

Enlightenment

"The Buddha didn't describe his awakening as an awakening to some absolute truth or reality. What he woke up to is the unfolding of the phenomenal world itself. It doesn't have to do with gaining some privileged access to a higher truth that somehow transcends the messiness of everyday life. Rather, it is an awakening to the flux and the flow, the pain, beauty, tragedy, and joy of life itself."

-Stephen Batchelor

To me enlightenment seems to be about seeing through the delusions caused by the three poisons, greed, hate and ignorance. But is it a one time complete experience? When you read about the Buddha's enlightenment under the Bodhi tree it sounds like that. And the sutras reinforce that idea. Perhaps it was for the Buddha - but he had spent six years in intense spiritual practice beforehand. So although it is our natural condition before we add on a protective shell of ego that only makes us suffer more, the shell is hard to pierce and might take us years of practice to crack. This reminds me of the koan about the hen tapping the outside of an egg shell at just the right moment as the chick also taps to get free of the egg from the inside. In the same way a teacher can help liberate us if he/she uses the correct skilful means. Maybe the koan breaks down here though because we seem to fall back into the seeming security of our old habitual ways all too readily. So I think we have to persevere with our meditation or other forms of practice indefinitely.

This is certainly true in my own experience. It's often a matter of two steps forward and one step back. I am gradually learning to stay with suffering and pain and not avoid it. To learn the lessons it provides that seem exactly tailored for me. To not seek escape in pleasant experiences and to let go of the clinging attachment to any that do occur. To hold life lightly and playfully, in other words.