into a daydream. I didn't mention it the first time around as if I didn't know it had happened; just like in the real world I don't notice when it happens. I'm just going along fully conscious and "Then suddenly I wake up..."

P: Me too. What does Benoit say about that?

Benoit says straight out:

The precise objective of inner work is to attain Reality through the elimination of the dream.⁸

P: I see. Could you clarify what you mean by 'reality' in this context?

Good question. Benoit starts out with the most basic thing there is: existing itself. I don't think you would want to deny that there is existence.

P: Why not? Oh, I see...if we did, then...okay...Go on.

Perceiving my existing is a basic perception, maybe the most basic of all. According to Benoit, I can make an inner gesture to install myself in my perception of existing, in reality, in the real world.

P: How is that to be done?

The simplest way Benoit suggests to eliminate the dream and install myself in reality is simply to make the inner gesture that perceives my sensation of existing. Just existing. 'I exist.'

P: Hmm...Exactly what is that gesture?

Well, try it out. See what happens.

(Pause)

P: Yes, I can get that.

So, you can see that when I make Benoit's mental gesture, I easily perceive my sensation of existing. Then that stops my machinery of thinking, including my generating imaginary movies. But only intermittently. To reach reality more often by elimination of the dream, I need to learn how to perceive the sensation of existing more often.

P: How am I supposed to do that?

For this, as for all the skillful tricks, I must start with the intention to experience enlightenment, and then go on from there.

P: Okay, what if I have the proper intention? Then what happens?

If you are asking, "What do I get?" Good question. Best question. I congratulate you for that question! When I make this gesture with the necessary intention, and install myself in the real world, here's what I get:

My mind is active concerning the ultimate reality of my condition at the concrete moment that I am living⁹ ...the ultimate problem of the human condition as it manifests in the present instant.¹⁰

Wait! I just remembered that this keen feeling of existing is what happens to me when I'm in real danger, life-threatening danger.

P: Like what?

Once I was adjusting the lighting during a technical rehearsal in a big empty auditorium. I was crawling along a girder in the space above the decorative plaster ceiling of the auditorium and below the roof, which was about four feet of space. Suddenly, I lost my balance and went through the ceiling. I managed to catch myself and ended up with just my leg dangling below the ceiling. The seats were 100 feet down. If I had fallen, I would probably be dead.

Even worse, sometimes I get lost on a ski slope and fall and find myself neck deep in a drift of snow, sometimes in a place where nobody would show up until spring. I'm struggling desperately to get out, with nightmare thoughts: 'We've moved from rescue operations to body recovery'—only being found next August.

After I escape, I'm just grateful for simply existing, existing all by itself, being alive, without having to add anything extra to it. I am perceiving my existing. Along with this, a strong feeling of tranquility comes over me, along with a keen determination to be more in the here and now in life, rather than getting lost in imagination. I say to myself, "Everything will be different from now on. I will behave in a different way that will be more appreciative of just being alive." It happens like that every time....

Benoit describes it as like the feeling of someone just before a duel: He promises himself that if he survives, he will completely reorganize his priorities and resolve to live a new way.

P: Isn't that death experience the same as what triggered your Experience?

Yes, it is! Exactly like my Experience, which was triggered by my sudden powerful impression that I was going to die. Attending funerals can have the same effect, even reading the obituaries. Many sages mention powerful death impressions that startled them into awakening: *Ramana Maharshi* at 14 was sure he was dying; Buddha was set off as a young adult by seeing a dead body. A prominent American sage was set off as a graduate student when his dear teacher was burned all over in a car accident and took a month to die in horrific pain.

P: I think we can understand that very well, with our experience of life.

Where was I? Oh...I was making this inner gesture.

P: Is Benoit saying that the inner gesture of perceiving existing is supposed to show me I am already in *Satori*? Seems a bit of a stretch to me.

It seemed that way to me too at first. Benoit goes on to suggest other ways. One is that the inner gesture

[Is] realized when I authorize the totality of my tendencies before the conscious appearance of any one of them...It requires us to relinquish control over consciousness and all its active and perceptual functions; and when we authorize consciousness to function autonomously in this way...we must do this completely, impartially, and unconditionally. This act is a moment in which everything that directs and controls my life comes to a halt, during which it is as though I were trying to open myself up to my very *existence*, the unchanging presence beneath all the activity of my life...and then none of them appears [emphasis in original].¹¹

So, try to authorize everything...Let's try that... Go on...authorize.

(Long pause)

P: I can sort of authorize my tendencies but only vaguely. I'm not getting anything... so certainly none of my inner tendencies are appearing.

Exactly right. Me too.

Here's another one from Benoit: Go to the place in your mind from which your daydreams will come. But be there before they come out and lie in wait for them.

(Long pause)

P: I'm trying to do that...but...I don't know how to do it.

There might be an easier way. Eckhart Tolle is a 21st century teacher who puts it like this:

Try a little experiment. Close your eyes and say to yourself: 'Oh, I wonder what my next thought is going to be.' Then become very alert and wait for the next thought. Be like a cat watching a mouse hole. What thought is going to come out of the mouse hole?¹²

Try that...

(Long pause)

P: No, I'm getting nothing.

Excellent! Well done. Me too.

Let's try another one. This is to say to your mind, "Speak! I am listening!" Or "Do what you please, but I am going to watch you doing it." If you discover that thoughts have already come up, you say, "So you want to talk to me about that. Go on, I'm listening."¹³ Shall we try that?

(Long pause)

P: I'm still getting nothing.

Good! Good!

P: What good is that?

Okay. Now you get the punchline! I asked you to do all that without telling you this in advance: The point for each of these is to stop my mind. Temporarily. Pause my thinking machinery. Not to suppress any thoughts that have already arisen, but to intervene before any thoughts arise. “*It suspends thought without suppressing it—and that is the key.*” [emphasis in original]¹⁴ We all tried all of Benoit’s tricks and saw clearly: They are good at stopping any thoughts from coming up; They pause my thinking machinery; There suddenly becomes nothing to notice.

P: (Mocks accusingly) You’re admitting you tricked us! Er...but...But it strikes me this is a paradoxical outcome. Here my thought machinery has all the time been putting out an endless train of thoughts, but then when I’m inviting any thought to arise, it completely turns off.

Uh-huh... Yes, it certainly does have the immediate effect of pausing my mind, pausing my thinking machinery. I invite thoughts to happen and what happens is nothing? What is going on? Shall we try one more? Here’s the last of Benoit’s gestures; I call it ‘casting the glance’:

This gesture...is like a look which, cast on the full center of my inner world, transpierces the plane of this world towards that which is unknown to me. This look, because it does not prefer any object, because it is sent, without pre-conception, towards no matter what, meets nothing and so results without my having wished it in the suspension of my imaginative film ¹⁵...It is an attentiveness to everything, an attentiveness which has no object...The attentiveness only lasts for an instant. It is without duration, a timeless flash of lightning in the depths of time....¹⁶

P: Yes, I get nothing! That sounds like exactly what you did in your Experience, when you looked straight at your mind.

Exactly! That is the same as I find when I do any of Benoit's suggestions, of which I've mentioned five: Make the gesture toward perceiving existing; Authorize all my tendencies in advance; Lie in wait for my thoughts before they arise, along with Tolle's 'I wonder what my next thought is going to be'; Say, 'Speak. I am listening.'; Cast the glance. All those have the same effect as what I did during my Experience (quoting from myself on Day 1 in Appendix 2):

'I look directly at my mind, and there the unoccupied openness, clearness, nothing in the way, freeness is, in full, and also at the same exact time the consciousness is, in full.'

Also, later I'll get into Benoit on immobility: I think Benoit's immobility is the same as in my Experience when I was just standing there. By the way, Benoit is a lot clearer in his books. They are worth reading.

Steven C. Hayes' Skillful Trick: Identifying as the Witness

Steven C. Hayes is a professor of psychology who has published more than 600 articles and 15 books, a psycholinguist, a much-loved practicing psychotherapist, and founder of the Association for Contextual Behavioral Science. His focus is on the perspective within myself **from** which my mind is observable. That is the same thing as the Witness. If I get to that, it stops my thinking machinery.

Or I could just call the Witness *awareness*. Suppose I'm experiencing awareness. Then a daydream arises. If I identify with the image, then I go off on a fantasy or a memory or judgment or plan or something else. But if instead I identify with awareness, my thinking machinery stops so I'm not carried off by the daydream.

P: Can you tell me how to get to the Witness?

Yes. The first way is to look back in your memory. Think back to your early elementary school days; didn't you have a watcher within yourself? Go up behind your eyes at that time; wasn't there a neutral presence there? Isn't that same presence here now? In this room? In you?

P: (Long pause) I think I'm remembering that, but it's very abstract. I'm not sure it is getting me to the Witness.

The next ways are very gestural ways to do it, using parts of my body to make simple physical gestures. I move one hand out to arm's length with the fingers spread out as if I was reaching for a large grapefruit. Then turn my hand 180 degrees, now with the fingers reaching out toward my face as if I was going to grasp my whole head. Then I move the hand inward toward my own head, toward my mind.

Here's another gesture that works for me. [Stands up.] What I do is I 'back up' into myself until I get behind my eyes. To do this, I put my hands out at arm's length in front of me. I start wiggling my fingers, then while I'm stepping back, gradually pull my hands backwards until they're right next to my ears; this symbolizes 'backing up' into my mind. [Extend my arms in front of me and start wiggling my fingers as I take two steps back while pulling my wiggling fingers back toward the sides of my head.] This is a physical gesture that I'm using to stand for the mental backing up.

In my Experience my gesture was to imagine my whole body turning around 180 degrees to look directly at my mind.

Also, I can use 'gestures' in speech, like 'Speak. I am listening.'

P: [Reaching out one arm with fingers outstretched, turning it around, moving it in toward his face.] Aha! That's better. I think I am getting somewhere. But how can I be sure I'm at the Witness?

Good question! Let me explain. First, you need to know what the Witness is. Hayes sometimes calls it the Observer Self, which is the same thing as calling it the Witness, the Watcher, the One who knows,

Presence, etc. The Observer self is separate from the contents of my mind (thoughts, feelings, images, etc.); the observing self is that *in which* the contents exist. “The observing self is the transparent center, that which is aware ...the center of all experience...Awareness is the ground of conscious life, the background or field in which...” the contents exist. It is where “our core sense of personal existence is located... and that is where *you* are. ... No matter what takes place, no matter what we experience, nothing is as central as the self that observes [emphasis added].”¹⁷

P: What is the witness like?

Get ready; it's a strange place. It's an anomaly, an analytic singularity. It's different from everything else in the universe.

First, it's the only thing we can't observe; this is because it is that which observes. You can try it yourself: “...try to locate that self to establish its boundaries. The task is impossible: whatever we can notice or conceptualize is already an object of awareness, not awareness itself, which seems to jump a step back when we experience an object.”¹⁸

Second, “the observer self is featureless.”¹⁹ It has no shape or size or weight or color.... It has no qualities; it is unqualifiable; it has un-finger-put-upon-ability (a Tibetan term). Third, it is one of the few things in the universe that have no edges, no limits, no boundaries. ‘Nothing’ and ‘Everything’ and the Observer self have no boundaries. All else has boundaries.

Fourth, it “cannot be affected by the world any more than a mirror can be affected by the images it reflects.”²⁰

There is more on the Witness in Appendix 3.

P: So, what's the upshot of all this?

If I'm identifying as the Witness²¹, then that is the same as being fully conscious. The point is that it is incompatible with discursive thought, which means it stops my machinery of thinking²². You can see this for yourself by just going to the Witness. It's easy; you did it just now.

Ken Wilber: Activate your attention without dwelling on anything.

Ken Wilber was 23 when he wrote *The Spectrum of Consciousness*. He'd looked at the world's methods of experiencing enlightenment and found they share three characteristics in common.²³

Factor 1: Active Attention — a special type of intense yet relaxed alertness, which can be described as a “Speak[!] I am listening.” attitude, as a *total* authorization or *total* acceptance of my tendencies... [emphases in original].

During my Experience, daydreaming was in *passive* attention. Once I wake up from a daydream, and turn around and look directly at my mind, I am in what Ken Wilber calls *active* attention. When I activate my attention, what also shows up in me is a *sensation of awareness*. This is definitely a sensory experience, a totally mundane sensation like any other—the sensation of my feet in my shoes, or the taste of sugar. My sensation of awareness is a felt thing—a felt consciousness. It isn't abstract: It's like a light goes on in my mind. (Maybe that is where the word ‘enlightenment’ came from.)

I can give you a clear perception of the switch from passive attention to active attention right now. Just close your eyes. Then suddenly I want you to first ‘notice’ that something is on the screen inside of your eyelids, and then ‘see’ what is on that screen. In between noticing and seeing, you may notice the sudden coming awake of your eyes; your eyes come alive. For me active attention usually pops on with a slide or a click.

Then the thinking machinery of my mind just stops. When this active attention is carried out correctly, it results in:

Factor 2: Stopping - the suspension of thought, of conceptualization, of objectification, of mental chatter... It is a suspension of space, time, form, and dualism, and in

this condition an utter mental silence prevails...*this is remaining with what is...* [emphasis in original]

In my Experience this is what happened in a marked way during the intervals when I was just standing still, immobile for long intervals. If this stopping is clear and complete, it will result in:

Factor 3: Choice-less Awareness...pure timeless awareness...it operates without any effort whatever...above space-time in the absolute Now, pointing to nothing beyond itself and seeing nothing beyond itself.

In my Experience choice-less awareness lasted for a long time, all the time while I was standing still. Er...rather, it's not exactly 'time'; I need to put scare quotes around 'for a long time' in the last sentence. Wilber calls it 'timeless' and 'above space – time in the absolute Now.' Benoit says, "It is without duration, a timeless flash of lightning in the depths of time." It was like that in my Experience.

P: What happens after choice-less awareness?

Eventually I always go back to dwelling in daydreams about one thing or another: tasks, plans, memories, fantasies. Ken Wilber doesn't go into this much and the other teachers don't go into it either. I think it is very important. More on this in Section 2.

My daydreams are in passive attention. Once passive attention takes over, my mind is disconnected from the witness. As long as I'm immersed in the daydream, there is no opening to look straight at my mind. Later my mind goes back to active attention. And back and forth it goes. Passive attention may last a long time. Active attention may wake up seldom. At 14 I was unhappy at how much time daydreams were taking up and how seldom active attention was waking up. Later I found that the more I practiced, the weaker the daydreams were, and the longer the 'times' of active attention.

After publishing *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, Wilber became a full-time philosopher/ mystic/ author. He's now up to more than 20 books, all still in print. You can't do better than to read them.

Clapping one hand

The wild and crazy men of Zen came into their own about 1000 years after Buddha, when *Huineng* (who-ee NENG) burst upon the scene (c 638--713 CE). At 14, he heard monks chanting: 'Activate the mind without dwelling on anything.' At 16, he ran away from home to join the local monastery, working as a kitchen boy. A few years later the Abbot decided to retire. He pledged to pass the office on to whoever wrote the best poem. The head monk had seniority; in bold strokes of black ink, he wrote on the wall:

The body is the tree of enlightenment.
The mind is like a bright mirror's stand.
At all times we must strive to polish it
And must not let dust collect.

As soon as it was read to him, *Huineng* (illiterate) asked his friend to write on the opposite wall:

The mind is the tree of enlightenment.
The body is the bright mirror's stand.
The bright mirror is originally clear and pure.
Where could there be any dust? ²⁴

The head monk was mandating endless years of meditation; *Huineng* was not. Secretly in the late hours that night the Abbott shook *Huineng* awake and sneaked him up to his lodgings. "You are the successor." He warned him that the monks would rebel over this. So, he gave him his symbols of transmission—his robe and his bowl—and rushed him out to escape at once. Which he did.

When the monks discovered what happened they sent an army after *Huineng*. Much later it was the General of the army all alone on a dark

and stormy night who finally tracked him to the top of a mountain. As dawn broke *Huineng* had retreated into the bushes. The General called out for *Huineng*, who replied “Show me what your face looked like before your parents were born.” The General was suddenly and completely awakened — fully enlightened — at that moment.

P: What? What?

Exactly. That's what I thought. Then I learned that the men of Zen believed that being ‘fully conscious’ was exactly ‘your true face.’ ‘True’ meaning ‘proper, right, straight, such as it should be.’ So, it’s ‘Show me what [your fully conscious enlightened face as it should be] looked like before your parents were born.’

P: We still don’t understand.

Here’s what that means. The light of full consciousness is the same in everyone, including me and you at five years old. Think back to your early elementary school days. Didn't you have a watcher within yourself? Go up behind your eyes at that time. Wasn't there a neutral presence there? Isn’t that same presence here now?

P: (Pause) Okay, I’ve got it.

That is the witness, the true face of all, and it is present in you in the past and now and in the future. And in me and everyone else too, at all times in the past and the future. In particular, it was present in our parents and their parents, *and before their parents were born*, and in the General too...is the point of all that. *Huineng* was saying that the true face of enlightenment is present in us already.

Eventually the Emperor made *Huineng* Abbot of a big monastery. One dark and stormy night a student arrived after a grueling and dangerous journey from his distant monastery, eager to study with *Huineng*. *Huineng* politely asked his name and where he had come from.

The student politely replied "I'm so-and-so. I came from Mount Sung."

Then *Huineng* said "But what is this thing?"

The student was so struck by *Huineng*'s question that he fell silent and immediately went to his cell to meditate — for seven years, the story goes! He had taken *Huineng*'s question as a directive to...what? Look deeply at...what is there to look at that answers the question? If you go upstream far enough...what is there at the source...his existing and his openness/consciousness are there to look at...So....

After seven years, *Huineng* asked him again “What is this thing?”

The student replied, “To say it is like some ‘thing’ misses the point.” Then *Huineng* said “Aha! Now you are enlightened!” Or words to that effect.

P: Wait, wait. What?

What sense does that make, you mean? Here's how it makes sense: when I look into my mind itself intently all the way to the bottom, what I see is not a thing. It's completely unoccupied, clear, open, free. At the same time, it's the ongoing flux of consciousness; it's moving all the time; it's the activity of looking itself. It's the witness. Certainly, it isn't a thing nor even similar to a thing-like entity at all. When I look directly at my mind and find what is really there, which is not a thing at all, I can only say “To say it is like *some thing* misses the point.”

In other Zen stories the student just straight-out asks the teacher ‘What is enlightenment?’ Sometimes the question is put metaphorically like: ‘What is the heart of the Buddhist teaching?’ Then the teacher's punchline enlightens them suddenly and immediately.

P: Really? How does that work?

As usual, the intention has to be there. Then the student has to take the teacher's punchline as a hint that indirectly tells him to do what is needed: perceive his existing (Benoit), or identify as the witness (Hayes), or activate his attention (Wilber), or enter into ‘ordinary’ awareness (*Padmasambhava*, later in the chapter), or any of the other things in this Section.

P: Why just a hint? Why indirectly? Why doesn't the teacher just tell him directly?

I don't know why one would think it has to be indirect...Maybe so the student has to do some of the work of getting there?

P: Okay, you have told us that the student basically asks how to experience enlightenment. What is the teacher's punchline?

One kind of Zen punchline is to draw the student's attention to something commonplace and mundane, as by answering 'The cypress tree in the garden' or 'A piece of cake', or 'Do you hear that waterfall?' In 21st century Zen, the teacher might say, 'The blue van in the parking lot,' or 'Do you hear the traffic?' In one story the teacher asks: 'Have you had your breakfast?' And when the student replies 'Yes,' the teacher's punchline is 'Then go wash your bowl.'

P: How is that supposed to help?

If I have the intention, and if I take the hint properly, then I may suddenly pause my thinking machinery and go fully conscious, perceive my existence (Benoit), or activate my attention (Wilber), or identify as the witness (Hayes), or enter into 'ordinary' awareness (*Padmasambhava*), or start attending to my consciousness itself as the direct path into the depths of being, or whatever....

P: I'm guessing that *all* of the students don't suddenly go fully conscious.

No. Even if the student has the intention, if he takes the hint the wrong way, he might just get into dwelling on the waterfall or on washing his bowl; or just say 'What? I don't get it. You're not answering my question. I don't understand what a waterfall or a piece of cake have to do with enlightenment;' or even 'Oh, I see, enlightenment is a piece of cake.'

P: What makes the difference between those who get it and those who don't?

It may be too difficult for some to understand. After all, we are trying to pay attention to a thing which is in a certain sense not there, "pure

attention, attention without any manifested object²⁵...there is nothing to perceive...²⁶ active attention to my inner world is without an object."²⁷ At the same time, "It is not a mere nothingness or something annihilated because it is lucid and present."²⁸

P: Some do get it. How do they explain that?

Huineng said: "Among people some are keen, and others dull."²⁹

Another kind of Zen punchline is a real punch: The teacher replies by punching the student, or kicking him, hitting with a stick, shouting, or tweaking his nose.

P: Isn't that just rude? You'd never get away with that today!

Maybe not but let me help you into sympathy with this. Imagine the teacher senses that the student is trapped in a daydreaming state, close to sleeping even when he is awake. He is lost in a waking sleep, sunk in a daytime—dreaming state of mind, spaced out. To urgently awaken a person who is asleep I might have to poke them with a stick, shake them, shout at them.

P: Or punch them?

Here again the right intention of the student is essential for rightly interpreting the teacher's act; otherwise, it's just an occasion for fright, or a provocation to fight or flee. Instead, the student is being invited to wake up to the witness, to full consciousness, activated attention. Just remember how it feels in your consciousness when you just 'come awake' from a daydream. Reality dawns. Being bursts upon the scene. It's not about dwelling on the punch or the stick or the kick or the tweak or the fear or the anger; it's about noticing 'I came awake. I am existing.'

Later a few of these Zen punchlines became famous as 'koans,' such as, 'Show me the sound of one hand clapping.' I found a book with the 'correct' answers to hundreds of koans.³⁰ The answer is: the pupil faces his master, takes a correct posture, and without a word, thrusts one hand forward.

Makes sense to me; in fact, I wonder why I didn't think of it myself.

P: Us too!

Many of the other koans sound simply impossible, such as "A monk put a gosling in a bottle and fed it until it was full grown. Show me how to get it out without breaking the bottle or hurting the goose." (I can't find it in the book, and I can't figure it out, so no answer here.)

My guess is that all the important work takes place *before* the koan is solved. During that interval, the koan makes the student think furiously but without acceptable results. Eventually the student follows back his thinking, going upstream; eventually he ends up at the place **from** which he is thinking, and that puts the student into the witness. Then his thinking machinery is paused. This can happen either by identifying as the witness, or by his attention getting activated, by perceiving his existing, by entering into 'ordinary' awareness, and so on.

P: But how does that explain the answer to the one hand clapping koan?

No, you're right, it doesn't explain it at all.

Padmasambhava's Trick: Awareness as Ordinary

This operational definition is from the seventh-century Tibetan, *Padmasambhava* (Pod-ma sahm-BAH-va) who wrote 'Self-Liberation through Seeing with Naked Awareness':

[T]he method for entering into it involves three considerations:

Thoughts in the past are clear and empty and leave no traces behind.

Thoughts in the future are fresh and unconditioned by anything.

And in the present moment, when (your mind) remains in its own condition without constructing anything, awareness, at that moment, in itself is quite ordinary...

Only a naked manifest awareness is present...

This is the real introduction to the actual condition of things.³¹

Let's take this one part at a time. Take "Thoughts in the past are clear and empty and leave no traces behind. Thoughts in the future are fresh and unconditioned by anything." This is the situation after I have drawn the sting from outside thoughts from the past and the future that are disturbing, repetitive, persistent. He writes as if that had already happened. What he doesn't mention is that I have to do it first.

P: And how do you do that?

That's in Section 2.

What does he mean by "awareness...is quite ordinary?" For that we need a special meaning of 'ordinary.' This is from *Khenchen*, a 20th century Tibetan:

We are not seeking to recover something far away or concealed, and we are not trying to remove the obstacles that prevent us from acquiring something. Instead, we are simply looking for the nature of our own mind which is right there in our own mind. What could possibly be more accessible than that?

We could easily think that the nature of our mind is extraordinarily fine, extremely pure, and utterly unusual, and so we should discard everything that is old and familiar and arrive at something that has never been experienced before.

But that would be to manipulate and contrive; we will never discover the nature of our mind that way. So, to dispel such misconceptions, the term 'ordinary mind' was used to indicate that it is and has always been just the

mind's nature without any manipulation or any contrivance.³²

What does *Padmasambhava* mean by “naked manifest awareness”? ‘Awareness’ refers to being fully conscious; ‘naked’ refers to the emptiness property; ‘manifest’ refers to its being present unquestionably.

Most important to me is what *Padmasambhava* means by saying about this awareness: “This is your real introduction to the actual condition of things.” I think he means what I found in my Experience when I saw that the mind is the most important thing, in some ways the only important thing (described on Day 3 in Appendix 2).

P: So, that confirmation gives you confidence in one of your conclusions from your Experience. But that doesn't tell us much about what **we** should do?

No, you're right. I got off the track. Here's what he says about what to do.

Merely allowing (thoughts) to settle into their own condition without trying to modify them in any way is sufficient... allowing (thoughts) to be just as they are without trying to do anything about them, is sufficient³³...the unmodified uncorrected nature of the mind is liberated by its being allowed simply to remain in its own (original) natural condition.³⁴

P: Is he saying to just do nothing?

He's saying it is possible for me to do nothing to manipulate my mind. That is done by pausing the thinking machinery of my mind. But he doesn't give any instructions about what to do to pause it. For him, it's more a matter of ‘just do it.’ Or since he is saying to just do nothing, maybe he means ‘just *don't* do it.’ The result is to see that “The nature of the mind, as well as being empty, is also intrinsically aware; everywhere it is clear.”³⁵

This sometimes works for me. I just look directly at my mind and it pauses the thinking machinery.

P: That sounds just like your Experience, where you said that when you look directly at your mind...

Yes. As I said on Day 1 in Appendix 2, “There the unoccupied openness, clearness, nothing in the way, freeness is, in full [that’s his ‘being empty’ and ‘clear’] and also at the same exact time the consciousness is, in full [that’s his ‘intrinsically aware’].

P: Yes, empty, and aware at the same time. So, we are curious. What is the benefit of this?

He calls it “the Clear Light of your own intrinsic awareness.”³⁶ More on nine other benefits and rewards in Section 3.

Buddha’s trick: Being fully conscious

*I will teach you the All. Listen to this...³⁷
Buddha*

One day, Siddhartha Gautama (that was his birth name; c. 563 BCE) decided that this would be the day to get enlightened, and so he went to a nearby grove of trees, intending to stay there until he became awakened. This is the same thing I did in my Experience. He got enlightened in one day, and he was then entitled to be called Buddha, which means ‘the awakened one.’

He was 35. For six years before that he had done thousands of hours of meditating, particularly with two paramount teachers of meditation, but he left both of them because he learned by experience that meditation didn’t work.

What did work for him was to stop the machinery of thinking. He emptied his mind of discursive, analytical thought. He did this, as I did it

in my Experience, simply by being fully conscious of what his body-mind was doing, including being conscious of his senses and how his feelings and thoughts showed up in his body. I'll let him tell his own story.

To be awakened:

You should be fully conscious

when you are sitting, standing, walking, lying down,

when you're bending and flexing your limbs,

when you are urinating and defecating.

You should be fully aware

when you're having feelings,

whether pleasant or unpleasant or neutral.

You should be fully aware

when you're in various states of mind

such as greediness, anger, hatred.³⁸

Elsewhere, he put it another way:

[B]reathing in long he discerns, I am breathing in long, or breathing out long he discerns, I am breathing out long. Or breathing in short, he discerns I am breathing in short, or breathing out short, he discerns I am breathing out short...When going forward and returning, he makes himself fully alert, When looking toward and looking away he makes himself fully alert... When bending and extending his limbs...when carrying his cloak... When eating, drinking, chewing, and savoring... When falling asleep, waking up, talking, and remaining silent, he makes himself fully alert...when feeling a painful feeling he discerns, "I am feeling a painful feeling." When feeling a pleasant feeling, he discerns, "I'm feeling a pleasant feeling." When feeling neither a painful nor pleasant feeling, he discerns, "I'm feeling neither a painful nor pleasant feeling." When the mind has passion, he discerns that the mind has passion. When the mind is without passion, he discerns the mind is without passion...when

the mind has aversion... delusion... constricted...
concentrated...³⁹

And so on and on and on...

When Buddha first started talking about being enlightened, he described the experience as 'clearly visible.' Later on, *Sivaka*, one of his followers, objected:

"What do you mean, clearly visible? It doesn't seem clearly visible to me at all."

Buddha's response was "Well, *Sivaka*, when you are greedy, you are conscious that you are greedy, right?"

And *Sivaka* said "Well, yes"

"And when you're not greedy, you're conscious that you're not greedy, right?"

"Yes."

"And when you're feeling hatred, you're conscious that you're feeling hatred, right? And when you're not feeling hatred, you're conscious that you're not feeling hatred?"

"Yes."

"And when you're feeling confusion, you're conscious that..."

And so on... At the end, Buddha said "Well, *Sivaka* my friend, it is in exactly in that way that it is clearly visible."⁴⁰

A fellow named *Bahiya* was in a big hurry to get enlightened, and he begged Buddha to tell him quickly how to do it:

Bahiya, you should train yourself thus: in the seen will be merely what is seen; in the heard will be merely what is heard; in the sensed will be merely what is sensed; in the cognized will be merely what is cognized. In this way you should train yourself.⁴¹

What about everyday life?

One day the Buddha was conversing with a Prince. The Prince asked him, "What do you and your monks do in your monastery?" The Buddha said, "We sit, and we walk, and we eat." The prince said, "How are you different, then, from my people, for we do those things as well?" The Buddha responded, "When we sit, we are conscious we are sitting. When we walk, we are conscious we are walking. When we eat, we are conscious we are eating. When your people sit, they do not simply sit, their minds are busy with all kinds of imagination; when they walk, they give reign to a thousand idle thoughts; when they eat, their minds churn with schemes and images and imagined conversations."⁴²

Stopping the machinery of thinking by attending to your senses shows up all over, including reports from all eras of Buddhism. For example, here is *Torei* (Japan; 1721 – 1792 CE):

You must search for your true nature. How do you search? In the eye seeing of colors; in the ear hearing of sounds; in the body feeling distinctions of heat and cold; in the consciousness feelings of wrong and right: all these must be seen clearly as they are. This seeing and hearing and knowing is at the root of the practice. The training...is when looking at some color, to ask himself what it is that is being seen; when hearing some sound, to ask himself what it is that is being heard; when feeling hot or cold, to ask himself what it is that is being felt; when distinguishing wrong from right, to ask himself what it is that is being known...⁴³

Buddha summarizes:

I will teach you the All. Listen to this. And what is the All? The eye and forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and odors, the tongue and tastes, the body and tactile

sensations, the mind and [thoughts]. This is called the All. If anyone should speak thus: 'Having rejected this All, I shall make known another All' - that would be an empty boast on his part. If he were questioned, he would not be able to reply and, further, he would meet with vexation. For what reason? Because that All would not be within his domain. ⁴⁴

My Way

You can find this in Appendix 2.

What do these tricks have in common?

All of these tricks pause thinking, cause a suspension of thinking without suppressing it. Sometimes I call it ‘stopping’ thinking, or ‘immobility.’ I think ‘pause’ is usually the best word.

(Discussion among the participants)

P: I’m afraid that some of us feel that terms like ‘stopping, immobility, pausing’ are all somewhat negative as a conclusion.

No problem! There are many other ways I can refer to it that are just as legitimate. For example, I could just as well say that everything in this section causes my mind to be liberated, free, open, clear, nothing in the way. Another way is to refer to the feeling as serene, peaceful, tranquil. As you will see in Section 3, I could just as well refer to it as causing people to feel more real, attain realization; a ‘realized person’ is the term that is used. Another way described in Section 3 is to approach it through the experience of the ‘numinous.’ To religious people numinous means sensing the presence of a deity; for the non-religious it means a feeling of mystery and sacredness. Also, as a counter to the East Asian focus on terms like emptiness, the void, and so on, consider D. T. Suzuki’s famous reply when asked what it felt like to experience enlightenment: “Like everyday consciousness but two inches above the ground.”⁴⁵

These all apply to any form of meditation you can think of—concentrative meditation, open awareness meditation, focusing on the breath, mantras, chanting, body scanning, and so on.

Sometimes the terms used to describe the meditation can confuse things. For example, if I refer to ‘a dispassionate observation of spontaneous thoughts’ or to ‘labeling each thought as it arises,’ that sounds like the opposite of stopping. But the real effect of these procedures is to stop thought in its tracks, as we saw when we tried out the Benoit tricks and as you can verify for yourself. As Hayes points out:

In no form of meditation, as that term is usually used, does the meditator engage in discursive, analytical thought ... Said in another way, none of these traditions encourage the individual to react [in terms of] "meaning," "logic," or "reference." What is in common to all these traditions is the selection of procedures that might weaken the literal quality ... exerted by self-talk while enhancing the salience of you-as-context.⁴⁶

My favorite is to think about it as the pausing of discursive thought, with 'discursive' meaning either 'proceeding by reasoning or argument' or 'passing aimlessly from one subject to another; digressive; rambling.'

Shinzen Young: Basic Mindfulness

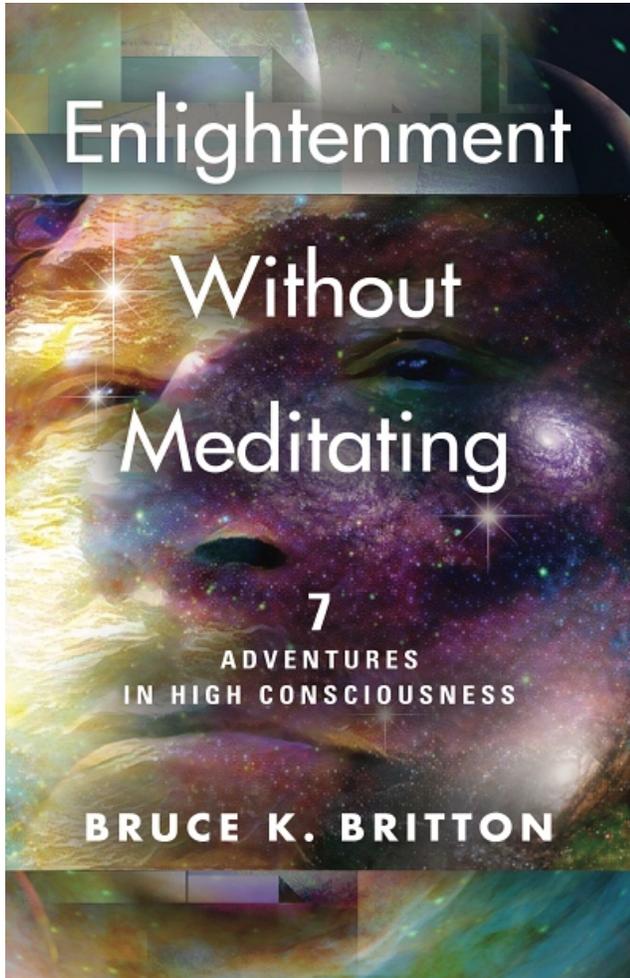
Shinzen Young is my main teacher. He is a wonderful teacher and I respect him greatly. He has written so perfectly on his ideas that I could add nothing to what he has said. I suggest getting his books such as *Five Ways to Know Yourself: An Introduction to Basic Mindfulness* (2011) and *What is Mindfulness* (2013) which at this time are available on his website Shinzenyoung.com. He's mentioned that in progress is the most complete list of intentional enlightenment activities that I have heard of, called ULTRA (Ultimate List of Trainings for Attentiveness). It isn't yet available at the time I'm writing this. Fortunately, his books contain lists and classifications of more than 30 of the major techniques from the world enlightenment traditions. Among other things, he finds a striking degree of commonality among the techniques described in Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and secular traditions, with many examples.

He has identified three activities that accelerate one's progress: Motion Challenges (e.g., do it while moving); Trigger Practice (e.g., start with a short video that triggers me, like of a politician: first play it while watching out of the corner of my eye with no sound, and notice my body-mind's emotional reactions, then gradually increase visual and sound levels until it carries me away, then back down to lower levels

while I keep noticing my body-mind's emotional reactions, etc.); Duration Training, which refers to practicing for many hours a day in 10-day silent retreats. I have done about 2500 hours at such retreats presided over by Shinzen and by six other teachers. Reading his books and listening to him on his channel on Youtube is a revelation. [Last minute update: As this book goes to press, Shinzen emailed me on July 22, 2021, ' I now co-direct my own neuroscience lab at the University of Arizona. The other co-director is Dr. Jay Sanguinetti...We call our team SEMA LAB (Sonication Enhanced Mindfulness Awareness...).']

Other ways

My experience of enlightenment can also be turned on by entering into certain streams of mind that I haven't mentioned before. I can think myself into the right frame of mind, talk myself into it, imagine myself into it. One good way is to read books or articles that put me in the right frame of mind. I know people who get into it by looking at Buddhist art. One example is statues of Buddha, and there are many others. Another good way is to put myself into a semantic field which helps me, which I do by thinking about words that remind me of it: single words or phrases like suchness, thusness, it's just this; or I use groups of words: 'stillness, effortless, serenity, pacific' for that aspect of it; or: 'open, free, space-like, etc.' for another aspect. Ken Wilber suggests pretending I'm making a video tape of everything that goes on; When I see something, I imagine it as if I were looking at it on a movie screen. It works well for me.



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