

Are You Qualified for Enlightenment?

The only qualification to seek enlightenment is a human birth. However, out of a million seekers only one or two realize who they are. In this democratic age it seems a gross injustice that the Universal Declaration of Human rights ignores the right to enlightenment and focuses so narrowly on political fights. Shouldn't the Congress of Sages issue a proclamation declaring inner freedom an inalienable right, empower world governments to grant it to all citizens and establish a judiciary to seek redress when governments fail to deliver?

The sense of entitlement that characterizes our democratic era has understandably affected the modern spiritual world. Seeking has become a mass movement. Tens of thousands, perhaps more, spend inordinate amounts to have their brains reversed by the powerful energy of India's Kalki avatar. Brain reversal is touted as enlightenment and qualifies one to sit in the Golden Temple with forty four thousand other enlightened souls on the Omega Point in 2012 and save the human race from disaster. A clever 'enlightened master' can pick up a king's ransom from a month long enlightenment 'intensive' that involves nothing more than 'sitting in silence', a practice supposedly meant to induce enlightenment. Millions attend Oprah's 'webinar' to experience the 'power of now' teachings of the West's latest guru du jour. If anyone anywhere can walk into a fast food joint for a cheap quick lunch why shouldn't he or she be able to attend a Neo-Advaita satsang and purchase Nirvana for the price of a Big Mac?

In a world overrun by billions of lost souls the statement by an Eighth Century sage that a human birth is difficult to obtain seems a quaint relic from a bygone age. The enlightenment qualifications he lists seem hopelessly naïve: good social position, a religious mentality, scriptural knowledge, 'well earned merits of thousands of past lives', discrimination between the real and the apparent, the grace of God

in the form of longing for freedom, and an association with a perfected sage...among others.

If enlightenment is merely an experience of freedom even psychotics and criminals qualify. Much of what is defined as psychosis in the West is an individual's uninformed and clumsy reaction to mystic experiences. Sinners regularly 'see the light' and became saints. But enlightenment is not sainthood. It is the hard and fast knowledge that there is only one self and that the self, awareness, is everything that is - and that I am it. To get that knowledge the individual needs much more than a handful of non-dual epiphanies.

A Mature Human Being

He or she needs to be a healthy integrated human being. Unfortunately Western psychology does not have a well considered definition of a healthy mind. It concentrates almost exclusively on obviously unhealthy human characteristics and - to show its almost complete lack of understanding of the nature of the mind - attempts to fix psychological problems with chemistry. The failure of psychology to adequately treat the dysfunctional mind has driven many into the spiritual world where they fare no better.

Spirituality is intended for healthy integrated minds that consciously relate their suffering to a lack of understanding about the nature of reality, not to ego problems picked up in childhood and compounded by various missteps along the way. Vedanta investigates desire and values, for example, topics that only rational minds are capable of understanding. Its whole psychological program involves managing the likes and dislikes that compromise the ability of the mind to inquire into the nature of reality. It is not a discipline meant to make the world work for the ego. It is a means that neutralizes the ego's suffering by giving it non-dual vision. Whether one's worldly goals have been achieved or not, a mature person has studied life carefully enough to know that seeking happiness in samsara is pointless.

The qualities listed below are not ideals to be lived up to. Trying to live up to an abstract ideal only creates conflict and becomes another subjective problem that needs to be overcome before inquiry can bear fruit. In fact all these qualities exist in some measure in every mind that is attracted to the spiritual option. Understanding them makes it easy pinpoint areas that need work to prepare the mind for inquiry.

An Open Mind

What is a healthy qualified mind? It is an open mind, one willing to see things differently, one willing to question its assumptions. In the spiritual world this kind of mind is said to be 'awakened.' An awakened mind is not an enlightened mind, however, because enlightenment is the hard and fast knowledge 'I am awareness'. Awareness is not awake because awareness never slept. So what is 'awakening?' It is the experience induced realization by an ego that there is something more to reality than meets the eye. It is based on an experience of the reflection of non-dual awareness in a mind that is temporarily 'open' to something beyond its own limited means of knowledge. Invariably, the experience ends and the mind 'closes', meaning it retains a memory of the experience and this memory becomes the knowledge "I am enlightened" which is merely indirect self knowledge. The awakened mind almost never remains open and inquiring because it is not a special mind at all. It is just the stubborn everyday mind dressed up in mystic clothing. It is so eager to claim enlightenment that it ceases to inquire once it thinks it has 'got it'. If it really wants enlightenment it needs to stay open and inquiring so that it can convert its indirect experiential knowledge into direct immediate knowledge.

To say 'I am enlightened' is to say that enlightenment is an experience the ego has gained. This is all quite wonderful except for one small detail: it leaves duality intact. The knowledge 'I am the light' backed by the understanding that the 'I' is limitless awareness and that experience is limitless awareness - but limitless awareness is not experience - is enlightenment, assuming that henceforth the knowledge neutralizes the remaining binding fears and desires. The

enlightenment that leaves the experiencer and its craving for experience in tact is no enlightenment because enlightenment is freedom from experience.

This is not to say that the mind goes into some kind of blank state and quits experiencing. On the contrary experience continues as before. But the conscious being knows that experience henceforth is incapable of modifying the self. If experience can't change me why would I seek it? An open mind remains open irrespective of what it experiences because it is awareness without judgments and conclusions. It simply understands what happens as it is and does not feel the need to make ego sense out of it. It can draw conclusions and make decisions but it is not compelled to do so.

An open mind is open to the idea that its interpretation of experience – its experienced based story of who it is and what life is all about - is not necessarily the only way it can see itself and is therefore qualified to expose itself to the teachings of Vedanta. It is the kind of mind that can learn from the experience of others. Most people believe that they are very unique and that if they have a problem there is a special solution only for them. They don't realize that there is basically only one person and this person has universal problems for which workable solutions have been devised centuries ago. So even if they are told by the wise how to solve their problem they will reject the advice and keep experimenting on their own until such time as they give up in despair and ask for help.

A Reasonable Discriminating Mind

A healthy mature mind is a reasonable mind, one not inclined to superstition, opinion and belief. This is particularly important in the spiritual world where the most outrageous and irrational beliefs are regularly passed off as truth. The Buddha is reported to have said, "Believe nothing you have read or anything you have heard, even if I have said it, unless it corresponds to common sense and reason". Enlightenment is not a mystery. The self is not hidden away behind the mind as conventional wisdom has it. However, when something is not immediately available for perception it is possible to speculate

and fantasize. The self is self evident, simple and obvious if you have a proper means of knowledge to investigate it. It does not contradict perception and inference. It makes perfect sense.

Life is never what it seems to be. A healthy discriminating mind is one that intelligently avoids the petty dramas, conflicts and indulgences of daily life. To the discriminating, life is a fantasy, a tragicomedy to be acted to the hilt, no doubt, but of no lasting importance. "It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." A discriminating mind sees its likes and dislikes, memories, dreams, fears and desires for the transitory epiphenomena they are. A discriminating mind does not avoid action – action is unavoidable – but it knows that action will not produce lasting freedom and therefore avoids pursuits that will only make it feel momentarily free, preferring instead to inquire into the basis of its pursuits.

A discriminating mind understands that life is a zero sum game because it sees the laws of duality in action. It understands clearly that every gain entails a loss and every loss entails a gain. Because it understands the frustrating nature of samsara unreasonable expectations will not influence its decisions.

The Vedantic definition of discrimination is 'the settled conviction that the self alone is real and that phenomena are not real'. Reality, awareness, is what exists in the past, present and future, before the past and after the future. It exists in and beyond the waking, dream, and deep sleep states of consciousness. Everything else – which is everything experienced – is unreal or 'not-self'.

Life, experience, passes through you; you do not pass through life. This knowledge is the basis of self inquiry. Liberation is discrimination, the knowledge that separates the real from the apparent. One need do nothing more than know the difference between the real and the apparent to free oneself of attachment to the apparent. Until discrimination is perfect the ego will get entangled in appearances and suffer.

Objects do not stand alone. They depend on the self but the self does not depend on them. 'Unreal' does not mean that objects are not experienced but that they depend on the subject. Reality, the self, the subject, stands alone. A rainbow, for example, exists but is not real because it relies on a conspiracy between the eyes and certain physical conditions. When the conditions that brought it into being dissolve – as they do - it ceases to exist.

The practice of discrimination – rejecting the unreal as 'not-self' – is the one sure way out of samsara assuming it is supported by the following qualities.

An Objective Dispassionate Mind

A healthy mind is an objective dispassionate mind, one willing to abandon sense indulgences, emotional passions and intellectual arguments for the sake of peace. Inquiry only works in a peaceful mind. Born of the observation of the defects inherent in samsara it permits the individual to walk the tightrope between indulgence and abstinence. When indulgence causes attachment, it drops the object. When denial causes cravings that can't be renounced, it judiciously indulges until attachment develops. Both unfettered indulgence and fanatical denial produce turbulence and hinder inquiry. A dispassionate mind is a 'been there done that' mind that enjoys an ironic, humorous ho-hum indifference toward itself and the world. Usually this qualification is listed after discrimination because dispassion happens naturally when you understand that the freedoms available in samsara are limited.

Successful self inquiry depends on many factors, not the least of which is a clear still mind. There are two basic sources of agitation that hinder inquiry: desire for or fear of a particular object and the depressed or angry reaction of the mind to unwanted results. It is impossible to control your desires. They come from an unconscious source and enter the door of your conscious mind without your permission. The only control you have is how to relate to them. An immature person does not consider whether or not acting out a

desire is desirable. He or she simply takes the desire or fear as a command and sets out to either pursue or avoid the relevant object.

A Disciplined Mind

A mature mind is a disciplined mind, not a controlling mind. There is a notion that the thoughts need to be controlled or eliminated for enlightenment. Just as you can't directly control your desires you can't directly control your thoughts. Control comes through observation. A disciplined mind is an observing mind. Thoughts are value neutral but the stuff you add to the thoughts, the judgments and opinions you have about the content of your mind, are a problem. If you like somebody and ask them out on a date and they reject your invitation you feel hurt. There was no hurt involved in the rejection; it was simply what reality had to offer at the time. But because it was not the result you wanted you added the hurt. If you are not observant you will blame the person or feel bad about yourself and miss an opportunity to discover the source of the pain. This will set you up to experience the pain again. Had you traced the hurt back to its source and discovered that it was connected to your identification with your desires you would have lessened the likelihood of hurting yourself the next time. To strip your additions from the thoughts and see them as they are is the purpose of disciplined observation. A mind freed of its projections is capable of self inquiry.

Observation is not only useful for removing projections but for analysis of the content of your thoughts. What you think about yourself and the world represents your knowledge or ignorance. Because the purpose of self inquiry is the removal of ignorance, including ignorance masquerading as knowledge, it is important to know what you actually do think and why you think what you think. A person caught up in samsara is more or less one with his or her thoughts. There is no separation. How can such a person evaluate his or her thinking with reference to the truth if the thoughts are not known?

Mental discipline implies restraint with reference to one's desires and fears. It is not always wise to act on every desire, even if it is possible. Very rich and powerful people often destroy their lives because they have the wherewithal to satisfy all their desires, no matter how frivolous or inappropriate. To gain the kind of mind that is capable of self realization it is important to develop the habit of evaluating your desires with reference to your priorities. I want to lose weight and my neighbor brings over a big cheesecake. Desire arises and I want to eat it. Is it appropriate to satisfy this desire? Giving up gratuitous desires as they arise with reference to the goal of achieving a quiet mind is a necessary qualification for self realization. If you do not go with the desires eventually they will no longer disturb you.

Mental discipline also implies control of the senses. If you find that certain impulses cannot be released at the mental level through observation and evaluation with reference to your priorities, the last line of defense is at the sense organ level. For example, you have a distinct dislike of someone in your office. Every time you are in this person's presence you have a big urge to let them know how you feel. As long as the feeling stays in your mind you are OK karmawise. But as soon as the negative energy is released into the field you have no control of the consequences. If you are particularly egoistic and feel that you need to be 'honest' with the person...as if they really cared what you thought and your honesty was anything other than cruelty...and you unload your negative feelings on them in an unguarded moment you may end up with a black eye or worse. Perhaps he or she is tight with the boss and bad mouths you to him. A month later you are out of a job. If you are out of a job you can't pay the mortgage. The bank forecloses and your wife takes up with the rich guy down the block whose wife died a few months back. Your kids hate you for messing up their lives. If you thought your mind was unhappy before this all happened think of how it is going to feel once it happens. One's whole life can unravel because of a very small incident. Karma has no sympathy. It doesn't care what you like and dislike. Think what you like but it is wise to be very aware of what you do.

Simply refusing to give in to the urge to project the mind into objects is the negative half of mental discipline. The positive half is turning the attention back on yourself. Projections like anger, blame, and criticism are never about the object. Just as in a dream all the co-workers in your dream office are your own dream mind, in non-dual reality all the 'others' are actually your self. So when you are angry, for example, you are angry with yourself for some reason you do not understand. So the emotion needs to be converted into self inquiry. Ask why you are angry, for example, with the object and if it is really true that the object is the problem. Ask why it matters that so and so is a jerk. In fact you have no control of the anger. Just try to get angry when you are happy and see if it is possible. Anger comes from an unconscious reservoir of unexamined beliefs and opinions. The object just triggers something that is already in you. Once you have owned the anger it is necessary to resolve it through continued inquiry into its source. The source of negative emotion is always the belief that you are small, separate, inadequate and incomplete. Ask yourself if this is true with reference to self knowledge. It never is. The true you is never angry. Let the mind rest in this knowledge and the anger will disappear. Positive projections on objects should also be analyzed and traced back to the self. In this way positive and negative projections are resolved and the mind becomes objective and non-judgmental. When the mind has been cleared of most of its binding projections it reflects awareness faithfully and indirect experiential access to the self is gained. You may think that experience of the self is direct knowledge but it isn't. A mind that is 'aware of awareness' is still in duality. This is not enlightenment but it is a very important step because now there is an experiential verification that the self exists. It is not the end because this indirect experiential knowledge needs to be converted to the direct knowledge. Just as it is necessary to own your projections to resolve them it is necessary to own awareness as you to resolve self ignorance.

A prepared qualified mind is one that constantly concentrates on the self and rejects all projections as 'not-self.'

Minding Your Own Business

Good fences make good neighbors. A mature qualified mind has a clear sense of its relationship to other minds. Need is a fact of life. If you don't see that your needs are met in accordance with dharma your mind will be agitated. Many people, particularly women, however, have been conditioned to take care of other's needs before they take care of their own. No particular virtue accrues for taking care of other's needs although much is made of it by society and religion. Dharma is blind to differences. In fact it can hinder the growth of others if it keeps them from developing self reliance. If you are married and have children you have a duty to see to it that your obligations are fulfilled, up to a point. If you have adult children living in your home, eating your food and not paying rent you have boundary issues and need to change the way you see yourself with reference to others. To gain self realization you need to respond appropriately to whatever life brings. Appropriate response to life is called your dharma, your duty to yourself. If your mind is continually paying attention to the needs of others how will you evolve? Ignoring your own dharma poisons the mind with resentment. A resentful mind is not qualified for self knowledge.

A Patient Forbearing Mind

A mature mind is a patient forbearing mind. Many times there are unpleasant and relatively intractable situations that will not resolve themselves immediately. Your mother in law comes to visit and overstays her welcome. Your wife is particularly attached to her and if you irritate the mother in law you will have problems with your wife which can morph into further problems. So you patiently endure the situation until she goes away. A forbearing mind is endowed with the capacity to tolerate sufferings and disappointments without struggling for redress or revenge. A mind that strives to right wrongs is constantly agitated. A mind that feels deprived or victimized is not qualified for self inquiry.

A Balanced Mind

A mature mind is a balanced mind. The mind is the instrument of self inquiry. If the qualifications listed so far are present the mind will

become quiet and able to control the reaction to stimuli pouring into it from the senses and direct attention to the self. A quiet mind purifies quickly because it is able to apply self knowledge to unhelpful thoughts, beliefs and opinions. Thoughts not in harmony with the nature of reality create emotional turmoil. Equanimity is the peaceful state that ensues when the mind meditates consistently on the self and detaches itself over and over from sense stimuli, feeling and thought as a result of a continuous examination of their defects.

A Motivated Mind

A mature mind is a motivated mind. Everyone wants to be free but among those who avail themselves of the spiritual option not everyone has a burning desire for freedom. Only a burning desire for liberation will generate the perseverance and determination required to overcome the surfeit of obstacles encountered on the path.

In fact liberation is usually only one of several priorities for seekers. Most are satisfied with the idea of belonging to a community of like-minded souls and are realistic about their chances for enlightenment. One needn't be the sharpest knife in the drawer to see that of tens of thousands of seekers only one or two ever realizes limitlessness. The problem is further compounded by the fact that most of those claiming enlightenment are so obviously controlled by their desires for love, fame, wealth, and power that enlightenment has lost its true meaning. Why subject myself to the disciplines of Yoga or Vedanta to get what I want in the world? Why not just pursue those ends directly? And in fact modern seekers are seekers because they are burdened samsaric concerns: security, pleasure (particularly pleasure) and to some degree virtue. Finally, the teachers, almost without exception, tout experiential enlightenment because it does not require qualifications. Were it made known what enlightenment actually takes, the spiritual world would shrink to the size of a pea overnight and the plethora of new agey advaitic gurus would have to seek an honest means of support.

Furthermore, when spirituality becomes a middle class phenomenon it takes on middle class characteristics. A middle class person is middling in his or her approach to life. He or she is afraid to test the limits and plumb the depths. Middle class life is essentially a dharmic life; the rules are followed and merit accrues. Merit is awarded with security and a certain degree of comfort. Life may not be terribly fulfilling but the suffering is not terribly painful either so the mind will not make the sacrifices that the pursuit of absolute freedom requires.

Enlightenment, the realization that I am eternally free, is the culmination of human evolution. Everything is working against it. The one who pursues it with single pointed devotion is a salmon swimming upstream in the powerful river of life. The true seeker is someone who has actually lived to the fullest, tested every limit, and realized without a shadow of a doubt that there is nothing in samsara that can satisfy the intense craving of the heart for freedom. The desire for freedom of one who takes to spirituality out of hurt, disappointment, the desire for community or the romance of an alternative lifestyle will always be insufficient.

When you near the end of your evolutionary journey a raging desire to be free sweeps over you. This burning desire, which is invariably uninformed – if you knew who you were you wouldn't desire to be free – almost invariably formulates itself as a desire for experiential freedom. It will generate many intense and amazing epiphanies but it needs to be converted into a desire for knowledge. Only self knowledge will extinguish it. And although you will not realize freedom without it, it needs to be accompanied in some measure by the qualities enumerated in this chapter.

A Believing Mind

A mature mind is a believing mind. Knowledge requires a means and since perception and inference can't reveal awareness, scripture and a teacher are required. Inference and perception are operated by the ego but the ego can't operate scripture. Scripture needs to be operated by a skilled teacher. In fact the ego needs to be

temporarily suspended for self knowledge to take place. This suspension is accomplished by faith in the teaching. Up to this point all your faith was placed on your ego and now it is transferred to the teaching and the teacher. The teaching needs to bypass the ego because if the ego suspects that it is going to be canceled, it won't become absorbed in the teaching. When the teaching works you either discover that the ego, depending on your definition of ego, is like a shadow, wholly dependent on the object that casts it and/or you realize that it is now an enlightened ego because it sees no difference. It can now stand alone with the self as the self.

Vedanta requires faith but not blind faith. If it did there would be no need for an open mind, discrimination, dispassion, etc. It is faith pending the result of scripture-guided inquiry. You understand that if you could set yourself free you would have done so long ago and you temporarily agree that self knowledge can do the trick. So you check your ego at the door and let the teacher work the teachings on you. If they reveal the self you no longer need to believe because you know.

A Devoted Mind

A mature mind is a devoted mind. Devotion is the patient willingness to apply oneself whole heartedly to the task at hand. You may be qualified in full measure and have circumstances conducive to liberation – faith in the teacher and the scripture - but without devotion you will not see the inquiry – which may take years owing to the difficulty of dissolving the persistent dualistic orientation of the mind – through to the end.

Finally, a mature seeker is a self-confident, self reliant person, some who has taken life's ups and downs in stride and still has an open inquiring mind. The daunting list of qualifications enumerated above is enough to discourage even the most committed seeker. Unfortunately, this only one third of the qualifications story.

The Teacher

It is remarkable that people who would not think twice about investing years studying with top professionals in their chosen fields will shun spiritual teachers and imagine they can get enlightened by following the instructions contained on a ten-dollar New Age CD. In an age of instant gratification, sound bites and fast food, it is not surprising that we have come to believe that a few minutes of deep breathing, concentrating on the space between the eyebrows, parroting a mantra, or sashaying through a visualization fantasy will produce transcendence.

On the other hand, because spirituality is a totally unregulated field, setting standards by which techniques, teachings and teachers can be objectively evaluated, is impossible. So the situation is potentially dangerous...a further advertisement for a mature mind.

A seeker needs to be very clear about his or her motivations because the teacher you get depends on your motivations. The post World War II prosperity that led to the breakdown of the family has resulted in several generations of love starved seekers. The 'Hugging Saint' from India regularly hugs thousands a day, a sad commentary on the emotional health of the planet. If the desire for love is a strong motivation for seeking you need to be especially careful because needy people rarely enjoy good discrimination. It is important to love and respect your teacher but for the right reasons. If you are unaware of your true motivation you will end up enlightenment disappointed and love disappointed too.

You would be surprised to know how many modern gurus, particularly Western gurus catering to Western seekers, gravitate to gurudom, not out of a high minded dispassionate need to help but out of their own insatiable need for love and respect. If you find yourself attached to a teacher and the teacher attached to you, beware. A proper teacher will not accept you if you are emotionally insecure. Of course anyone seeking anything has a certain degree of emotional insecurity but a proper teacher will help you convert emotional yearnings into devotion for the truth. Liberation is freedom from attachment to objects, particularly people. Unfortunately, you usually only discover a teacher's real motivations

when you decide to move on. If the teacher promises growth or uses guilt to get you to stay or abuses you with threats of spiritual disaster when it is clear that you are committed to leaving you have chosen an unenlightened teacher.

Suspicion is another psychological force operating in many seekers. It is the mirror opposite of emotional neediness born of neglect but stems from the same source. Suspicious people prefer to go it alone. They have suffered abuse, real or imagined, at the hands of parents and others and often have a chip on the shoulder. This person knows that everyone has an agenda and is eager to discover it. But it is not always easy to figure out a teacher's real agenda because many teachers are self-deluded, their true motivations hidden behind a screen of pious concern for others or a flashy energy awakening practice. They make you feel good and when you are hooked they dig in their claws.

This kind of seeker sits at the back of the satsang and looks for flaws in the teacher and the teaching, unlike the love starved emotional types who sit up front sucking up the energy as if it was a drug. The solution that often evolves for them is to love a dead guru, usually one of the 'greats' of yesteryear. This approach is better than falling into the clutches of an unpurified living guru but it is ultimately unfulfilling because it takes a living teacher to wield the means of knowledge and to challenge you one on one. Of course the way around this argument is to imagine that the dead guru is sending you instructions from beyond the grave. Ex parte instructions are unreliable because they suspiciously tend to coincide with the seeker's desires, beliefs and opinions which results in no growth. Loving an ideal has its joys but it can also be a lonely and unfulfilling life. A radiantly enlightened person can sit at the same table with such a seeker and go unrecognized.

Seekers should view all teachers, gurus, meditation masters and their teachings, un sentimentally. Claims of spiritual attainment should be taken with a grain of salt. The more a guru pumps himself up or allows others to praise him the more suspicious you should be. The most glaring example of this kind of guru is the now deceased Adi Da

aka Da Free John aka Da Avabhasa Ruchira Buddha Avatar aka etc. etc. The longer the beard, the more extravagant the name, the slower the speech, the more grandiose the claims of enlightenment, the more your suspicions should be aroused. Enlightenment does not need advertisement. When you have assimilated life's lessons and sincerely long for liberation, the self will manifest a respectable purified teacher for you.

Someone who builds an identity on the discovery of the self suffers enlightenment sickness, not enlightenment. Suspending critical faculties and dredging a wide moat of superstitious love and respect between the seeker and the teacher, though passing for devotion in certain circles, is certain to nullify the benefits conferred by association with a realized soul.

The potential for abuse is greatest when the teacher touts the experiential view of enlightenment, particularly the no ego, no thought notion. If thinking is a problem in general, critical thought is definitely a problem because it might be directed at the guru. When the teachings emphasize surrender to the guru another red flag should go up. When enlightenment is presented as something you don't already have the alarms bells should ring loudly.

There are a million ways to con a person who doesn't know who they are. One of the best is that you will only get enlightened when your karma is gone. The guru's job is to eat your karma. Therefore you need a hungry guru. The joke is that enlightenment is self realization. Karma doesn't stand in the way of the self at all. Before you have karma you are the self. All that is necessary is that the guru point out what your self is. Even if your karma had to be eaten nobody else could eat it because you made it and it stands in your account. The guru can only eat the karma standing in his or her account, which will be considerable if he or she is promoting this silly notion of enlightenment.

The potential for abuse declines abruptly with Vedanta because Vedanta does not promise you something that you don't already have and there is a proven means of knowledge that allows you to

check the words of the teacher for authenticity. And the surrender that is encouraged is a conditional surrender to the teacher and the teaching, pending the outcome of your own investigation. Furthermore, the surrender to the teacher is surrender to the teachings, not advice about what to do with your life. Vedanta is not going to fix your life. If your life is a mess it is because you are a mess. Vedanta makes it clear who you are and who you aren't. When the teaching is assimilated life takes care of itself. The teacher's authority does not rest solely on his personal experience but on how closely his teachings are aligned with scripture. Additionally, Vedanta's core teaching is discrimination - which puts you in the driver's seat. In fact, the teacher is the devotee of the student. He or she cannot teach unless you ask for knowledge so you have equal power in this relationship.

People who have not developed self awareness are invariably prisoners of their conditioning. The most fundamental relationship imprint is parent/ child, a completely unbalanced relationship. The parent has all the power, authority, experience and knowledge and the child has none. As one ages and gains experience and knowledge the gap between the parent and the child should narrow. When parity is achieved the child is a mature adult. When the parent's faculties decline the roles are reversed and the child becomes the parent of the parent. Until you become your parent's equal you are not properly mature, no matter what your age.

Suffering has no respect. It visits young and old alike and everyone in between. So when you start to consciously seek you may very well still be psychologically immature. You may not have resolved the issues that should have been resolved in your primary relationship with your parents. If you meet an authority figure like a spiritual 'master' you will unconsciously assume the role of a child or a slave. You will look up to the teacher; you will submit to his or her authority without question. You will quickly become dependent. This is a very dangerous situation because a teacher is not your parent. He or she is meant to make you independent by showing you who you are. If a teacher has not become fully mature – and very few have - and you turn your life over to him or her you are asking for trouble because

you are putting the fox in charge of the chicken coop. He or she will be more than happy to be your parent because the power you invest in him or her will make it easier to achieve his or her personal agenda. This unbalanced duality between the child and the parent is the model for most religious devotion and accounts for the fact that religion does not teach freedom through identity with God.

In any case you don't choose to become a Vedanta teacher. Your lineage empowers you if you have the natural inclination to teach and you have picked up the method of teaching. You cannot do this unless you have surrendered to the teachings, applied them to your own mind and been set free by them. Freedom means freedom from your conditioning. Freedom means that you have nothing to work out to become satisfied. It means that you have no agenda, including saving the world. Much misery is inflicted on the world in the name of saving it. So the style of teaching – which is modeled in the ancient texts, particularly the Bhagavad Gita - is not parent/child or master/slave. It is friendship. Friendship is a much more spiritual archetype because an equal relationship obtains between friends. A friend may know more than you but he or she does not make you feel as if he or she is doing you a big favor by disclosing it. He or she happily shares, no strings attached.

The Zen Master Dogzen is reputed to have said, "Next to dharma enlightenment is the most important thing in the world." When you focus exclusively on how you feel you lose sight of the big picture. If a teacher/ guru can keep you high on 'the energy' or distract you with a heavy load of service work you will not ask questions. If you're all wrapped up in your practice the teacher can pursue his or her agenda away from prying eyes. Trust is good, knowledge is better. It is up to the seeker to find out what goes on behind the scenes, if anything. You can only blame yourself when you discover that you or others are being exploited in some way.

To avoid exploitation and disappointment you must have a refined appreciation of dharma. Dharma is an intangible, something that is built into the mind by the self. A person who consciously appreciates dharma and follows it impeccably has a charismatic aura of sanctity,

purity and grace. He or she feels clean and straightforward. His or her life is remarkable for its absence of conflict. He or she has no agenda.

A teacher that immediately sets out to put you to work in his or her service – ‘for your enlightenment’ - has an agenda. Once it is known that you are compliant, demands for money, sexual favors, etc. follow. The most common and unimaginative agenda, one that you can almost never resist, is the idea that you are helping others to enlightenment by helping the teacher get what he or she wants, which is inevitably more people to enlighten. Ask yourself why the teacher wants you to help him get more people to enlighten when he has you to enlighten. Invariably you will be told that you are not ‘ready’ which will be true if find yourself dealing with such a teacher. Find out how the teacher supports his or herself. See the lifestyle. It is five star hotels, fancy cars and expensive jewelry? Bhagavan Rajneesh, who rechristened himself Osho to wiggle out of his bad karma, had ninety three Rolls Royces. How many are necessary to enlighten you?

Before you place your faith in a teacher do your homework. Check the web for blogs and sites by disaffected students. Look for the scandal. Observe the ‘inner core’ of students. What kind of people are they? Are they guarded and cliquish? Are they open and self reliant? Do they act superior? Are they sheeplike and downtrodden? Do they cower and simper in front of the teacher? Many teachers are power hungry bullies. Do they think for themselves? Or do they only spout the party line? Do you have to learn a special language to fit in? Cults invariably have their own special lingo. Or do they speak like normal people?

Enlightenment is self knowledge not experience. If a teacher claims that his or her enlightenment is experiential and that he or she can transmit it in some way – through ‘silence’ or shaktipat, for example – your enlightenment will be temporary. Only energy, not enlightenment can be transmitted. Enlightenment is the knowledge “I am awareness.” Awareness is not something you can get; it is something you are. To realize who you are a special means is

necessary because awareness is beyond experience. You can have Vedanta worked on you and it will set you free but that does not qualify you to teach Vedanta. You need to know how to wield the means. If someone enlightened by Vedanta is not qualified to teach without knowing how to wield the means of knowledge – and most aren't - how qualified is someone claiming experiential enlightenment?

For enlightenment I need to be qualified and I need a proper teacher. This should be enough but it isn't. A third factor is involved: the grace of God. God means the total. Ultimately, enlightenment is the self realizing the self. God is the self as the total mind. Just as an individual looks after his or her personal life, God looks after the lives of every conscious being. What happens in the world serves everything else in the world. Trees suck up carbon dioxide and provide oxygen for human beings. Your personal liberation is obviously good for you but it also needs to fit into the needs of everyone else. The people you are meant to help may not be ready to be helped so you have to wait. There are fully qualified seekers with competent enlightened teachers who fail to realize who they are. No blame. The time is not right. When these three factors coalesce enlightenment is inevitable.