

Liberation: An Interview with Mukti by Margaret Brownlie

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If you are reading this article, most likely there is something in you seeking Liberation. Recently, I had the opportunity to meet and spend some time talking with Mukti, a teacher of the non-dual path to Awakening, whose name itself means Liberation. Like most, I knew her primarily as Adyashanti's wife. I was inspired. I found true beauty, abiding gentleness, deep, deep kindness, authentic humbleness, wide-openness, easy humor, depthful clarity, and gentle authority—the kind that comes from Knowing. She has only been formally teaching for a few years, she has published no books, yet she is also not just the new kid on the spiritual circuit. She has spent her

life studying the work of Christ, Paramahansa Yogananda, and the Zen non-dual teachings of Adyashanti, following her own path to Liberation, and ripening that for its own sake, until her teaching is instantly recognizable as a true compass for others.

Your teaching is growing really rapidly right now, but to many you're a new name and a new face. What can you tell us about your teaching about how you came to it?

I find the teaching to be fairly simple, in the sense that the same underlying message seems to come through over and over: that it's possible to live without a sense of inner division when one's willing to be willing, and to be curious, and question what is true, what is real, what is living this life. This attitude of receptivity can be facilitated by letting the familiar positions and knowings of the thinking mind rest and relax out of the center, and by sensing into a knowing of a greater order. So, this is the message I come back to over and over again, because many people experience this sense of inner division as conflicting parts of themselves, or they have feelings about how they view things on the inside and then how life is presenting on the outside, and things not jiving with something deep in them that has a love of wholeness and harmony. This sense of division, or lack of harmony, can cause great suffering. There's a tremendous opportunity that I've discovered in my own experience: to really come to know what wholeness is or harmony is, or what intelligence is when not divided.

And how did you come to that?

From as early as I can remember, I had this great desire for people to be kind to one another. I had this sense, somehow, that there was the capacity within us to have a sense of what brotherhood or sisterhood or living in harmony could be. As a little child, I remember watching people and they would do unkind things to other people. I could see that they themselves were in pain and something in me felt that there's just got to be a more loving way. Later, when I was exposed through my family to Christianity, it really took the form of desiring to know the path of Christ in Christianity. He seemed to be this exemplary person who was able to unite people and to heal, not only physically, but more to heal a sense of ignorance of not knowing their Godliness or their Divinity. And then I think it matured. Through my exposure to Zen or non-dual teachings, I came to an interest in knowing what is Undivided, what is Unmoving, what is Stillness, what is Constancy. So, I would say, those were the main factors that propelled me along. And there was this deep knowing that I wouldn't be satisfied until I gave everything to This that my heart longed to know and to see.

You mentioned that Christ was one of the influences on your path, what others still influence where you come from now?

In my formative years I was very drawn to the life of Christ and stories of Christ and I went to Catholic schools from grade school all the way through university so it was an influence. At the same time I had a parent, and later both parents, who became very interested in eastern teachings, and particularly the teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda. So, while I was attending Catholic schools, I was also attending services where I began to be introduced to eastern thought and to meditation. I think that's where I very first heard about self-realization or realization, and that it was possible.

I had exemplary teachers in Yogananda's lineage that lived that realization, and I found that incredibly inspiring. I saw that it wasn't all about Christ being the only son of God but that there's all of these great beings who lived that Christ Consciousness or God Realization. That began to open up this window, and even got me to think more on a global stage, of how, all over the world, there were people like me who were seeking these deep truths, and seeking ways to open to the best within them. I saw, "Oh, it's not just limited to one path. These great traditions are happening everywhere." As a young person that was rather revolutionary I was exposed to different forms of meditation in that practice, and also Hatha Yoga. I began to have more of a relationship with sitting still and quietness and letting the mind settle to some degree or another. I can't say I was great at it. But also, through Hatha Yoga I was able to let my energies be more redirected to the body and its wisdom. Those were tremendous influences on me. Studying Chinese medicine also began to open my mind and to restructure the way I perceived the world in a way that was far less linear and much more holistic. And the other greatest influence in my life was Adyashanti. His non-dual teachings and the flavor of his Zen background has deeply fed me in the last decade or more.

You have been influenced by body practices in your own life, yoga and acupuncture. When you speak of loving both the form and the formless, how does that relate for you?

The most intimate form we have, that we're most intimately connected with, is our own body, and if one has the eyes to really see, it's constantly teaching us and showing us. It's a great meter of what's true, what begets Wholeness, or what feels harmonious. Often it's overridden by the thinking mind, but with practices in which one is willing to set the thinking mind aside for a while and devote time to nurturing one's body, one can develop a tremendous relationship with that wisdom that the body so affectively and directly communicates.

How does that relate to the Formless?

I don't see Form and Formlessness as two different things. Formlessness is the greatest mystery that we can encounter and this mystery moves into expression and form as everything that our senses can perceive. It's not so much that they relate to one another but that they really are one and the same. The One as form is registered in the senses and the One as formlessness can only be known through consciously being the mystery that we are. This is not a knowing of thought but a knowing through conscious being.

I notice that, when I speak of you and Adyashanti, sometimes, there's a wariness of a western teacher having a non-western name. How did you come to go by Mukti?

Originally I was given the name by Adyashanti. He had an inspiration one day, early on, to come to the group that he was teaching and give everybody a name. This is so typical of the spontaneous nature of Adya. So, he came with names for about ten people, some of which were Sanskrit and some of them were not. I can't speak to his reasoning, if any, but I do know that for many people I've talked to who've been given a name, they sit with the meaning of it, and often they have a curiosity to realize the meaning of that name. Let's say, the meaning might be the name for a quality or an aspect of the Divine. They sit with that name, almost like a koan, to actual-

ize it within themselves.

When he gave me the name Mukti, which is often translated as Liberation, or The Great Release, it was very much a gift for me, and I was very private with it. I just held it in my heart. Very few people knew that I was ever given a name, and I didn't have any desire to use it publicly. For eight years or so, I did not. Probably the reason I didn't is because I didn't want to create any barrier with people who I would meet who may feel like it was strange or foreign, or unfamiliar, or off-putting or something. Being a person I mentioned earlier who very much had an appetite for harmony, I didn't want anything that might cause division. However, when Adya asked me to teach, it just came to me in an instant, "You will go by the name Mukti." I had no resistance. And I know well enough from different life experiences that when that type of knowing comes, with that type of nonnegotiable, factual, this-is-the-way-it-is feeling, that there is nothing within me that has any desire to do anything otherwise. I had no story about whether I should or shouldn't do that. It was just a given.

This Liberation that is your namesake, it seems that's what we all really want. What does that mean, and how do we get it?

What does liberation really mean? This is the golden question and this is a tremendous inquiry for anyone who truly wants to know that. I don't know that everyone wants liberation. A lot of people want their idea of what it is. Perhaps, they view it as a state that will feel great all the time, or like a "get-out-of-jail-free card," as Adya says. But liberation—it doesn't answer to our desire to feel better. There's this overwhelming tendency for people to assert what it is that they want and in that assertion they are denying what is already here, what is already present. There is no being free of what is. One might even say liberation, by its nature, affirms reality as it is.

And you ask, "How do you get it?" The best way I know how to point the Way is to invite or even challenge people to cease those efforts to deny what is present and to withdraw the energies that feed this sense of "me" that has this incredible, desirous appetite to seek. By reinvesting one's energy, by seeing what is present already, what is here already, what is actually living this life, one can come to realize the true nature of Self, the true nature of reality.

How do we cease those efforts? Well, ultimately there is no "how" to ceasing; ceasing is the result of no longer striving and seeking. People strive and seek because they believe that they will be fulfilled by what they are seeking. Very few people consider that fulfillment, often brief, comes when things are attained because for that moment, seeking ceases. So, first one must see how seeking itself can cause suffering. Once that is seen clearly, one loses the appetite to seek. For some time, seeking may continue to varying degrees, but eventually the energy for it runs out. Seeking can take different forms. For example, it can manifest as accumulation of possessions or as accumulation of beliefs and concepts that one identifies with. The beliefs and concepts that cause great suffering are those which divide up experience and argue with reality. For example, "This is right, and this is wrong," or "This shouldn't be" are concepts that we cannot know to be true outside a thought that says they are. Few people question the real truth of these judgments, opinions, and beliefs or consider what their experience is when such positions are suspended or dropped.

You spoke about reinvesting your energy. We often think of this kind of shift we call Liberation as something that takes place in seclusion or on retreat, but is awakening in any way different for a contemporary person in a mainstream culture? Does it require withdrawing?

Awakening is awakening, regardless of time. If one finds within him or herself an impulse toward liberation, toward knowing and being what is real, that person will experience that movement of Consciousness and have the opportunity to stop and be consumed by that, regardless of what society or historical age they live in. Perhaps one's path prior to awakening is different for a contemporary person. We do have some interesting factors in this age with all the worldwide communications, and the scope of what the contemporary person has being input

into their consciousness.

There's a lot of news and things that are understandably disturbing that people might fixate on or become identified with in ways that create tremendous suffering. This might be quite different than a life of a monastic up in the high mountains where the scope of input that they receive is of a whole different scale, lesser scale. Most contemporary persons don't have the support of, let's say a monastery. And yet, monastics have their own challenges—different societies, different challenges, just different sets of parameters. Somebody in a different age and time may have searched or walked or traveled across countries to find someone who could point the way. Now they can just Google and get to know teachers on the web. So it's a different ball game, same ball. As to being in seclusion, awakening doesn't require physically withdrawing, but it does require a willingness to live a life that's not centered around grasping for what one wants and pushing away what one doesn't want. That push-pull movement of desire draws us into illusion and is what obscures our true nature.

And your own Liberation, how did that unfold?

I suppose there are infinite factors but my story has some themes. From very early on I made choices at different junctures that were informed by this great sense of wanting to know that which is Whole or Harmonious, Without Judgment, that which is Undivided. So, when I look back over my life, continually, through different relationships or different jobs, I would choose over and over again by following something deep within me that I could just sense was steering me towards the discovery of that. At different times I might have called it my Inner Guru or my Deepest Knowing. And so, that's an overall theme. And then also, just a sense of deep listening: truly wanting to know the way, and listening deeply to that inner wisdom and my body wisdom to show me more and more how to act in the world, how to be in the world as a person, but also how to come to know myself more deeply. I can't even say that I can take credit for those things. It was just something moving me to be that way. Ultimately I think it was a willingness to stop, to stop even the searching, to stop thinking I knew anything and just being willing to get in the back seat.

More specifically, on the day when I had the most significant identity shift I was listening to Adya speak about Stillness and that inner knowing that was seeking to know itself lit up, like a heat seeking missile, with this question that didn't come from my mind but was deep within me: "What is Stillness?" I sat in meditation to really open myself up to discovering what Stillness might be. It wasn't an answer to be offered to the mind, but the question delivered me to direct experience of what always is, what is ever present, what is unmoving. In the days to follow, that flowered into that which is forever unchanging and unmoving expressing itself as everything that changes and moves and births itself as form. Since then, there's been ever more seeing of how that comes into form, and how it forgets itself. There's been more and more welcoming into remembrance of all of that which has forgotten its True Nature, and in that remembering there's been a welcoming of all those parts of myself, and in turn of others, that feel separate due to a forgetting that they are the Whole.

There's stillness that comes from you speaking about all that, and then there is life. On your web site there's this wonderful picture of you and Adya at Disneyland and you both look like you're having so much fun. When I first saw that it was such a contrast to most 'spiritual' web sites—it was a delight. Is this where Liberation leads? To that joy?

Liberation leads to far less and far more than people can imagine. It can be very ordinary, and yet in that ordinariness it has an exquisite beauty, and it includes everything. So, it includes the joyous times. It includes the bitter-sweet times. It includes the difficult times, and there is an overwhelming sense that none of it is to be missed, that you wouldn't miss any of it for the world. So in that sense, there's very much a dearness to things—which might bubble up as joy or may be very quiet. There's no longer a sense of someone who needs to have a say in that. It's all an expression of our True Nature. The knowing is that what you are is enough in and of itself—that no experience, joyous or not, can add to or take away from what you are. You are quite enough as you are.