

# HOW TO FIND WHAT ISN'T LOST

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A SHORT, PRO-INTELLECTUAL, PRO-DESIRE  
GUIDE TO ENLIGHTENMENT

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## PREFACE

This book has a simple, single purpose: to help you awaken to your true nature. I provide the spiritual system that I developed to help myself. It is itself based on the Hindu mystical school of Vedanta, along with other ideas from both literature, psychoanalysis, and philosophy.

Most importantly, I have drawn from experience.



The world is unsatisfactory. You can't control it, and at best, even if you attain what you want, it is always tainted by the specter of losing it, and of your death and the death of those you love. Ultimate meaning seems incomprehensible. Why are we here and what is the point?

The idea of enlightenment is that there is a way to perfect, lasting happiness and meaning beyond the seeming constraints of this world. In fact, it contends that this happiness and meaning is nothing other than what you already are.

You have mistaken yourself for a body and a mind — this sounds bizarre, even crazy, I know, but it is the truth — and as a result suffer from their limitations. This mistake can be corrected. We experience dualistically, through the division between “me” and “everything that’s not me,” but the truth is non-dual.

The theory section of this book will in large part be devoted to working out how and why this is a plausible picture of reality. Both philosophical considerations and the experiences of the wise over history and in various cultures support it.

The Self (that is, our true one, as opposed to the normal, everyday person we think we are) is pure, uninterrupted being, awareness, and bliss, and it is beyond all limitations. It is not any particular awareness or consciousness. It is that out of which all particular consciousness arises.

Enlightenment means to realize this fact not as an abstract set of words but in experience.

Enlightenment is and is not religious. It is religious in the sense that it suggests that there is something very important beyond what we know with our senses and mind. It is not religious in that it requires no blind belief in God, prayer, sacrifice, scripture, or membership in any church: merely a willingness to look deeply into your experience of yourself. It is self-validating. Anyone can test it and experience it for themselves.

I could tell you that enlightenment will make you less selfish and help you save the world. This might happen, because it will release you from a large number of negative emotions. The reality, though, is that it may or may not lead to greater service and charity.

Enlightenment is peace and joy, but not in the normal sense of those words. Its peace and joy is perfectly compati-

ble, in a strange way, with ordinary pain and suffering. Enlightenment reveals that there is no world and that there are no people, at least not in the way you think there are. So saving the world may or may not happen then. To proceed into the inner mysteries, you have to be willing to give up prior notions, assumptions, and goals. To enter the temple sanctum, you have to remove your shoes and bow your head.

Trust me, it's worth it.



Enlightenment is not just for mystics in a mountain cave. It is something available to everyone, because it is your nature right now. Something stops you from recognizing what you are literally experiencing this second and at all times.

It takes no special talent to get to that recognition, only a sense that there is something more and a strong desire to obtain it.

I know this to be true for a fact. You can find my personal spiritual experience at the back of this book, though if you are new to the non-dualistic way of thinking (or even if you aren't), you might get more out of it after reading the rest of the book.



This book is meant to be short, dense, and useful. Its purpose is to help you attain a goal that, I have to say — in classic paradoxical spiritual teacher fashion — is not a goal, and cannot be attained. And yet you must try with all your strength and sincerity to attain it.

I hope for this book to be a simple tool just sufficient to

the task: rough, ready, and made to accomplish, not to dazzle.

Let me also make a couple of important disclaimers. I thought hard about how to make this book flow as organically as possible, and banged my head against that problem until I realized that it was a variant of the perfectionism that I'd always suffered.

Perfectionism isn't entirely bad. It is actually a pointer to the spirit, where alone real perfection lies. Perfection isn't to be obtained in the realm of action and result. That isn't to say that effort and quality don't matter — far from it. But *in particular* when working on that which deals with the spirit, there is a special problem with trying to make something perfect. Perfection in art and engineering usually involves full comprehension, full seeing, and then translation of that seeing into a work. That's miraculously hard when it comes to even the "normal world," but it becomes downright impossible when it comes to the depths of the soul. There, words stumble and turn back, perplexed and befuddled. Mind cannot penetrate: and where mind cannot penetrate, what hope is there of consciously attained perfection? Perfection will come if it comes by the choice of a higher power.

In the meanwhile, I'll go by the maxim that the perfect is the enemy of the good, and good is what I hope for this book to be. In the meantime, I apologize in advance for those places where I stumble and fall.

I'd also love to hear your thoughts on the book and your spiritual journey. If you want to let me know how you feel, have questions, or perhaps want to learn more closely from me, feel free to contact me at my website, Sifting to the Truth:

<http://www.siftingtothetruth.com/>  
I look forward to hearing from you.  
Good journeying.

## INTRODUCTION: THE BIG PICTURE

The basic case this book makes is simple. It is that at heart, what you seek in life, whatever else you may say or think, is to know your own self, or Self, in its typical spiritual capitalization.

The Self is bliss, peace, happiness, meaning, and truth, though not quite in the way in which you understand these terms. The Self will resolve the most cutting of your existential worries, will assuage your fears of death, will console you for your losses and your disappointments, will reassure you always.

And — it — is — what — you — are — right — now.

You just don't know it. Or you sort of know it, but not quite in the right way.

Something like that.

Still, be assured that it is what you have been seeking, and what you already are. Is it a paradox to seek what you already are? If so, it is one of many paradoxes to come.

We'll call this clear experience of the Self enlightenment. It could also be called self-realization, moksha, nirvana, or liberation.



Now there is good reason to believe that there is a way to see this truth clearly, not just intellectually (though the intellect is very important), but in your own experience. When you do, you will understand why all the benefits promised above are in essence true, even if they are somewhat imprecise when worded that way.

There is very little talk of God in this book. Belief in God is not required to proceed, though neither is it disregarded. In essence, the question of God is an individual one, and belief either way is compatible with the route to the Self outlined here.

The Self, it is true, is not just something in the physical world. It is something special, something which will quite literally blow your mind. But it is also true that it is not the conventional concept of God. Precisely what it is can and will be described, but it is in truth beyond words. In the end, it can only be experienced.

The system in this book is derived from a few main sources. The first is that Hindu school of mysticism called Advaita Vedanta, in which I was initially educated by my teacher, Swami Bodhananda Saraswati. This book's ideas owe their deepest debt to that most sublime genius of Vedanta, Sri Ramana Maharshi.

The other main sources of this book include other mystic traditions, and certain key authors and ideas in literature (the work of the stupendous French novelist Marcel Proust in particular), Western philosophy (in particular the long debate about the relationship between mind and body), and psychoanalysis (the work of Freud and his successors). I've learned a great deal about the last from my



own psychoanalysis, which has been, thanks to the tireless work of my analyst, a profound growing experience all its own.



The essential method in this book is three-fold, deriving again from a Vedantic conception of spiritual education.

The first step is to learn the intellectual theory. I'll explain why there is good reason to believe that the enlightenment experience exists, that it is desirable, and that you personally can achieve it. For many, this will depend on showing why the scientific worldview, while very useful, cannot explain it all, and especially cannot explain human consciousness. The exact relationship between the Self and the mind will also be explored, and this too will be part of a good road map. Importantly, I'll also explain why the path to enlightenment depends crucially on two more activities: quieting the mind and the pursuit of the Self.

Second, I'll explain the method to quiet the mind. A quiet mind means one in which disturbing thoughts are infrequent and mild. A quiet mind is capable of deep focus. To quiet the mind, you must get more and more honest about your true desires, and pursue them one way or the other. This requires openness to and expression of your feelings and desires, and a progressive testing of them to understand their meaning. Self-discovery is an organic process of opening and blooming. You will also have to resolve your intellectual doubts about the whole arena of spirituality. This takes time.

The most important means of quieting the mind is one which requires a certain amount of quietness to use. It is

also the third step of the system: what I call the pursuit of the Self. A quiet mind is relatively quiet; the Self when pursued and recognized shows you always to have been Quietness itself. This pursuit consists of two activities: self-inquiry and surrender, and culminates in the seeing through of the illusion of personal identity.

Actually all three of the steps are inseparable. Knowledge quiets the mind. A quiet mind absorbs knowledge better. Knowledge is required for the pursuit of the Self, but that pursuit also increases one's knowledge. A quiet mind helps in the pursuit of the Self, and that pursuit quiets the mind.

In fact, every section and chapter is shot through with all three steps.

So these are all self-reinforcing components of a single thing. I am only separating them for ease of use.



### **How this book is different from other spiritual ideas and systems**

The general thrust of the spiritual scene today falls into one of two camps: the traditional or the “New Age.” Both of these categories, of course, cover systems with vast differences.

Still, I'd like to make some **ridiculously stereotypical and imprecise generalizations.**

The traditions, on the good side tend to be:

- Embedded in a strong institutional structure and community

- Time-tested
- Knowledgeable about a body of scripture
- Mostly respectful of the intellect

Unfortunately they also tend to be:

- Rigid and hierarchical: open mainly to an elite
- Not open to new views
- Unnecessarily obscure
- Often repressive of desire

New Age systems, on the other hand, are praiseworthy because they:

- Are compassionate, accepting, and non-judgmental
- Keep things simple and accessible to the masses

On the other hand they often:

- Are oversimplistic
- Dismiss the value of the intellect
- Are sappy and sentimental
- Pay little attention to emotional preparation
- Have overly indulgent ideas about desire

Both the traditions and the New Age philosophies usually have a fairly one-note idea of how to deal with problems of

motivation and negative emotion. When I say problems of motivation, I am talking about conflicts with wanting to do what you “know” you should do. It’s the kind of issue you might have when you know you’re “supposed to” get up in the morning and run, but don’t want to, or when you know you should stop smoking and you don’t. It encompasses all kinds of self-destructive behavior. As for negative emotions, I mean the obvious: feelings like anger, sadness, regret, guilt, etc.

The usual recommendation in nearly every case boils down to one of a few options: simply allow yourself to be aware of the problem without any judgment; take some simple practical step; remember some key bit of philosophical knowledge (“I am one with everything”); or give yourself a pep talk (“if not now, when?”).

These are indeed useful insights, and they all have their place, but by themselves they are woefully inadequate for most people. Moreover, they are lost opportunities.



I’m obviously biased by what helped me, but I believe neither of these camps has it right. First, unlike most in the New Age camp, I think the intellect needs to be respected and allowed full questioning and a wide range. For the seeker, it is a great tool of independent thinking, of checking to see whether something makes sense and is not bullshit. It provides a road map and yields an important, if limited, understanding of things. It is the ladder by which one climbs an important segment of the mountain. The intellect’s demands to understand are to be satisfied to the greatest extent possible; when they are, the intellect itself will recognize that there are realities that are beyond its ken.

And to that end, I have tried to provide as much relevant philosophy as I could in this short book.

The other key point is the need for much greater psychological sophistication than either side offers. The knowledge that psychoanalysis has discovered over the century since Freud about unconscious, inner conflict is to be treasured. Emotional growth and insight are crucial to spiritual growth and insight. There is also the immense power of artistic and literary expression to heal pain, discern the real meaning of desire, and most of all, to discover beauty of our individual viewpoints. All these quiet the mind. The investigation and expression of the individual self is not at war with the recognition of the true Self. The first is required for the second. All these points have too often been neglected by the two camps.

Deep-seated issues need to be addressed by some combination of psychoanalytic psychotherapy (contact your local psychoanalytic institute for a referral) with a trained therapist and an artistic-philosophical approach to experience that includes methods I call “metaphorization” and “the science of desire.” In all cases, there is an investigation into the meaning and messages which these feelings are trying to communicate.

The “science of desire” takes desire — by which I simply mean what we want — very seriously. Desire is not, as in the traditions, viewed as something to be repressed. Nor is it, however, as in many New Age systems, simply something to be indulged or dissolved with some spiritual magic wand.

Not everything in the mind can be explained and handled using purely spiritual methods. And reaching the end of the spiritual journey does not solve all mental and emotional problems, though it helps.

Desire and negative emotions need to be listened to and

unfolded. If they are intense, they are not merely to be “loved away” or “accepted” or disappeared with positive thinking and silence. They are not to be shrugged off or squelched. They carry at least two messages. One is about needs we have that we are not satisfying or being honest about. The second is the inner beauty of our own unique minds and perspectives, which we can extract and enjoy through a process of artistic expression. That expression is itself a need we must fulfill, just as we must eat and drink to pursue the spiritual quest.

Unlike the traditional systems, I don’t believe in the need for any repression of desire or emphasis on “willpower.” Rather, all it takes is to listen to and express our feelings, and *they will moderate themselves*. Sometimes motivational problems or negative emotions arise because they point to knowledge or perspectives we have but are not noticing. When we notice them and give them a voice, they integrate into our lives in a more peaceful way.

So the key difference between my system and most other spiritual systems is this joint emphasis on the importance of the intellect and the importance of exploring the messages within desire and emotion.



### Think for yourself

One more note. Every person’s circumstances differ. Every person’s temperament and background differs. Think for yourself. No teacher or teaching is to be idolized: they are but pointers and paths and maps, not the destination. They are all flawed.

Take my teaching, but with a critical mind: evaluate it to

see if it is effective in your own life, and, if necessary, adjust it.

The sincere seeker finds the right teacher and the right path. Sincerity simply means that you actually do want more happiness and truth than the world offers, and that you exert relentless effort over time to find it.