The absurd Truth, hiding in plain sight!

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Let me attempt to document the journey of a spiritual seeker in brief.

Chasing Pleasure

1. Individual experiences pains and pleasures in life.
2. Individual runs after things that provide pleasure and runs away from things that provide pain.
3. Sometime into one's adulthood (usually), one starts feeling a sense of dissatisfaction, which seems to be unresolvable.
4. Individual runs after something he thinks will bring happiness, and it lasts for a while, and then after it loses it's novelty, or a more shiny, more interesting item draws his attention, he runs after that.
5. After sometime, he forgets what the original goal of his seeking was, and gets caught in the web spun by his chain-reacting attention, until one day he remembers what his original quest was, and tries to understand what is missing from his life.

Avoiding Pain

1. Or it could be the other side of the spectrum, where the individual experiences pain or the absence of a pleasurable object (something taken away from him). Then the individual seeks to avoid the source of such painful experiences.
2. With the process of flitting between pleasure and pain, the occurrence of pain progressively becomes more frequent, as the ability to accept pain in lieu of pleasure becomes weaker with time.
3. The individual then starts to run away from the source of such pains, or hiding in the refuge of something that alters his state of mind - substance abuse etc.
4. When finally the suffering becomes intense enough, the individual becomes a seeker -- trying to find a way to end the suffering.

This is the story of almost all human beings, in varying degrees of intensity. We constantly struggle, chasing pleasure and avoiding pain. The suffering comes as a result of resisting the inevitable - change. We don't want our pleasures to diminish or disappear, and we want that no pain ever touches us. That is a source of great resistance, as a result of which our being suffers.

Caught between the Past and the Future

Along with chasing of pleasure and avoiding pain, we also are moved to bounce between the past and the future. Our minds are given to reminisce pleasurable memories of the past, or wallow in the misery of past pains. Based on the past, we play "what-if" scenarios, of how things might come to pass in the future. All the while, inflicting great mental strain on our own selves as well as those around us. It is not unusual to catch oneself getting angry at a spouse about what we think he/she might do, before such a situation has ever arisen. Eventually this strain gets so intense, that it sets us seeking a resolution with the question "How do we become free of these neurotic patterns of mentation?"
Deep Loss

When an individual suffers deep personal loss, it can set off the quest for understanding why loss happens, or why suffering happens or simply an opportunity to seek relief from the pain associated with the loss.

The Quest

So coming from these four categories, seeking begins. There are exceptions of course, but we will not address them in this article.

What does one initially seek? Practical means to end their suffering, or finding happiness. Spiritual salvation (Moksha, Mukti) are rarely the goal for the neophyte seeker. They are just seeking a cessation of their suffering, or finding tranquility amidst the chaos of life.

These type of people will look at self-help books, read spiritual popular materials and dabble at first, and eventually find a teacher (or series of teachers) who will help them get to the next step in their journey.

I've asked many of my friends who are in the path, and they all indicate that they don't really know why they are in the path, except that it makes them feel good.

When they started, there was a curiosity about what a certain practice might help with -- better quality of life - physical well being through Yoga, Tai chi, or some similar psychosomatic practice, or just mindfulness meditation, etc. Most of them, myself included, didn't really understand what liberation or mukti was, any more than we understood quantum mechanics (some of my uber-scientific friends are exceptions). Yet, we found succor in the respective practices and stuck with them through thick or thin, until one day things started changing.

Little by little, the realization dawned that we are not the body or the mind. Then the idea that there might be some spiritual angle to this seeking, became more apparent. It moved from the realm of fiction to more plausible reality.

When Dogma becomes Cerberus

However, there is a lot of legend and lore built around the hoary subject of liberation, and most of us think that we are either somehow undeserving, or incapable of attaining liberation. I remember avoiding to meet my master, thinking somehow that he would know what kind of junk lives in my mind, and my "impurities".

Many people think like that. The modern world is very good at "polluting our minds", with wanton sexuality, violence, self-centeredness, etc. All of these are considered to be negatives in terms of spiritual traditions. There is a strong sense of moral righteousness that is associated with the spiritual world. And the sense that somehow, if a person does not live up to the morally righteous qualities expounded in the religion texts, they are unworthy of spiritual growth.

As a result of this Cerberus called Dogma, many people do not take the first step, which is always the most crucial step in their journey. They are intimidated by the
misinformation that is prevalent so widely, purely on basis of a morally righteous viewpoint, which are based on simplistic understanding for rules of conduct, such as we see in the Ten commandments.

If one was already morally "perfect", there would be no need to seek liberation, and such a being would not be suffering!

**Liberation for One means liberation **for All**

As a rule, we, apparently separate beings, go through life with the primary goal of seeking Spiritual freedom, or Moksha, whether we know it or not. In fact, most of us don't. And that's why we feel an inexplicable void in our lives, that we try to fill with things. Things or relationships to acquire, things to do, things to think of. Whenever the mind faces quietude, it scares us so, that we try to keep it occupied with stimulation.

The thing is, no one is ever unqualified for liberation. One could be the most heinous criminal in this world, or in the doldrums with an addiction of some kind. As far as the aspect of spiritual liberation is concerned, everyone is born equal. Everyone has an equal opportunity to attain liberation.

That brings us to the most important question of all -- **What IS liberation?**

Liberation, to me, is the realization of our true nature. Who we truly are, and what the source of our existence is.

To know that, we have to ascertain what we are not, first. Let us start with the question, What are we?

- Are we just an accident of nature, that have become conscious beings, through some random interaction of matter?

Or,

- We don't know, let us find out.

So long as we subscribe to the first description, there is no liberation. Even if we believe in a creator God sitting above in the heavens somewhere. Even if we were to have experiences where such a being appeared before us, and we experienced deep beatitude and bliss, and eagerly await our arrival to this wonderful realm called heaven, that would not be liberation in my book. I bet you dollars to donuts (or rupees to medu vadas if you prefer the salty/savory kind), that you would feel that same void you feel in this earthly version of yourself eventually.

And of course, if you are a materialist...I'm sorry...you just have to come back another time... :P

If we keep an open mind, and say "We don't know...let us find out", we stand a chance of finding out who and what we truly are.

You see, we are Pure Awareness that seems to have a body, a mind, which seems to interact with matter. And there is really no multiplicity of that Pure Awareness. It is all there is. Sure, there appear to be infinite beings and infinite forms of matter. The universe appears to be infinite, and so on. However, all of that is predicated on the fact that we are Aware.
When we try to find out what that awareness is, we end up finding no thing, ergo, Nothingness or Emptiness, and silence. The mind and sensory apparatuses, through which we interact with the universe, cannot find this awareness. Yet, we know, that we ARE aware. We can be aware of this or that (conscious of objects), but we cannot really investigate awareness by itself, with any of the tools of objective inquiry.

When faced with this quandary enough number of times, and with sufficient sincerity, the mind simply gives up, and stops. Then we just remain that which has never been a prisoner of the mentations, of the cravings for pleasure and fear of pain.

It becomes suddenly apparent, that all these troubles, avoiding pain, chasing pleasure, our notions about who and what we are, are all just stories that we have confabulated as part of existing in this apparent form, at this apparent time. In fact, it becomes clear that space, form, time all are creations of our mind alone. And that there is never a single moment, when we are already not liberated; because, our very being is free, and neither a victim of time, nor does it exist in space.

The absurdity of this realization is so amusing that one is given to bursting out into laughter, thinking back at the intensity of our struggles, trials and tribulations. This is that absurd truth, hiding in plain sight!