

Enlightenment
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What is your enlightenment? It is the place you came from when you were born and it is the place you will return when you die. It is home. The particular wave that is you rises and falls for such a brief moment from that great ocean of essential nature, and that wave is entirely ocean, is home itself. As children, the taste of salt water still lingers in our mouths, but as we grow older the memory of ocean recedes, leaving a feeling of longing, of inexplicable exile, in its wake.

At the same time, having achieved a body, a human life, which is such a compelling thing, we don't want to give it up, even if it feels sometimes like the island of our banishment, and as we grow older we begin to dread the thought of losing the particularities of this consciousness, this skin, these pleasures, and even these struggles.

In the confusion which is the hallmark of human life — the simultaneous longing for home and fierce attachment to the circumstances of our exile — we can grow to doubt that home, that our enlightenment, is real. Or if we still believe in it, we doubt that we will ever find our way there again. *Others will make it, but not I.*

But here is the great gift of our practice : We cannot lose our true home, our enlightenment, because it is already right here. Nowhere else. All we have to do is remember. And here's the other great thing : If we do remember, we lose nothing of our human life — this consciousness, this skin, these pleasures, and even these struggles. In fact, we gain more life, in ways unimaginable in our exile.

Great Master Ma, one of the old Chinese teachers, said :

For countless eons no being has ever left the samadhi of dharma nature.
In the samadhi of dharma nature we wear clothes and eat food, talk
together and reply.

Keizan Jokin, the Japanese author of *Transmissions of the Light*, elaborated on this. He said :

This samadhi becomes earth, water, fire, and wind, and transforms into
mountains, rivers, grass, and trees. It also changes into skin, flesh,
bones, and marrow.

It's a beautiful idea, isn't it, that the universe is dharma nature's limitless deep meditation, and that none of us, no matter how hard we try, can ever fall out of it. We are always held in that samadhi — indeed, we and the mountains and rivers and the great earth, and the flesh on our bones — are that samadhi. And in our time, we go about talking together and replying, in Mazi's touching words, and washing the dishes with fourteen-billion-year-old hands.

If that's the real deal, what happens? Where do we get stuck? Fear comes up and blocks our way home again. It makes us forget. It pulls us away from the untamable life that's always swirling around and through us, and it pushes us into that purgatory where there is nothing but self-concern, nothing but our own small story, and we forget that that ocean, the samadhi of dharma nature, even exists.

So, what are we afraid of? That this small mind with its schemes and its strategies and its obsessions will, just for a moment, dissolve into something larger than itself? That, if only for an instant, it won't call the shots? That this body will expand to include pine sap and the skin of snow in the arroyo? Is this a problem? Why is it that we choose, over and over again, the chatter and the static of our usual minds, which make us so tired and so sad?

And yet, at the very same time we sit in meditation again, we come to retreat again, we make love again, we go out into the mountains again, and we think, *This time. This time.* We yearn to come home so much.

How strange being human is, how poignant, that we should fear and long for exactly the same thing — and that which we fear and long for is nothing other than our own true lives. When we fear our life, it's as though it's not really our own — it's something that's happened to us that's maybe a little dangerous to us. We have to protect ourselves from these wild impulses towards authenticity and wholeness. And when we long for our life, it's as though it somehow escaped us and we have to recapture it — that melancholy feeling that things haven't turned out as we expected, that we got off the track somewhere, and time is moving inexorably onward, but maybe we'll wake up one morning and it will all have been put right.

And yet here they are, our lives. Right here. Everything you need is right here. Whatever your circumstances, they are sufficient, no matter how you feel about them. Because you already carry eternity inside you.

So, love this enlightenment, which is already inside you, is already at work in your life.

Love whatever forms it comes in, in whatever ways. Listen. Pay attention. Hear what it has to say to you. Become aware of all the small ways it's acting in your life all the time. Those moments in meditation between breaths when the world opens up, or the moist air on your face as you watch the sun sink into the sea, or the wordless and complete understanding of the pain of someone you love.

Sometimes our enlightenment will ask us to love those things that seem impossible to love. When we feel that our hearts will break of it, but even then we cannot refuse. A woman weeps because she has finally realized to the bottom of her toes that the light really does shine everywhere, that it shines in the war criminal and the hatemonger, too, and for twenty-four hours she weeps for the sorrows of the world, which she feels completely, no separation, for the first time in her life. And then something turns, and the goodness of the world comes flooding in, and she laughs and weeps, but this time with joy. She says, "It was as if I had been looking at the dark side of the moon, and suddenly it turned and I was looking at the light side. But it was all moon." Sometimes your enlightenment will break your heart, that the moon's light might fill it.

Try this. Don't hold your enlightenment out in front of you like a thing, the object of your fear or your desire or your ambition. Don't despair that it's beyond your reach. Act as if it were already a part of you. Don't try to use it as an escape, as a way of solving all your problems without having to do the work of actually solving your problems. Enlightenment will not save you from having to live your life.

Do something else. Try loving your enlightenment. Attend to it. Feed it and nourish it. We're very good at finding out what the demons want and giving it to them : another crazy relationship, another drink, another morning of silent despair. Find out what your enlightenment eats and stock up on that.

Remembering your enlightenment, rediscovering it in your bones and sinews, will not necessarily make you happy or powerful or famous, but it will make you real. And you will know the rivers that run in your veins and the distant suns that wear your own face. All the tribes of the world will be kin to you, and the grasses will grow long on your belly and you will turn with the seasons.

Life calls to your life. It sparkles and flashes. Right here, right now. And there is no inside and no outside to this sparkling and this flashing. No edges, no limits, nothing to defend,

nothing to preserve — just the great shining living of it.

The salty radiance is still on your tongue — all you have to do is swallow. Let it pour down your throat and into your heart. Open your eyes and really see. All the tribes of the world are waiting for you.