

## The Scientific Study of Enlightenment

**Ad van der Ven\***

*Department of Pedagogy, Institute for Learning and Development, Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands*

**\*Corresponding Author:** Ad van der Ven, Department of Pedagogy, Institute for Learning and Development, Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

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The study of enlightenment can only be undertaken on the assumption that such an ideal state does indeed exist. Examples of past persons widely believed to have been enlightened were Buddha (also known as Siddhattha Gotama or Siddhartha Gautama or Buddha Shakyamuni), Osho (also known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh), and Jesus (also referred to as Jesus of Nazareth). They all had many things in common, and one of them was that they were somehow completely at peace with the phenomenon of death. As soon as a person becomes aware of himself in his development from childhood to adulthood, he/she also becomes aware of the finitude of his/her earthly existence, in other words of the inevitability of death. For many, this is a terrifying thought that they grapple with all their lives. The enlightened person no longer seems to have that fear and, indeed, seems fully satisfied with the thought of death. For this reason alone, the study of the enlightened state is of paramount importance to psychology, because the ultimate goal of psychology as a practice is to bring happiness to the client.

However, the question is how the study of the state of enlightenment should take place as an empirical research study. The obvious way is to rely on the sayings and actions of the enlightened person himself. In the case of Jesus and Buddha, these acts and sayings are known only secondhand, so it is never certain to what extent what was written was actually true. This must be taken into account when studying the surviving texts. In Osho's case, there are an incredible number of books available that contain the literal accounts of Osho's speeches that he gave daily, several times a day for many years.

Moreover, it is important to be guided by the fact that science is always primarily about making the incomprehensible understandable. An example of this is Jesus' mysterious answer to Martha's question at the tomb of Lazarus. In John 11:17-26 NIV (New International Version) Bible translation one can read: On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Jesus' answer is very mysterious. Just what does it mean that you will live, yet die bodily, and what does it mean that if you believe in Jesus, you will live? What does it mean that Jesus says here, "The one who believes in me . . ." and not "The one who believes me . . ." <sup>1</sup>. Finally, one may wonder whether there really is such a thing as 'enlightenment'. For the answer the following short story.

A few decades ago, the author of this article met a man who lived all alone (he was not in a relationship) and slept in a Volkswagen van on the university campus, where the author was then employed. During the day, the man always sat next to the doorman with a book in hand. It was unclear whether he actually read. He also looked quite shabby and no one spoke to him. The author once asked him whether something like 'enlightenment' really existed and what it was. The author was momentarily unaware of it, but the man looked up at the fluorescent lights that burned above where he was sitting. The man also wrote a book [1] on wisdom entitled *Tao Stoics* with the subtitle *Late Twentieth Century Lessons in Wisdom*.

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<sup>1</sup>Another issue here in this context is whether Lazarus really died. The assumption that Lazarus was not really dead is supported by the fact that at the time the cave was opened there was no scent of corpses, something Martha feared.

## Bibliography

1. León L. "Tao stoics: late twentieth century lessons in wisdom or subjects for discussion". Library of the Radboud University Nijmegen, Nijmegen, The Netherlands, eBook, (1990).

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