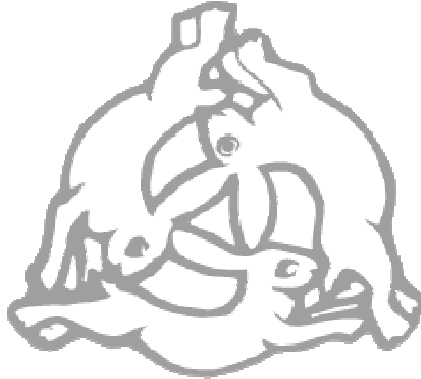


**Isn't it time we were honest about spirituality?**



**open enlightenment**

A free ebook by Alan Chapman

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### **Let's be honest**

The purpose of this ebook is to start an honest and informed conversation about what it means to be human in the most profound sense.

For the first time in history we have access to all of the world's religions, and more importantly, a rational and evidence based account of their origins and history.

Combined with personal, direct exploration of spiritual experience, and an open, accessible and cross-traditional body of 'spiritual peers', we have arrived at the point in our development as a species where a new perspective on ourselves and our place in the world is steadily coming into view; a perspective that both recognizes the

reality and authenticity of spiritual experience and honors the spirit of science, without entertaining either religion or secularism.

The book is divided into short chapters, where a number of statements outlining this new view are explored. However, it is hardly comprehensive, and is only intended as a starting point.

If you find this book interesting, or you have something to contribute, please come and join the conversation at:

<http://openenlightenment.org/>

where the issues raised in this ebook and many more besides are being discussed.

Enjoy!

## **The root of the world religions is the human phenomenon known as enlightenment**

Three thousand years ago saw the dawn of what the German philosopher Karl Jaspers called the Axial Age. Between 900BCE and 200BCE flowered the World's great spiritual movements: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, monotheism and Greek Philosophy. Rabbinic Judaism, Christianity and Islam, although not appearing until the first millennium, are demonstrably the later flowerings of the Axial Age.

Prior to the Axial Age, religion and spirituality consisted of dogmatic superstition, and ego or ethnocentric concern with sacrificial petition to supernatural beings.

During the Axial Age, a new approach to reality appeared in four separate areas of the planet (India, China, the Middle East and Greece), with the following characteristics:

- The recognition of an inclusive, transcendent but non-supernatural aspect to humanity that could only be discovered personally.
- The consideration of universal compassion as the only route to genuine spirituality, and how a person behaved was considered more important than what they believed.
- The attitude that no one should ever take any religious teaching on faith or hearsay.

The Axial Age traditions called this inclusive transcendent aspect of humanity ‘God’, ‘Nirvana’, ‘Brahman’, ‘the Way’, and ‘the Good’.

The direct, personal recognition of this inclusive transcendent aspect was called ‘liberation’, ‘realisation’, ‘anamnesia’, ‘illumination’ and ‘enlightenment’.

Enlightenment is what happened to the Vedic sages, Buddha and his Dharma successors, Lao Tzi and the Taoists, Socrates and the Platonists, the Hebrew prophets, Jesus and the Christian mystics, and Mohammed and the Sufis. (And the hidden mystics or ‘occultists’ of the West.)

The characteristics of the Axial traditions outlined above are very different to those that bear their names today. As Karen Armstrong clarifies in *The Great Transformation*:

*The prophets, mystics, philosophers, and poets of the Axial Age were so advanced and their vision was so radical that later*

*generations tended to dilute it. In the process, they often produced exactly the kind of religiosity that the Axial reformers wanted to get rid of. That, I believe, is what has happened in the modern world.*

However, in many places an authentic expression of the Axial teachings can be found, and there are many historical examples of new teachers appearing who claim to have experienced the same inclusive transcendent aspect reported by the great traditions, and whose teachings share the same fundamental characteristics. There is overwhelming historical and contemporary evidence to suggest that enlightenment is a natural, profound, human event that is historically recent in our development as a species; and it may well be on the increase.

History is witness to the fact that the advent and understanding of enlightenment has led to a number of great spiritual movements

based on peace and compassion, transforming the world for the better as no other theoretical, dogmatic or political movement has ever managed.

But the majority of the Axial traditions that began almost three thousand years ago have been misunderstood, degenerated and misrepresented throughout the last two millennia, with the most horrific and tragic consequences.

Isn't it time we gave enlightenment the consideration it deserves? Shouldn't we endeavour to understand enlightenment in light of its incredible potential for transforming the world for the better?

Wouldn't a more accurate picture of the root of the world's major religious movements go some way to preventing the repetition of the horrors of the last two thousand years?

Isn't it time we addressed enlightenment in an honest and contemporary fashion suitable for a human living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

## **The debate between faith and atheism is irrelevant to genuine spirituality**

Current mainstream religious consideration is limited to a debate between the existence and the non-existence of a supernatural father figure called ‘God’.

Materialist atheists, such as Richard Dawkins, deny the existence of the supernatural figure on very valid, empirical and rational grounds; but his view of spirituality – as is common with materialists – is incredibly naive, and as a result spirituality for him is nothing but a matter of faith.

Religious theists argue for the existence of God based on faith and the idea that the world is obviously designed. The fact that proof or knowledge of God is actually the antithesis of faith seems to have

escaped the ‘faithful’, and not only do they generally demonstrate a very limited understanding of current scientific thinking and evidence, but they also share the same naive view of spirituality with the atheists.

Whether we believe in a supernatural father figure, deny his existence, or remain undecided, makes no difference to the existence of enlightenment, or anyone’s ability to engage with the phenomenon.

Faith in God has no bearing on genuine spirituality, as is evidenced by the superficially different approaches of Buddhism and Christian mysticism, despite the fact both traditions share the same deep features of leading to a personal, direct recognition of the inclusive, transcendent aspect first described in the Axial Age.

What would happen if the public became aware that there is a fourth option to spirituality, one that rests on personal growth and exploration, not dogma or naive materialism? What if it was common knowledge that faith, atheism and agnosticism had no bearing on genuine spirituality at all?

## **Enlightenment is currently very widely misunderstood**

In the East, especially in India, enlightenment is much more within the public consciousness than in the West; however, just as the word ‘God’ in the West now means something very different to its original meaning for the Axial Age pioneers, ‘enlightenment’ is most usually understood as something supernatural in the East. Sadly, as more and more Westerners become interested in enlightenment, this supernatural view of enlightenment is now being exported to the West.

Here are a number of popular descriptions of enlightenment:

- Enlightenment is an escape from life and death into a state of perpetual bliss.

- Enlightenment is the realisation that everything is an illusion.
- Enlightenment confers immortality, as well as all manner of miraculous abilities, such as teleportation, levitation, apportionation, invisibility, the ability to change size and shape at will, prediction, and the power to heal.
- Enlightenment is the knowledge of everything that exists, has existed and will exist; or enlightenment is the actual specific knowledge of everything in the universe.
- Enlightenment is the inability to think certain negative thoughts (such as the decision to kill a living being), feel certain negative emotions (such as hate or lust), or act in certain negative ways (such as getting drunk, taking advantage of devotees, or entertaining behaviour based on conceit or arrogance).

- Enlightenment only happens to very, very, very special people.

As defined by the original Axial pioneers, and their true heirs for the past three thousand years (of which there are many on this planet right now, both in the East and the West), enlightenment is nothing more than a specific recognition of our fundamental nature.

Nothing more.

The wildly inaccurate and unhelpful fantasies presented above are no doubt a result of the complete lack of integrity exercised by those people who have claimed (and still do claim) to understand enlightenment despite the fact they have not experienced it. The reasons for doing this are many, as we shall see.

**Bad descriptions of enlightenment lead to confusion, delusion, escapism, and exploitation.**

Just as the clergy in the West have played on the superstitions of the public over the centuries in order to gain wealth, followers and power, so too have many of the ‘gurus’ in the East by presenting enlightenment as a very special and supernatural event. As a result, any ‘guru’ claiming such an ‘attainment’ can easily exploit the many people who are only too willing to find existential solace in a fantasy.

What kind of obscene universe would it be if genuine spirituality relied on middlemen? The truth is humanity does not and never has required the Church or the living ‘avatars’ of the East; and this is the message of the Axial pioneers that has been lost to the mainstream over the millennia.

If we do not engage in an honest discussion about the roots of the great spiritual traditions – which includes talking about enlightenment from an evidence base – then there is nothing to counter the confusion, the unhealthy fostering of escapism and the widespread religious exploitation of the public that has persisted for countless centuries.

Bad descriptions of enlightenment promoted by middlemen only serve to distract us from the very real possibility of understanding ourselves and our place in the world - NO MATTER WHO WE ARE - and developing morally, in the most profound and beautiful of ways, as a species.

**Bad talk about enlightenment is due to the fact that enlightenment exists, not the activity of talking about it**

Some present day teachers of the Axial traditions take the contradictory stance of refusing to acknowledge the existence of enlightenment, let alone discuss it in an honest and open manner. This is usually based on the following assumptions:

- Any talk about enlightenment is fundamentally unwise, hurtful and unhelpful.
- Talk about enlightenment fosters goal chasing, envy and pride.
- If the teacher discusses enlightenment, especially his or her own personal experience in this area, then they may

risk expulsion from their school or tradition, or forfeiture of their right to teach within that lineage.

As I have already demonstrated, inaccurate and unwise talk about enlightenment certainly encourages unethical behaviour. But bad talk is a result of the fact that enlightenment actually exists; it is not a result of simply talking about enlightenment. The field of medicine is similar, in the sense that it too is both real and very important, but has and probably will always suffer from bad models, misunderstandings and unethical behaviour. The accurate and helpful talk of genuine doctors cannot be blamed for the existence of the bad talk; on the contrary, it is the only antidote to tackling the problem.

The degree to which goal chasing, envy and pride are suffered is particularly dependent upon a person's view and approach to

enlightenment, but the truth is these very human foibles come with being human, not with simply talking about enlightenment. Goal chasing, envy and pride are just as much fostered by the fact that a person can be a member of a lineage, school or priestly caste, that a person can attain teacher status, that it is possible to develop very high technical meditative ability or achieve a high degree of scholarship. Why is excellence encouraged in every related subject to enlightenment, despite the fact goal chasing, envy and pride may result, but not for enlightenment itself, for those very reasons?

It is a sad fact that some genuine teachers are afraid to be honest about enlightenment simply because their school or tradition has at some point adopted the bizarre, contradictory and hypocritical approach described above. But we have to ask ourselves: is being associated with a certain school, or having a certain title, as important as helping others understand the profound event known

as enlightenment, especially when the Axial traditions, in particular Buddhism, considered the facilitation of enlightenment as the most compassionate act a human can do for another?

How is refusing to acknowledge the existence of enlightenment, and refusing to accurately describe the phenomenon in a helpful and wise fashion, in any way compassionate?

## **We should talk about enlightenment because it is profoundly important to us as a species**

Talk about enlightenment will never go away, because enlightenment happens to human beings; in fact, the conversation will only intensify as humans become more connected via the internet and new communication technology.

An honest conversation – that I believe is inherently compassionate, as did the Axial pioneers – has begun about spirituality and enlightenment, and this will prove extremely beneficial, and not only for those interested in enlightenment. Maybe it is a result of the internet's ability to give a voice to the unheard, but it appears as if more people have experience with enlightenment than was previously thought, or that the occurrence of the event is actually growing.

We have seen how the advent and understanding of enlightenment during the Axial Age led to a fundamental ethical shift for the majority of the species: compassion became the ultimate spiritual practice, replacing the sacrifice of humans and animals. The horrors of the dogmatic religious attitude are well documented, but the work of those people who have truly understood and adopted the teachings of the Axial pioneers is similarly well known in the form of the countless charities, hospitals, compassionate missions and movements that have dotted our post-Axial history. The Axial Age is proof that the advent of enlightenment, if only in small numbers, can result in a major growth in moral development on a global scale.

Is it not of great importance that we explore, understand and facilitate genuine spirituality considering:

Enlightenment appears to be a relatively new but natural human development whose occurrence may be growing. The evidence suggests that genuine spirituality is an inherent part of being human;

Enlightenment is responsible for a major, beautiful and profound shift in our moral development in recent history;

Enlightenment offers a profound understanding of reality and ourselves that cannot be gained by any other means, and that it is the root of every major world religion?

## **It is possible to talk about enlightenment in a sane and honest fashion**

This can be achieved provided:

- We proceed from an evidence base, both 1<sup>st</sup> person (subjective) and 3<sup>rd</sup> person (objective). We already have thousands of subjective reports on the experience of enlightenment, many scientific studies on the mental, ethical, emotional and health benefits of genuine spiritual practice and a steady growing body of knowledge on neurological correlates within the brain.
- Within our own practice, we endeavour to observe, investigate and describe the evidence as accurately as we can.

- We exercise integrity. Subjectively, this means only talking about what we know we have experienced. This can only be based on personal, direct engagement with genuine spirituality, in-depth study of the territory described by various reputable schools of enlightenment and the application of their models in assessing our own spiritual events, review of our experiences by a community of peers, and the instruction of wise and honest teachers. If we don't know what something is, we ask. If we don't have sufficient experience and knowledge of the various maps and models of enlightenment, we defer judgement to someone who does. If we do know what something is, we speak up.
- We challenge the integrity of ignorance and fantasy wherever we find them, whether that is within our own

minds or within the teachings of a 'guru' or 'holy man' who is profiteering from confusion, delusion, escapism and exploitation.

**It is possible to experience enlightenment and inaccurately describe it, misidentify it, still ascribe to fantastic models of what enlightenment is and fail to integrate the experience with wisdom**

Enlightenment is an event that happens to people, and not a specific belief, idea or intellectual insight.

A person can have beliefs, ideas or intellectual insights *based on* and *about* their experience of enlightenment.

Just as cultures have observed the sun in the sky for millennia and described its nature and our relationship to it in many different ways, so too have individuals observed the inclusive transcendent aspect of humanity and described its nature and our relationship to it in many different ways.

Just as the various descriptions of the sun vary in degree of accuracy, understanding and outright fantasy, so too do the various descriptions of enlightenment.

The event of enlightenment does not come with an accurate description, a name tag, or a user manual.

It is very possible for a dedicated spiritual practitioner or teacher to experience enlightenment without realising exactly what it is, if the event doesn't fit with their bad description or fantastic model of what enlightenment should be like.

How many more teachers are out there who have experienced enlightenment but do not know it?

It is not enough to simply have the experience of enlightenment. If we are to profit from genuine spirituality then we must to first be

able to recognise it, before we can accurately understand it and then consciously integrate the experience to bring its profound benefits into the real world. An open and honest conversation about enlightenment is an integral part of this process.

### **We can talk about enlightenment even though it is ineffable**

There is a common objection to the idea that enlightenment can be talked about meaningfully on the grounds that it is ineffable.

Yet all experience is ineffable; no word is the thing named. But we can still talk about our experience meaningfully without any detriment to the experience or our relationship to it. Isn't this the basis of language?

There is another common objection to the idea that enlightenment can be talked about meaningfully on the grounds that nothing can be talked about meaningfully because language itself is inherently flawed.

And yet language seems to be doing just fine in expressing this very objection, doesn't it?

### **We can talk about enlightenment with wisdom**

We've already reaped the benefits of inaccurate, misrepresented and misunderstood talk about genuine spirituality, in the form of the horrors of the last two thousand years of religious intolerance and hatred.

We've already reaped the benefits of the refusal to talk about enlightenment, with the exploitation of an unwitting public and the general ignorance that genuine spirituality even exists.

Wisdom only comes as a result of understanding our experience, and it is only then that virtuous action naturally follows. How can we develop wisdom as a species without a collective understanding?

If we can accurately describe enlightenment, or at least be less wrong than the more common supernatural models, then we can reach a greater degree of understanding of what might be the most beneficial relationship or approach we can adopt towards enlightenment, and conversely, what might be the most problematic perspectives and attitudes.

The manner in which we talk openly and honestly about enlightenment is informed by the exercise itself, and if we pay attention to the results of an ongoing genuine conversation about enlightenment, we should see the manner in which we present enlightenment progressively develop over time to favour a more profitable outcome.

Yes, talk about enlightenment might foster greed, envy and pride; but wise talk will highlight these pitfalls, why they lead to

undesirable outcomes, and present the best means of dealing with these all too common human emotions.

Yes, talk about enlightenment might mislead the practitioner into believing that enlightenment is an escape into heaven on earth, and that there is nothing left to be done; but wise talk will bring understanding and compassion to the problem, demonstrate the experience of others for whom enlightenment happened a long time ago, and explain that practice is not a means to an end, but is always an end in itself.

It may be that talk about enlightenment within a specific model might lead to the marginalising of other people's very real and genuine experience, but wise talk will show the evidence that the superficial experiences of the spiritual process vary greatly between individuals and is simultaneously mediated by the method and

tradition adhered to, while still sharing the very same deep features of genuine spirituality.

How much more wisdom might be gained as the conversation continues?

**Enlightenment is not an absolute worldview to be pushed on anyone and it is not the answer to all of our problems**

Just as everyone is not interested in physiology, even though it is an essential part of being human, neither is everyone interested in spirituality (let alone enlightenment).

Only a doctor needs to know a good description of physiology in order to provide benefit to the community, in the form of diagnosis, prognosis and treatment. Similarly, only a spiritual teacher or guide needs to know a good description of genuine spirituality in order to provide benefit to the community, in the form of facilitating spiritual experience and its understanding, wisdom and its application, and compassion.

It was a core tenet of the Axial traditions that no worldview or set of beliefs should be accepted without personal corroboration, and there is not one single example of a genuine spiritual teacher who has evangelised their teachings as absolute in-and-of themselves, as many ‘believers’ do today in the form of the faith-based dogmatic religions preached in their names.

The role of someone who has experienced enlightenment is to act as a guide or counsel for those who are interested in spirituality or those who are experiencing spiritual events.

Furthermore, if you have a broken leg, it would be wiser to visit the doctor rather than the spiritual teacher.

To believe that the experience of enlightenment is all we need for our problems to be over is to misunderstand that without

understanding or integration the event might as well mean nothing at all and that no amount of understanding or integration will put an end to the problems we face by simply being a human being. This applies to the popular New Age fantasy of a species wide enlightenment saving the earth and ourselves; it is simply naive and lazy.

However, enlightenment does beget compassion; and although compassion does not spell the end to all of our problems, it certainly makes the world a better place to live in. We can bring honest and accurate knowledge of enlightenment into the public arena simply to benefit *those people who are so called to explore spirituality* as a means to facilitating compassion in the world, just as the Axial pioneers once did, without evangelising enlightenment or pushing any dogmatic beliefs on anyone.

**Many religious leaders, gurus and spiritual teachers do not (and will not) welcome an open and honest conversation about enlightenment**

Some religious leaders will resist a public acceptance of the reality of enlightenment and its role in the origin of the world's Axial age religions, because it will be seen as a direct attack on their beliefs.

This need not be the case: Jewish, Christian and Islamic mystics – the most revered saints of these religions – have greatly enriched these traditions by exploring and understanding genuine spirituality through the lens of their respective monotheisms. Furthermore, the inclusive transcendent aspect that was once described as God by the original founders of these religions and their saints is a much more rich, profound and beautiful 'God' than is supposed by those Jews, Christians and Muslims who have only the *idea* of God to invest in.

Some gurus will actively deny the descriptions offered by an honest and sane conversation about enlightenment and its benefits because it will unavoidably undermine their power and position.

I hope this happens very soon. It's a necessary step in combating the great deal of ignorance, hopelessness and exploitation present in our world.

Some spiritual teachers will attack the idea of an honest spiritual discussion by invoking the belief that any conversation about enlightenment is inherently unwise, hurtful and unhelpful.

We have already seen how this belief is based on hypocrisy, confusion and a wrong view of compassion, and is completely at odds with the ethics of the Axial Age founder(s) of their tradition.

### **Enlightenment is often confused with many other natural, human spiritual events**

A study of the genuine enlightenment traditions – such as Advaita Vedanta, Buddhism and Sufism –and a personal, direct engagement and investigation of spiritual practice will reveal that the recognition of the inclusive transcendent aspect of ourselves – sometimes called Brahman, Nirvana, and Allah – is but one amongst many of the rich and diverse spiritual experiences that a we might encounter during a spiritual career.

A very common event that very many people might experience even without a dedicated spiritual practice, which is often known to occur spontaneously, during dreams, sex, or experimentation with certain drugs, is the mystical experience.

The mystical experience might involve a trance state, bliss, vibrations, visions, a feeling of expansion, union with the divine, a great light, or a sense of leaving the body.

The mystical experience can have a great transformative effect on a person, and although it is a very real and valid spiritual event, it should not be confused with enlightenment.

It is very common for inexperienced people with no knowledge of genuine spirituality, access to a group of peers or a teacher (or even in some cases an interest in spirituality!) to confuse the mystical experience with enlightenment, usually due to coming across a bad description or model of the event. This can have disastrous consequences for the person's social life and personal well-being if he or she decides to act on the assumption!

There is a great deal of literature that tends to lump together every single variety of spiritual experience under the heading of 'enlightenment' or 'mystical experience' as if the two were interchangeable, demonstrating the complete lack of integrity on the part of many New Age authors.

The mystical experience is much more common than enlightenment, and it is important that we do not confuse the two.

**Enlightenment has not happened to that many people, but many more people have experienced it than is usually assumed**

Although many more people have experienced a mystical event than enlightenment, the mystical event is not rare by any means, and enlightenment is much more common than a cursory estimation might suppose.

Traditionally speaking, and especially within a religious context, only the great founders of the world's traditions have experienced enlightenment, and so the estimation of the number of 'enlightened' people walking the planet at any one time tends to be given as only a handful.

(Bizarrely, many Buddhists ascribe to this notion, despite the fact the early Buddhist texts report at least sixty of the Buddha's followers experienced enlightenment within the early days of his teaching.)

There is currently no real way to accurately estimate the number, but if we were to take the time to guess the amount of public spiritual teachers who claim to have experienced enlightenment whose teachings concur with other trust-worthy sources of the experience, and add the many Indian mystics, Tibetan monks, Sufi masters, Zen masters and Christian monks and nuns who are considered deeply realised within their own communities, and then add the great number of realised students belonging to these teachers who are not yet teachers in their own right, we arrive at a figure in at least the hundreds, if not the thousands.

Now consider how many spiritual teachers there might be who have experienced enlightenment but who have not spoken openly about their experience because they either do not understand what has happened to them due to investing in a bad model, are afraid of the reaction it will cause if they admit their experience, or believe that talking about enlightenment publicly is unwise. If we further add those rare people who might have experienced enlightenment but have no idea what enlightenment is, let alone that this is what they have experienced, we arrive at a vastly higher figure than the conservative religious estimate of just a handful.

Furthermore, the mystical event is an indication of engaging with the spiritual process that leads to enlightenment. It would follow that if the number of people who are experiencing enlightenment is on the increase, then we would expect the number of people who have had a mystical experience to outweigh the number of people

who have experienced enlightenment. What might it mean if the number of people who have had a mystical experience outweighs those who haven't?

**Authentic spirituality is not limited to any one tradition, technique, description, race, geographical location, psychological type, gender, sexual preference, or income bracket**

Spirituality is the birthright of being human.

The recognition of our fundamental nature is as dependent upon our religion, size, looks, wealth, health, home, class, race, family, friends, marital status, happiness, culture, intelligence, aesthetic values, temperament or age as is the occurrence of falling in love.

Enlightenment is a characteristic behavior of our species.

If you are interested in spirituality or answering the Big Questions about life then you should know that enlightenment is a very real and attainable experience for you in this lifetime.

There are many traditions, teachers and practices that can help you, but make sure you never confuse enlightenment itself with any tradition, teacher, or practice.

**The questions that arise as a result of openly discussing spirituality and enlightenment with wisdom are culturally relevant, exciting and worth asking**

When we talk about spirituality from a basis of integrity, evidence and research, questions arise that not only have genuine real world relevance, but may also have never been asked before.

An honest discussion must necessarily start with the individual, and it is impossible to extricate the individual from his or her cultural context. The impact of genuine spirituality on the individual has repercussions for the society in which he or she lives, and the cultural context certainly impacts on the accessibility of genuine spirituality and how it is approached.

How is the current communication revolution affecting our view of spirituality, and how we talk about it?

What will it mean for the world religions as more and more people are given a voice to express their own personal, direct spiritual experiences?

With an increasing accessibility to free resources from many previously inaccessible spiritual traditions, should we expect an exponential growth in practitioners interested in real personal and spiritual growth?

With the public's interest in spirituality on the increase, and the ability to have an honest discussion on the subject with a growing online community and network of peers with experience of

enlightenment, is it possible we might be approaching a new Axial Age?

What might all of this mean for our future as a species?

**Have you found this book interesting, useful or beneficial?**

If so, please consider supporting the Open Enlightenment project by making a one-time donation to help us realise our aims of spreading the word of authentic spirituality and providing free resources for engaging with spiritual practice, including free online meditation resources, articles, talks, podcasts, and events.

Open Enlightenment began in 2009, and its founders are Alan Chapman and Duncan Barford.

### **About the author**

Alan experienced enlightenment within the framework of the Western tradition of enlightenment known as Magick, although he has experience with Theravada Buddhism, Sufism, Gurdjieff's Fourth Way, Christian mysticism, Tantra, Yoga, Enochian magick, Advaita Vedanta, Zen and Taoism. For several years, Alan has maintained The Baptist's Head website with his colleague Duncan Barford, where a record of their experiences with Magick and the process of enlightenment – known to magicians as 'The Great Work' – can be found. Alan is author of the magical primer Advanced Magick for Beginners.

Enlightenment occurred for Alan on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2009 in Tamil Nadu, India. (It made for an interesting tweet.)