
ENLIGHTENMENT: PRESENCE, AWARENESS & ORDINARY SACREDNESS

Question:

A person who Chops Wood and Carries Water for a living -
what do they do after enlightenment?



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1. Opening Exercise: The Difference Between Doing and Being Present

Exercise:

A. Close your eyes. For the next 30 seconds, think about something you need to do after this call, tomorrow, or sometime this week.

When finished: While you were thinking, what sounds did you notice around you?

B. Now, close your eyes again. This time, don't think about anything. Simply listen. Notice whatever is here—the sounds closest to you, the sounds farther away, your breath, the space around you."

When finished: What did you notice this time?

Result: The sounds were there both times. Nothing outside of you changed. The difference was your awareness."

"This is one of the great insights of spiritual traditions: life is constantly offering itself to us, but we often aren't fully present to receive it."

2. Seeing the Sacred in the Everyday

A. A Buddha Statue and a box of pasta.

Question: Which of these is the more spiritual item?



Answer: Many of us would probably say the Buddha. It represents spirituality, wisdom, awakening, and enlightenment."

But what about the pasta? Is this less sacred?

"If **everything** comes from **Source**, then how could one thing be more connected to Source than another?"

The Buddha statue is not sacred because of what it is made of. It is sacred because of what it represents—and because of the **awareness** we bring to it.

But this pasta is also part of creation. It too comes from Source. The difference is not in the object. The difference is in our awareness and our relationship to it.

"When we are unconscious, we divide life into sacred and ordinary. When we awaken, we begin to recognize that the sacred is present in all things."

3. What Is Enlightenment?

Question: When you hear the word enlightenment, what comes to mind?

Enlightenment is often imagined as something extraordinary—a state reached by only a few highly evolved spiritual beings. Yet across wisdom traditions, there are many different descriptions that point toward a similar realization."

4. Different Perspectives on Enlightenment

Although different traditions use different language, they each describe a movement from a limited way of experiencing life into a deeper recognition of reality.

Buddhism

Enlightenment is freedom from suffering through awakening from attachment, craving, and the mistaken ways we perceive reality.

Zen Buddhism

Enlightenment is awakening to our true nature through direct presence and awareness of reality as it is.

Mystical Traditions

Enlightenment is the experience of connection and union with the Divine, recognizing our relationship with a greater Source.

Modern Spiritual Teachings

Enlightenment is awakening from unconscious patterns and becoming fully present to life as it is unfolding.

5. What All These Teachings Have in Common

Although the language is different, the common thread is **profound**.

Across these traditions, enlightenment points to the same fundamental shift:

1 - Moving from unconsciousness into awareness

We begin to see beyond the automatic thoughts, patterns, and conditioning that keep us from fully experiencing life.

2 - Moving from separation into connection

We recognize that we are not isolated from life, but deeply connected to something greater—something many traditions call Source, Divine, consciousness, or our true nature.

3. Moving from seeing life through filters into experiencing reality directly

As awareness deepens, we become more present to what is actually here, rather than living primarily through memories, expectations, judgments, and stories.

4. Awakening to the sacredness of all life

We begin to recognize that the sacred is not separate from the ordinary. It is present within every moment, every experience, and all of creation.

6. What Enlightenment Is NOT

Enlightenment is not:

- A permanent state of happiness where nothing difficult ever happens.
- Never feeling sadness, anger, or grief.
- Escaping ordinary life.
- Having peak mystical experiences or visions.
- Becoming perfect.
- Becoming someone special or superior.
- Having all the answers.
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Those experiences may occur, but they are not enlightenment.

Enlightenment is not about adding something to ourselves. It is about awakening to what is already present.

7. Presence and Awareness: The Path to Enlightenment

The present moment is where life (all of sacred life) is actually happening.

The past exists as memory.

The future exists as imagination.

But this moment—the one happening right now—is where awareness meets reality.

When we are fully present, we step out of the constant pull of thought and become available to experience life directly.

Presence allows us to see more clearly. Awareness allows us to recognize what is here. Together, they open the doorway to awakening.

****More on the fundamental teachings of Zen below (a juicy ready)**

8. The Sacred IS the Ordinary

The sacred is not separate from the ordinary.

If everything comes from Source, then nothing is outside of Source.

The sacred is not only found in extraordinary moments or profound spiritual experiences.

It is found:

- In a conversation.
- In a walk outside.
- In preparing a meal.
- In listening deeply.
- In a single breath.
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The ordinary becomes sacred when **we are present enough** to recognize what has always been there.

When you are fully present in the moment – things change from an [energetic frequency](#). You feel it. Others feel it. The results change.

9. LISTEN TO THE RECORDING – Striking the Temple Bell Story

This story reveals one of Zen Buddhism's most fundamental teachings.

More on it below to contemplate after the story.

10. Closing Reflection

Enlightenment is not about reaching some distant state in the future."
Enlightenment is the awakening to what is already here."

The present moment – held with sacredness is not merely where enlightenment happens—"It is where enlightenment is found."

Enlightenment is the awakening of awareness that allows us to experience reality more fully, recognize our connection to Source, and discover the sacred within every moment.

Practice #6 – Be in FULL presence for 1 minute a day

Model this after the Temple Bell Story.

BE in this practice while engaged in something you do every day. Brushing your teeth, drinking your water, washing dishes, etc.

For ONE MINUTE – tune in **fully** to what you are doing. No distractions or other thoughts. Treat it like a moving meditation. Fully present.

le: **Tooth brushing:** What does this toothpaste taste like? How do the bristles feel on my gums?

le: **Drinking water:** What does this water taste like? What is the temperature? How does it feel in my mouth?

If you find your mind drifting – just gently bring yourself back to the moment.

Zen Buddhism Fundamental Teaching: Presence and Awakening



This Temple Bell story reveals one of Zen Buddhism's most fundamental teachings about the nature of **presence** and **awakening**. The Buddha understood that most human suffering comes from our inability to be fully present with our **actual** experience.

Instead of living our lives directly, we live in our **thoughts about** our lives, constantly pulled away from the richness of the present moment by mental commentary, planning, worry and distraction.

In Zen practice, we learn that presence is both the **path** and the **destination**. When we bring complete **attention** to whatever we are doing, even the most **ordinary** activities become **opportunities** for peace, insight and connection.

Washing dishes with full **attention** becomes a **meditation**. Walking down a familiar street with complete presence reveals details and beauty that **distracted** awareness never notices.

The Buddha taught that **mindfulness** or **present moment awareness** is the **foundation** of all spiritual development. Without the ability to be fully present with our experience, we cannot develop genuine wisdom about the nature of mind and reality.

We cannot cultivate **authentic compassion** because we are not truly present with other people's suffering.

We cannot find **lasting peace** because we are always mentally **somewhere else**, chasing after conditions that we imagine will finally make us happy.

But when we learn to be fully present, we discover that **each moment** contains everything we have been **seeking**.

The **peace** we thought we would find in future **accomplishments** is available **right now** in **whole-hearted engagement** with present activities.

The satisfaction we **imagined** would come from external achievements is actually found in the **quality of attention we bring to whatever we are doing**.

This does not mean that goals and planning become unimportant, but that they are held lightly rather than becoming obsessions that steal our **attention** from **present experience**.

