

In the fall of, I think it was 2016, I had the great pleasure and honor of visiting with Adyashanti and Mukti in their home and spending several hours with them.

It was obvious to me that Adya was experiencing a significant amount of pain even though he carried on as if nothing were amiss.

Not long after that, after reflecting on this and my own experiences that have been similar in some respects, I wrote the essay, "Suffering and Nectar":

Suffering and nectar ...

In much Eastern spiritual and popular nondual Western culture, there's a tenet that says all suffering ceases when one awakens to a deeper Reality. There are statements of this in Eastern scripture, and it is often repeated in nondual discussions.

In fact, it is true for some, for whom all suffering does end upon awakening. However, it is not universally true, and the expectation that life will be entirely without suffering can create problems.

When anyone attempts to evade genuine pain, believing such pain is incompatible with the awakening they seek, they can get sidetracked in aversion, often to the extent of unhealthy spiritual bypassing that denies the reality of whatever they are experiencing.

In so doing, they suppress parts of themselves and prevent them from becoming fully integrated into their awakening. So they remain divided within themselves, even in the effort to become enlightened. That is exactly the opposite of enlightenment, which must be whole and fully integrated.

Not all suffering is caused by delusion about Reality. Some is caused by organic forces that have nothing to do with one's level of awakening or non-awakening.

Especially, these may include patterns of brain chemistry or nerve signaling that cause intense psychic or physical pain. In the awakened person, these will fall in the category of "prarabdha karma," the flow of karmas, both bodily and circumstantial, that have already begun to bear fruit and will necessarily play out in their lives. This may be true even though the person has awakened to a higher level of consciousness that has "burned the seeds" of karmas that have not yet begun to bear fruit.

In the awakened person there is a transcendental dimension that is beyond whatever pain there is. However, in some instances, the pain may be sufficiently intense, it can only be honestly characterized as suffering.

There is a further difference in the way a deeply awakened person experiences suffering. In the moment, that suffering may seem to contradict the sense that "all things are as they should be." However, because the awakened person sees reality from a more expansive viewpoint, his/her relationship to the pain or suffering will be quite different, and as a result, the outcome will be different.

“Without undue attachment or aversion to anything,” a mature awakening will naturally release undue attachment or aversion to both pleasure and pain. Because all experiences are received with an evenness of attitude, suffering will not be compounded and prolonged because of one’s reactions to it. (And of course, there will still always remain a healthy attitude that naturally avoids unnecessary pain and gravitates to what is most joyful and fulfilling.)

"The enlightened knower of Brahman drinks nectar from every particle of the universe," whether the immediate taste of each particle is bitter or sweet.

Whereas before, the bitter taste of pain was wounding and diminishing, in the wholeness of Buddha Nature/Brahman consciousness/etc. (different traditions use different words), "all things work for good." Because the deeply awakened knower of Reality processes experience differently, that bitterness transmutes in some sense into healing medicine or the pangs of creative birth.

The bitterness ultimately transforms to nectar when it has been fully metabolized and assimilated. So from time to time, there may be suffering in the moment, but in the greater scope of an awakened life, all experience, whether of pleasure or pain, is transformed to a deeper joyfulness that transcends relative joy and sorrow. In that respect, such an awakened person has indeed gone “beyond suffering.”

So it’s true, as both scripture and popular spiritual culture teach, that awakening to a higher reality is the solution to suffering. However, in practical experience, that does not always mean suffering itself disappears entirely and forever.

(It bears mention here, Buddha never said life in the world is suffering, and he never said awakening, or nirvana, is the end of all suffering. What Buddha said was, life in the world is DUKKHA, which means life in the world is incapable of bringing satisfaction. And he said awakening, or nirvana, is the end of dukkha. So there may be what we could call suffering after awakening, but it will be different because after awakening, life will be meaningful, satisfying, in a way it could not have been before.)

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