

THE ENLIGHTENED ONE

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One day Godwin and I were discussing what the enlightened person might be like. As usual the conversation was wide-ranging and eluded to ideas from the Buddhist texts, Krishnamurti, Ramana Maharshi, Taoism and other traditions. We both agreed that the usual Theravàdin conception of the arahat as a rather stiff and unsmiling monk seemed to be inadequate. ßBhanteû, he said, ßwhy don't you go through the Tipiñaka, take out all the descriptions of arahats and put them together?û I thought this a good idea and agreed to do it.

Some months later I showed Godwin what I had written and he was delighted with the many interesting things I had found. But he also mentioned several things I had missed which he thought should be included. The enlightened one's ability to be at home anywhere, one of his favourite ideas, was one thing he mentioned. He also urged me to include something about non-duality, a concept he had become much interested in during the last few years.

After some more reading and writing and a few more discussions with him I put what I had written in its final form and got ready to show it to him. But it was not to be. Death intervened and our twenty-three year long friendship came to an end. Now reading through what I have written, I do not know whether it is an accurate description of the enlightened person but I am again and again reminded of Godwin himself. I offer this piece of writing as a humble tribute to the kindest friend and the wisest teacher I have ever known.¹

1. What are enlightened people like? Well, some are men and some are women.² You might find them in a monastery or a suburban home, in the forest or in a small country town. It is true that there are not many of them but there are a lot more than people usually think. It is not that enlightenment is inherently difficult; the sad truth is that most people cannot be bothered to pull themselves out of the bog of ignorance and craving.³

2. At first you wouldn't notice the enlightened person in a crowd because he's rather quiet and retiring. But when things started to get heated, that's when he'd stand out. When everyone else was enflamed by rage he'd still be full of love.⁴ When others were in turmoil because of some crisis he'd be as calm as he was before.⁵ In a mad scramble to get as much as possible, he'd be the one over in the corner with the content expression on his face.⁶ He walks smoothly over the rough,⁷ he's steady amidst the shaking.⁸ It's not that he wants to

¹ All references are to the P.T.S editions of the Pàli Tipiñaka. AN. Aïguttaranikàya; DN. Dāghanikàya; Dh. Dhammapada; MN. Majjhimanikàya; SN. Saïyutta Nikàya; Sn. Suttanipàta; Thag. Theragàthà; Ud. Udàna; Vin. Vinaya.

² itthiyà purisassa vā - SN. I. 33.

³ appakà te manussesu ye janà pàragàmino - Dh. 85.

⁴ verinesu averino - Dh. 197.

⁵ àturesu ... anàturà - Dh. 198.

⁶ ussukesu ... anussukà - Dh. 199.

⁷ caranti visame samaü - SN. I. 4.

⁸ kuppanāye no kuppati - Thag. 192.

make a point of being different, rather it's freedom from desire that has made him completely self-contained.⁹ But strangely, although others can't move him, his calm presence moves them. His gentle reasoned words unite those at odds and bring even closer together those already united.¹⁰ The afflicted, the frightened and the worried feel better after they have talked with him.¹¹ Wild animals sense the kindness in the enlightened one's heart and are not afraid of him.¹² Even the place where he dwells, be it village, forest, hill or vale, seems more beautiful simply because he is there.¹³

3. He's not always expressing an opinion or defending a point of view, in fact he doesn't seem to have any views,¹⁴ therefore people often mistake him for a fool.¹⁵ When he doesn't get upset or retaliate to abuse or ridicule again people think there must be something wrong with him. But he doesn't mind what they think. He appears to be dumb but it's just that he prefers to remain silent. He acts as if he was blind but actually he sees everything that is going on. People think he is weak but really he is very strong.¹⁶ Despite all appearances he is as sharp as a razor's edge.¹⁷

4. His face is always radiant and serene because he never worries about what happened yesterday or what might happen tomorrow.¹⁸ His carriage and movements are graceful and poised because he has a natural mindfulness of everything he does.¹⁹ His voice is lovely to hear and his words are urbane, clear and to the point.²⁰ He is beautiful in a way that has nothing to do with physical appearance or eloquence but which comes from his own inner goodness.²¹

5. He might have a house but if it burned down tomorrow he would move somewhere else and be just as comfortable there. He can be at home anywhere.²² Even those who try to cut down on the number of things they own always seem to have too much. No matter how much the enlightened one is given he always seems to have just enough. True, he seeks the necessities of life like everyone else but he takes only what he needs and his needs are very

⁹ anissito - Sn. 363.

¹⁰ DN. I. 4.

¹¹ SN. V. 79.

¹² Vin. IV. 352.

¹³ yattharahanto viharanti taü bhãmiü ràmaõeyyakaü - Dhp. 98.

¹⁴ diññhim-pi lokasmiü na kappayeyya, yãðena và sãlavatena và pi - Sn. 799.

¹⁵ janà maÿyanti bàlo ti, ye dhammassa akovidà - SN. I. 162.

¹⁶ cakkhumàssa yathà andho, sotavà badhiro yathà, paÿyavàssa yathà mãgo, balavà dubbalo-r-iva - Thag. 501.

¹⁷ khuradhàràpamo bhava - Sn. 716.

¹⁸ atãtaü nãnusocanti, nappajappanti nãgataü, paccuppanna yãpenti, tena vaõõo pasãdati - SN. I. 5.

¹⁹ AN. II. 36.

²⁰ bindu ca avisàrà ca gambhãro ca ninnadã ca - MN. II. 140. kalyãõavàco ... kalyãõavàkkaraõo poriyà vácàya - DN. I. 155.

²¹ sa vantadoso medhãvã sãdhurãpo ti vuccati - Dhp. 263.

²² càtuddiso - Sn. 42.

small. His life is uncluttered and simple and he is content with what comes his way.²³ His real nourishment is joy,²⁴ his real beverage is truth,²⁵ his real home is awareness.²⁶

6. Ordinary people are as noisy as babbling brooks while the enlightened one is as silent as the ocean depths.²⁷ He loves quiet and he speaks in praise of quiet.²⁸ By this I don't mean he never opens his mouth. He's only too happy to talk about the Dhamma to those interested in listening,²⁹ although he never preaches and he won't get involved in arguments or debates.³⁰ Also, because he doesn't talk beyond what he actually knows³¹ everything he says is vested with an authenticity that the 'experts' simply can't match.

7. The enlightened one's mind is not cluttered with thoughts nor is it inactive.³² When he needs thoughts he thinks and when he doesn't need them he lets them fall silent.³³ For him they are a tool not a problem. He still has memories, emotions and ideas but he is unmoved by them. To him they are just magical illusions.³⁴ He watches them as they arise, as they persist, as they pass away.³⁵ His mind is like the clear empty sky³⁶ - clouds drift through but it remains spacious, pristine and unchanged.

8. Although he is pure in all ways, the enlightened one doesn't think of himself as being better than, as good as or inferior to anyone else.³⁷ Others are just as they are and there is no need for judgements or comparisons. He's not for or against anyone or anything.³⁸ He no longer sees things in terms of good and evil, pure and impure, success and failure.³⁹ He has understood the world of duality⁴⁰ and gone beyond it. He has even gone beyond the idea of saüsàra and nirvàõa.⁴¹ Being beyond everything he is free from everything. No desires, no fears, no concepts, no worries.

²³ santussako ca subharo ca, appakicco ca sallahukavutti - Sn. 144.

²⁴ pātibhakkhà - Dhp. 200.

²⁵ dhammapāti - Dhp. 79.

²⁶ appamāde pamodanti, ariyānaü gocare ratà - Dhp. 22.

²⁷ tuõhā yanti mahodadhā - Sn. 720.

²⁸ appasaddakāmo ... appasaddassa vaõõavādā - MN. II. 2.

²⁹ yaü samaõo bahuü bhà sati, upetaü atthasayhitaü - Sn. 722.

³⁰ vadaÿ-ca jataü muni no upeti - Sn. 780.

³¹ yathà hi jàneyya tathà vadeyya - Sn 781.

³² alānacitto ca siyà, na càpi bahu cintaye - Sn. 717.

³³ MN. I. 122.

³⁴ màÿapamaÿ-ca viÿÿàõaü - S. III. 142.

³⁵ viditā vitakkā uppajjanti, viditā upaññhahanti, viditā abbatthaü gacchanti - S. V. 181.

³⁶ tad-àkāsasamaü cittaü - Thag. 1155.

³⁷ na ussesu vadate muni na samesu na omesu - Sn. 860.

³⁸ anurodhavirodhavippahāno - Sn. 362.

³⁹ puÿÿaÿ-ca pāpaÿ-ca bàhetvā - Dhp. 267; hitvā jayaparājayaü - Dhp. 201.

⁴⁰ dvayesu dhammesu - Dhp. 384.

⁴¹ yassa pāraü apāraü vā pārapāraü na vijjati - Dhp. 385; so bhikkhu jahāti orapāraü - Sn. 1. In the Pāli Tipiñaka the terms ora or apara (this shore) and para (the further shore) are usually used as synonyms for saüsàra and nirvàõa.

9. Not so long ago the enlightened one was as confused and as unhappy as everyone else. So how did he get the way he is? It was simple really. He stopped looking for the cause of all his pain outside himself and began to look within.⁴² As he looked he saw that the things he identified with and clung to; body, feelings, emotions, concepts, problems; all were not his.⁴³ And then he just let go. No longer entangled in the unreal he saw the real, the Unborn, the Unbecome, the Unmade, the Unconditioned.⁴⁴ Now he abides in that empty, signless freedom⁴⁵ and he's happy all the time.⁴⁶ Because of this it is rather difficult to categorise the enlightened one. Others try to pigeon-hole him by calling him a saint, an arahat or even sometimes a fool. But he laughs at these labels and refers to himself as 'a nobody'.⁴⁷ How can you label someone who has transcended all boundaries?⁴⁸

10. Because he has completed his task and has nothing more to do⁴⁹ the enlightened one spends most of his time sitting quietly minding his own business.⁵⁰ To the ordinary person there may seem to be a dull sameness about the enlightened one's life. ßGive me a bit of excitement, a bit of varietyû, they say. But of course when they get excitement or variety of the type they don't like - sickness, failure, rejection or death - then they fall into despair. That's when the enlightened one quietly steps forward to help and to heal. And because he's got plenty of time he can give himself fully to others. He touches everyone with his love.⁵¹

11. He is happy to bide his time like this until the end and when death finally comes he embraces it without fear and goes his way without regret.⁵² What happens to the enlightened one after death? Scholars have argued about that for centuries. But you can't find where the enlightened one has gone anymore than you can trace the path of a bird flying free in the sky.⁵³ In death as in life, the Trackless One leaves no tracks.⁵⁴

⁴² ràgo ca doso ca kutonidàna - Sn. 271; ajjhattam-evupasame - Sn. 919.

⁴³ sabbe dhammà anattà - Dhp. 279.

⁴⁴ ajàtaü abhàtaü akataü asaïkhataü - Ud. 73.

⁴⁵ suyyato animitto ca vimokho yassa gocaro - Dhp. 93.

⁴⁶ sabbadà ve sukhaü seti - SN. I. 212.

⁴⁷ akiycano - Sn. 455.

⁴⁸ sàmàtigo - Sn. 795.

⁴⁹ kataü kattabbakaü mayà - Thag. 330.

⁵⁰ àsānaü - Dhp. 386.

⁵¹ mettàya phasse tasathàvaràni - Sn. 967.

⁵² kàlaÿ-ca pañikaïkhàmi, sampajàno patissato - Thag. 196.

⁵³ àkàse va sakuntānaü padaü tassa durannayaü - Dhp. 93.

⁵⁴ apadaü kena padena nessatha - Dhp. 180.