



Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram

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Focus on Enlightenment #10

The Easy Path

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Enlightenment is not DIY (do-it-yourself). It's much easier than any DIY project you've ever done. The mystical secret is Shaktipat. Enlightenment is easier once you've gotten this rocket blast into Cosmic Consciousness. That's the whole point of Shaktipat, that you take light-years off your journey by getting a boost from one who is already there.

DIY is never easy. That's why there are so many TV shows, books and online videos leading you through car repairs, home improvement, cooking and dog training. When you don't know what you're doing, you need to learn from someone who knows. I often turn to the internet when I can't work my smart phone. My phone is smart, but it needs a smart owner. I get that way by learning from someone who knows. Enlightenment works the same way.

My first foray into meditation taught me this. After discovering how mega-busy my mind was, I knew I needed a Guru. In the 1970s my only local resource was a Buddhist temple, so I learned a little bit about their approach. I resonated with the Four Noble Truths, beginning with, "All life is suffering." I didn't need anyone to explain that to me.

Yet I was basically a good person. I was kind most of the time, except when I was driving. I loved passionately and worked hard. I mowed my lawn and went to church most Sundays. I did everything I was supposed to, but still felt unfulfilled. Suffering? Yes, I had that. I wanted to know what I could do about it.

Their answer was quite discouraging to me. The Eightfold Path seemed like how I was already living: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. Unfortunately, my experience of upright living and earnest effort hadn't freed me from suffering. I couldn't see how trying harder and doing it longer would work. I wanted results and I wanted them immediately.

I continued looking for a meditation teacher, which took me to one of Muktananda's meditation centers. I got more than I even knew to ask for. I got more than I could have imagined possible. I got Shaktipat, the initiation that awakens your inherent Divinity. This is explained in Kashmiri Shaivism's primary text:

Udyamo bhairava.h — Shiva Sutras 1.5

[Shaktipat activates] the inner arising of transcendental consciousness,
destroying your spiritual blindness, to set you free.

The four sutras preceding this one describe that the human being is limited by spiritual blindness, meaning that your own spiritual greatness is hidden from you. This breakthrough sutra promises that Shaktipat reveals your inherent Divinity to you.

Each word in the sutra is potent. Udyamo means to raise up, elevate or carry upwards, herein promising spiritual upliftment. Bhairava names the One Reality whom we also call Shiva. Bhairava is Shiva in the act of destroying your limitations, setting you free. The Guru is the human agent of Bhairava's fierce grace. This means that someone sets you free by giving you Shaktipat. It's like receiving a "Get Out of Jail Free" card.

Once Shaktipat awakens your inner power of upliftment, enlightenment happens. Like a kid growing taller during the summer, enlightenment happens day-by-day. While I went on with my daily life, something was blossoming within me. It was especially tangible in my morning meditations, which were so delicious that I got up early in order to meditate longer. My three kids usually came in for the last part. They laid down next to me. I frequently sat with one kid's head on each thigh and one head in the middle of my lap. It was Divine, inside and outside. Through the decades, it's only gotten better.

Yet I've gone through some rough patches. I always figured, if I wasn't meditating, I'd have gone through some difficulties anyway. While this spiritual path is the easy path, it's not easy. You still have to do the hard stuff. You can wait until life forces you into it or you can be proactive about it. It's a yoga practice called "tapas," meaning heat. It's the inner heat that comes from the friction of your ego rubbing against God. Guess which will be burned away.

Stories of ancient yogic sages feature them doing intense austerities, often illustrated by drawings of skeletal yogis with long grey beards sitting in icy caves. It's important to understand that they did this simply because they didn't get Shaktipat. Once you've received this inner awakening, you get to eat regular meals, in fact you need them to be able to handle the cosmic energy coursing through your spine. While yogis don't eat flesh, fish or eggs, my Baba always insisted that we include dairy as well as a little bit of sugar in our diet. A yogi who has gotten Shaktipat needs good nutrition in order to handle the energy.

Thus, your tapas (hard stuff) won't be found in starving yourself nor by living in a cave or in the woods. Your relationships probably provide more friction for you than withdrawing from others ever can do. The trick is this: for a yogi, the friction is about changing you, not helping you get what you want from others.

Doing the hard stuff means that you give up things you want as well as do things you usually avoid. Most people's leisure activities are focused on entertainment and comfort. Yet doing more yoga will get you enlightened faster. Fortunately, you don't have to give up comfort. Doing more yoga makes your body more comfortable, not to mention your mind and emotions. Then you take your comfort with you everywhere you go. And you're entertained by life itself.

"Early to bed, early to rise," you've heard this before. The sweet spot happens at 3:00 am every day; you could call it the "witching hour." It's not merely yoga that recognizes this incredible daily opportunity. Monks and nuns have been doing what they call "the night office" in their monasteries for centuries. You may already be experiencing this early morning wakeup call or find that you have trouble sleeping at that time. Sit up! Meditation is calling your name!

You could even plan for this the night before. Just go to bed early enough that you can easily answer that wakeup call with enthusiasm. Then you will have a new problem: if you're enjoying getting up early, it's not "hard stuff" anymore. Then is it really tapas?

Here's how it works. When you willingly do the hard stuff, just like an athlete in training, you grow into such inner strength that nothing is really hard anymore. So you're a yogi in training. But what are you training for? You're training for enlightenment.

Shaktipat makes enlightenment easy, though you can sabotage the process by prioritizing other things. You also have the power to speed ahead by living a disciplined life with regular and consistent yogic routines. Weave your yoga practices throughout your day so your inner state is constantly refreshed. You gradually become accustomed to feeling good all the time. Better than good, you feel uplifted. Better than uplifted, you shine with the inner light of your own Self.

This means you don't have to leave your life. Everyone in your life will appreciate your radiance as well as your willingness to do the hard stuff. Your inner depth and clarity will make you able to see them more clearly as well as to support them in their process.

All you need is two things: Shaktipat and the willingness to do the hard stuff. Oh, wait... You have to do the hard stuff anyway. So there's really only one thing to do. And it's easy.

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