
ENLIGHTENMENT

"If the spiritual traditions are not religions, as commonly conceived, then what are they? They are better thought of as systems for understanding and promoting deep personal change. And they derive from the teachings of individuals who have themselves undergone a lasting transformation of a particular kind. In this transformation their attitudes to the fundamental human questions that concerns life and death, change and bereavement, happiness and suffering, responsibility, relationship and identity have been altered irreversibly and radically. And by 'attitudes' I do not mean 'opinions', but rather the basic personal stances that they have taken — that we all have taken — on these matters, often without even realising that we have done so. The transformation (often called 'enlightenment') is something you do not get over. Once it has happened it permeates your actions and perceptions, feelings and motivations, completely. People who have been through it tend to be described by others as simple, natural, genuine and straightforward; serene and peaceful yet alert and full of life and vitality; wise in their words and economical and effective in their actions; kind, friendly, gentle and considerate in their dealings with people, perceptive and intelligent; at ease in their bodies and at home in the world. They seem to have shed the neurotic baggage that the rest of us reluctantly carry about: anxiety, irritation, resentment, regret, guilt, meanness, greed, possessiveness, worry, confusion and the rest of the familiar catalogue. And while we look on with envy, or even disbelief, they assert that this transformation is available to all. What we see as the inevitable minuses that must come along with the plus of being alive, they see as being the unwanted and unnecessary by-products of some mistakes we have made in the way we look at things. The spiritual traditions explain very precisely what these mistakes are, and offer equally precise techniques for undoing them."

From the Introduction to *Beyond Therapy*
The Impact of Eastern Religions on Psychological Theory
and Practice edited by Guy Claxton
