



# Three Steps to the Democratization of Enlightenment

A Center for World Spirituality White Paper

This white paper suggests that the Democratization of Enlightenment is the evolution of an enlightened society, with Enlightenment defined as knowledge of one's own True Identity. Accordingly, three conclusions are drawn: First, that enlightenment is sanity and hence a necessary ingredient for all individuals, not merely for elites. Second, attaining Enlightenment does not involve denying individuality, but grasping a key distinction between separateness and uniqueness. Third, the goal of enlightenment is said to be not the evolution beyond ego, but beyond exclusive identification with ego. After these three findings, the paper suggests that the Democratization of Enlightenment is essential both for individual mental health as well as planetary survival.

**Marc Gafni**  
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# THREE STEPS TO THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF ENLIGHTENMENT

BY MARC GAFNI

## PART ONE

### STEPPING BEYOND "LOCAL MEANS GLOBAL"

I was looking with my son at Google Earth the other morning. I wanted to show him my old neighborhood in Jerusalem, which I loved. We were able to find the exact location and see it – pretty clearly in front of us. Although I knew this was possible, I had never actually done it before and it kind of blew me away. For my son it was no big deal – it was just the way it is.

We are standing at the edge of a new reality. The local world as we once knew it barely exists any longer. Local has gone global. Global is local. There is no place to hide and no place to run. No place or person is effectively ever really off the grid.

There is no local place on the planet to live, which will not be directly affected by the events in the global. In that sense global is local. On the tragic side of things that means that Osama Bin Laden can have his people fly planes directly into the World Trade Center. Several thousand people in the New York area who got up in the morning for a normal day's work on Sept 11th die painful deaths by the end of the day. Local was invaded by global. Of course, the people in the building were also not really local. There were working

at the World Trade Center, a local Manhattan address whose purpose and activity was fully global.

The financial markets are a primary case study for the evaporation of the purely local. A man in Kansas takes out a mortgage on a house. The financial instruments he uses to create that mortgage draw on and affect the entire global economy. “Global is local” also means that the results of environmental negligence in one part of the world which contribute to global warming affect everyone on the planet. These are only a few examples of the shadow side of the local and global conflation.

“Local means global” in the best scenario suggests that if we really understand that we are profoundly intermeshed and interconnected, we can consciously form a collective creative planetary intelligence. A conscious society! We can bring together into an evolutionary We-space all of the gifts, wisdom and insight of the all the different sectors of the globe. The collective intelligence that honors the autonomy of all the parts even as it transcends them into a higher love is the great possibility and promise of Spirit’s Next Move.

What we need to really get now more than we ever did before is that there is no place that is separate and no person who is separate. It is only when that realization becomes awake, alive and aware in every human being that we will be able to harness this new realization of love and interdependence to create what will truly be a better world. This is the way forward to a conscious society, what it means to harness the energy of love into a new constellation of Eros that allures our reality to take its next evolutionary leap.

Only such a conscious society would be able to powerfully address vitally pressing needs of the planet in a way that no local consciousness is able to do. Curing disease, ending poverty sex, trafficking, insuring quality education, catalyzing entrepreneurial creativity and insuring the basic dignities for all beings – all of these things requires a new consciousness. More specifically, what philosopher entrepreneur John Mackey has called *conscious society*.

This new consciousness that I am describing is not a new idea. The most advanced segments of all great societies actually achieved some measure of that precise consciousness which I am describing. And they had a name for it: Enlightenment!

Now they could not see the global interconnectivity as the obvious reality that we see it to be. The most evolved spiritual elites in every society accessed a lived knowing of interconnectivity of all being. They knew in a first-person perspective what we might call the wholeness of reality, the knowing that every part is part of larger whole and that reality is interconnected part/wholes all the way up and all the way down.

Classical Enlightenment is generally understood to be precisely this knowledge that separation – between you, and me between you and everyone else, between human beings and nature and ultimately between human beings and God, is not real. This much is correct.

Separation is not real. If you know your true essence, then you know that you are not merely a skin-encapsulated ego, but rather you are part of the seamless coat of the universe. This knowing is not a dogma but a dharma. It is the true nature of reality revealed by the eye of the spirit. The eye of the spirit, when properly deployed, opens a window into the interior face of the cosmos.

This lived realization of the true nature of reality is what is called Enlightenment. All of the most subtle and speculative minds that ever live in virtually every society have access to this enlightened consciousness. Collectively they served as a kind of strange attractor, which seduced all the great religions and ultimately all of reality, towards a higher and nobler consciousness.

The enlightened ones were subversive evolutionary forces, which undermined the dominance of the ego with its pettiness and grasping. They were the affirmation of “faith history” over “power history.” Faith understood in this context means faithful to the memory of our true nature, which is the hope of the future. Collectively the enlightened beings in all the great lineages incarnate a vision of the possibility of possibility. They are a beacon of light in what is all too often nasty and brutish darkness.

Today the enlightened consciousness held by the spiritual elites is no longer enough. We need to move towards a world in which greatness and Enlightenment is not limited to the elites. We need to free up the enlightened creativity of entrepreneurial spirit. We need to create the shift in perspective necessary to hold the new global reality. We must democratize the core capacity which has always been charged with holding global consciousness – namely, Enlightenment.

Enlightenment does not mean spiritual perfection. It does not mean a constant of meditative bliss, which is indifferent to the world. What Enlightenment does mean in a post-postmodern context is the realization that you are – at your core – inseparable from Source and that you are holding world-centric and even Kosmocentric consciousness from which you experience both compassion for and identity with the larger world evolutionary context of all that is. This kind of consciousness needs to go viral.

Enlightenment must mainstream. We can only accomplish this through what I began to call a few years back, “The Democratization of Enlightenment.” Perhaps for the first time in history this is a genuine possibility. One of the factors that opens this up as an authentic world potential at this moment in history is the fact that the interconnectivity and interdependence of all reality which used to be only accessible through mystical consciousness is not a self-evident characteristic of reality. However, as we shall see at a later point in this conversation, if the democratization of Enlightenment is to become a genuine option for the mainstream other important hurdles will have to be overcome in the very understanding of Enlightenment itself.

To recapitulate:

*Every generation is responsible for its own evolution of consciousness. The evolution of consciousness is nothing less than the evolution of love. Love deepens into ever more profound contact and intimacies even as it expands to include ever widening circles of caring and concern. The evolution of consciousness, which is imperative in this generation, is no less than the democratization of greatness. From the perspective of consciousness, this means no less than the democratization of Enlightenment.*

The democratization of Enlightenment is the core evolutionary adaptation required in this generation. This is the adaptation required for the evolution of consciousness, which is the evolution of love for our time. Such an evolutionary leap is for the first time in history both absolutely possible and absolutely necessary in our generation. The confluence of necessity and possibility is not mere coincidence. It is rather the very nature of cosmic love.

The democratization of Enlightenment is not dissimilar from the democratization of governance, which was

the demarcating characteristic of what was termed the Western Enlightenment. In the old world, the belief was that only a very narrow elite has the power, authority, or ability to think beyond survival needs and hold the bigger picture wisdom necessary for benevolent governance. The emergence of the Western Enlightenment birthed a watershed shift in his understanding. For the first time in history there was a realization that the common man and woman has both the right and the required ability to engage in governance. This leap forward into democracy was essential in supporting the advances the world was to make in the next three hundred years. Democracy released a new entrepreneurial creativity, which powered the age of reason and beyond. To power the next stage of human history where the local and the global have collapsed into one, what is necessary is democratization – not only of government structures but also of Enlightenment itself.

## PART TWO

### THREE STEPS TO THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Enlightenment is an awesome thing. It changes the game in every way.

It is probably the single most important commodity of consciousness necessary for your personal fulfillment and depth. Want to be free? Want to be good? Want to be creative? Tap into enlightened consciousness and you are on the way!

Enlightenment is also the single most important evolution of consciousness necessary to create the kind of global commons and We-space necessary to chart successfully the next steps in the great Universe story.

Enlightenment is the mind/heart technology that is absolutely essential if we are to transcend the contractions of individual and national ego that are the source of so much suffering. Only an enlightened community of nations can take this planet and all of us living in it the next critical step. So anyone who cares about their own life, the life of their loved ones and the life of their children and grandchildren – necessarily must care passionately about Enlightenment.

There are even those of us that are calling for the “democratization of Enlightenment” as the critical next

step in the evolution of consciousness. That means that for the first time in history – Enlightenment needs to – and can – become a genuine option for the average Joe. No longer the exclusive province of the esoteric elites, Enlightenment has come down from the mountain and is seeking the Promised Land. The Promised Land is the democratization of Enlightenment in which enlightened consciousness will become – to different degrees – available to ordinary human beings. The democratization of Enlightenment is not entirely dissimilar to the democratization of governance that took place in the eighteenth-century when democracy replaced monarchy. In the same way – a world which is top-down driven by authority can now move towards an authentic democratization of Enlightenment.

And yet for all of that, the conversation on Enlightenment lives on the fringes of society. The people talking about it in niche publication are few. The amount of people who would say that Enlightenment is a core goal of their life is fewer than few. Enlightenment is rarely taken seriously in the mainstreams of our society. It is certainly not considered a genuine option for the normal, healthy, well-adjusted individual who is gainfully employed and in loving relationship. As a matter of fact if you mention genuine spiritual Enlightenment in particular places it may cost you big time. For example, if Barack Obama were to talk about becoming spiritually enlightened as a goal for Americans or others around the world – he would most certainly lose the upcoming election. If you put Enlightenment in the title of your book you may rest assured that you will lose at least fifty percent if not significantly more, of your readership.

But if Enlightenment is so good, if it can deliver on such significant promises both for the individual and culture, then why is it not taken seriously? I mean really, if Enlightenment can move you past the petty contractions of your coiled narcissistic ego, and open you up to vast love, intention, energy, and wisdom, who wouldn't want it? Maybe it is just a marketing question? Enlightenment clearly seems to need a good marketing firm (naturally one that is hip to the cutting edges of social media). Marketing companies manage to achieve stable profitability through marketing candy bars, salad dressing and all manner of home appliances. Surely Enlightenment is not harder to market than salad dressing.

This really is a conundrum. Enlightenment is the ultimate product with the best endorsements around, from all of the world's mystical traditions. All of them walked the Enlightenment path, did the Enlightenment

practices and came out significantly transformed. And it is in a sense a product, which everyone is in need of, in a pretty dire kind of way. So what seems to be the problem? Why does Enlightenment not go mainstream?

Stated simply there seem to be two core issues that we need to understand if we are going to open up the genuine possibility of Enlightenment going viral. This is a critical issue simply because Enlightenment going viral – what we have called the democratization of Enlightenment – is precisely the kind of evolutionary shift in consciousness we so vitally need to successfully respond the new world conditions. Utterly essential issues like world hunger, infant mortality, poverty and much more would begin to disappear if we reached a critical mass of people holding some level of enlightened consciousness.

Both of these core issue will be addressed in the remainder of this article, so keep reading.

The first is: What is Enlightenment? Underneath all of the spiritual platitudes and generic sound bites, no one seems to be too sure just what is Enlightenment anyways.

So let's clarify this issue. That will not be hard to do because Enlightenment is actually very clear.

Enlightenment is not an advanced spiritual state for the elites. Rather – stated very simply – Enlightenment is sanity. No more and no less. Now, once we understand that Enlightenment is sanity, the idea that it should be limited to the spiritual elites becomes absurd. Sanity is not a commodity for the elites; it is a survival necessity for virtually everyone.

So what do we mean when we say that Enlightenment is sanity?

Simple. Say you and I meet and I tell you that I am Barack Obama. When I say it the first time it might be funny. The second time is a bit strange. But clearly you assume that I KNOW that I am not *really* Barack Obama. But after a while I keep insisting that I am, and you realize that I actually think I am Barack Obama. At this point you realize that I am insane. Insanity means – among other things, the inability to correctly identify yourself. If you think you are someone other than who you really are, well that is more than a bit crazy. Sanity means to know your true identity.

The basic premise of enlightened realization is that you are not merely a skin-encapsulated ego. You are not merely your separate self. The belief that you are merely a separate self is simply stated – insane. Really crazy. The realization of Enlightenment is that YOUR true self is THE true self. And that the total number of true selves in the world is One. The realization of Enlightenment informs you that you are not separate. You are not separate from the whole, from source, from all of reality. You are an indivisible part of a larger whole, indeed the largest whole – the seamless coat of the universe. When you wake up, you know your being to be inextricable and indivisible from consciousness itself. You furthermore realize that that entirety of the largest field, the God field, and reality itself – lives in you as the essence of your being.

This confusion between thinking you are merely a separate self and not a True Self is far more significant than the relatively minor identity confusion between Marc Gafni and Barack Obama. This is a massive confusion in identity. Said simply to think you are merely a separate self is well ... kinda of crazy. It is insanity. To wake up to your true nature, which is your True Self, your correct identity, is not an advanced spiritual state. It is simply sanity. Now you understand what I meant earlier when I said, Enlightenment is Sanity.

Once you get this, my next statement will sound a little less crazy. Here it is. Not only does Enlightenment equal sanity but also “normal” consciousness is insane. That means that what is called normal consciousness – meaning your default experience, as a separate self – is really crazy. Insane. Now if you do not think normal consciousness is insane then remember this: normal consciousness is the belief that you are a separate self. It is the core human experience of separate self that produces most human suffering. The root of brutal conflict, grasping, pettiness and murder of all forms is the delusion that you are a separate self. As separate self you protect your turf and inflict pain and hurt on those who seem to violate your space. The deluded consciousness of separate self is directly responsible for twenty million children dying in the world this year! – of malnourishment and starvation. Is that not insanity, my friends? The deluded consciousness of separate self is directly responsible for one hundred million people being brutally killed by other people in the twentieth century alone. Is that not insanity, my friends?

So now the equation makes sense. Simply put, Enlightenment is sanity. Normal consciousness is insane. Clearly if Enlightenment means sanity, then the democratization of Enlightenment is not a luxury but an absolute necessity. We all need to be fundamentally sane! Occasionally we might get a bit crazy and think that we are merely separate selves but we always need to return to our core sanity. Sanity = knowing the nature of your reality, which at minimum means to know your True Identity.

But we are still not home yet! A huge conundrum still exists which really is the proverbial elephant in the room. If Enlightenment is so great then how come so few people care about it? That was the question with which we started our conversation but now it has immeasurably deepened. Enlightenment not only liberates you from unnecessary suffering. Enlightenment not only awakens you to be lived as love. Enlightenment not only frees you from the desperate fears of the small self and awakens you to your larger True Self. More than all of that – which is really a lot – Enlightenment is sanity itself. Well that is a pretty important commodity of consciousness. But if it's so important, then why do so few people care about it? Why does putting it on the cover of your book lose you a huge part of your mainstream audience? (I am hoping my new book, *Your Unique Self, The Radical Path to Personal Enlightenment*, will be the exception and not the rule. So far so good!)

My fellow Enlightenment teachers – who are awesome in so many ways, virtually all give some version of the following two answers. The ego is very clever. It does not want to die. Since Enlightenment means dying to your ego, the ego does everything it can to prevent you from being enlightened. It holds on for dear life to prevent its own death. The ego holds on to its own story of being a separate self, a skin-encapsulated ego. Sometimes the teachers add a second reason as well to explain why Enlightenment is just not catching on. It is hard they say. It takes an enormous amount of practice to have a genuine opening to your True Self. People are lazy. They do not want to put the time or effort in to do the work. Now clearly both of these explanations of why Enlightenment is not catching fire around the world have some merit. But really only limited merit. Both explanations are true but partial. You see these explanations by the Enlightenment teachers put all of the onus on the students – that is you, dear reader – who are just not getting it. Or just not willing to work hard enough. Or they demonize the ego and make it the all-powerful

villain who is capable of stopping you from reaching your natural Enlightenment. Well... maybe...

There is however a much deeper core cause which is preventing Enlightenment from catching on. The deeper reason is that people intuitively sense that there is a fundamental flaw in the teaching of Enlightenment itself. Or at least in the Enlightenment teaching presented by virtually all Enlightenment teachers.

You see people feel like Enlightenment is about realizing that you are not separate but part of the One. Which is true. But if I am indivisible from the one, the inner voice asks, then where am I? If we are all True Self and the total number of true selves is one, then what happened to *me*? If Enlightenment means, as all the teachers seem to be saying, to move beyond separate self and realize that you are True Self, then what happens to my sense of being an individual? Moreover what happens to my super strong *holy desire* to be an individual? So again, the Enlightenment teachers say that the desire that moves you towards individuality is really a function of the ego, which needs to be transcended. “*But I feel special!*” the seeker says somewhat embarrassedly. Feeling special is a trick of the ego – the teacher virtually always responds. And then teacher continues by saying, “If you move beyond your story, beyond your ego, the delusion of being special will disappear.”

The problem is that we all think we are special. And that deep down this does not seem to be a delusion of the ego. There seems to be some core first-person perspective truth to this assertion, which is felt in some form by virtually every living being. So here is the really good news. We are all special. That deep human intuition is telling the truth. By special I mean *unique*. Each one of us is a Unique Self. And I am not referring to uniqueness at the level of separate self-consciousness. Rather when you wake up beyond separate self you realize that your true self is The True Self. But the realization of true self is not the endgame of Enlightenment. Enlightenment itself is evolving. We now realize that there is another great step of Enlightenment beyond True Self. You actually wake up a second time and realize that your True Self sees through its own Unique Perspective. Every True Self sees through a unique set of eyes. Your Unique Perspective is the expression of your Unique Self. Unique Self is the awakening beyond True Self.

You see – and this is a big deal – Enlightenment teachings show you that you need to move beyond separate self which is the source of all suffering. But the assumption is always made – wrongly – that separate and uniqueness are somehow identical. If you move beyond your separate self that must mean that you leave your uniqueness behind. This is the implicit assumption or explicit assertion in virtually all Enlightenment teachings.

But it is not true. This mistake is based on a false conflation between separateness and uniqueness, which are actually two different qualities. You need to transcend your separate self to be liberated from suffering. You realize that you are True Self. True Self has no preferences and no perspective. This is the first step towards Enlightenment. It is literally a mind-blowing step. But it is still only a step. In your second step you awaken to the realization that ultimately Enlightenment always has a perspective. Your perspective. Your True Self awakens more deeply and realizes that it is Unique Self. Your Unique Self, which is True Self seeing through your irreducibly unique perspective. Your Unique Self is the personal face of essence that lives in you, as you, and through you. Your Unique Self is God having a Marc experience. Your Unique Self is reality Godding through you. Your Unique Self is the song only you can sing, the poem only you can write. Your Unique Self is your irreducibly unique way of loving, laughing being and becoming that is yours and yours alone. The realization of your Unique Self informs you that the singular constellation of sacred evolutionary synchronicities that formed you, have never and will never, ever occur again. This however is not uniqueness on the level of the ego, which is pre-True Self. Rather it is the realization of radical uniqueness, which emerges on the other side of true self. True Self + perspective = Unique Self.

At the level of Unique Self you are totally and absolutely special. You are irreducibly unique, unlike any other. Depression is replacability. Joy is a byproduct of living your Unique Self. Loneliness is your inability to share your Unique Self with another person. Sometimes this is because they are unable to receive your Unique Self. In other words, it's a reception problem. Occasionally your loneliness is because you lack the right words to articulate your Unique Self. It's a communication problem. But more often than not you are lonely because you do not really know your own Unique Self. You are disconnected from the

singularity that is you. It's an identity problem.

You spend most of your time trying either fit into the larger crowd {ego} or trying to melt/meditate into the One. {True Self}. The truth of the matter is – your genuine enlightened realization – is that you are Unique Self.

Sometimes the clearest way to get all of this is to simply think in terms of a puzzle piece and a puzzle. If you are at the level of separate self-consciousness then you think you are a puzzle piece and that there is really no larger puzzle. There is only you. A puzzle piece without a puzzle. If you are at the level of True Self-consciousness, then you think there is only a huge one-part puzzle. Although there seems to be lines marking unique puzzle pieces you believe that those lines are only an illusion. This is what is classically termed Enlightenment. In the evolution of Enlightenment however we now understand that there is a third and higher level of consciousness. This is the level of Unique Self Enlightenment. At this level you realize that you are a unique and distinct puzzle piece and that your puzzle pieces fits perfectly through its unique contours into a larger puzzle. You realize that you are part of the seamless coat of the universe but that the coat is seamless but not featureless.

It is the belief that becoming enlightened means losing your Unique Self that has prevented Enlightenment from going mainstream. Even though Enlightenment is the most precious gift, which can liberate you from unnecessary suffering, people would rather suffer than lose “*Me!*” Even though Enlightenment is most desperately needed evolution of consciousness to insure humanity survival, people avoid it because they sense they would have to lose their identity. And that – you feel – would be wrong. And you are right and the classic Enlightenment teachers are wrong. You do not need to give up Uniqueness in order to merge with the One. Quite the opposite. There is no True Self that does not see through a unique set of eyes. Enlightenment is not the loss of uniqueness but rather the clarification of the unique face of essence that lives as you, God having a YOU experience.

The true end game of Enlightenment is Unique Self Enlightenment. This happens when you clarify the distortion of the ego. This does not happen by evolving beyond the ego. That will never happen. This is the

final mistake of Enlightenment teaching, which we need to point out. You never evolve beyond ego. This denial and demonization of the ego is not helpful. It simply makes the ego hide out more cleverly. There is nothing more deadly than disowned ego. Communities which disown ego are often run by shadow ego elements, which can never be clarified and owned because they are always denied.

The goal is therefore not to evolve beyond ego but to *evolve beyond exclusive identification with ego*. The way to accomplish the evolution beyond exclusive identification with ego is to expand your identity and not deny your ego. This is the first momentous leap of Enlightenment, which takes you from separate self to the great-embodied insight that Your True Self is The True Self. And – let's say it again for the last time – the total number of true selves is one. At this stage you have moved into what is classically called impersonal Enlightenment. Which is totally awesome. You have left the personal in the form of personality behind and have joined the impersonal Enlightenment fellowship. This is the level of true Self. And then you awaken ever more deeply. You realize that your Enlightenment has perspective. Your perspective. You awaken to your higher individuation. This is your individuation beyond ego. You realize that you are a unique expression of essence. Your Unique Perspectives births your Unique Gifts. Giving your unique gifts is the unique obligation and delight of your life.

Okay let's try and wrap it up here. We have taken three major steps towards the democratization of Enlightenment. First, we have shown that Enlightenment is sanity and hence a necessary commodity for every human being and not just for elites. Second, we have shown that the realization of Enlightenment is not a denial of individuality but rather the embrace of the higher individuation beyond ego, namely Unique Self. This allows for the affirmation of the core human intuition of specialness and uniqueness, just not at the level of ego but at the level of Unique Self. Third, we have undermined the denial of ego so prevalent in Enlightenment teaching by pointing out that you never evolve beyond ego rather you evolve beyond the exclusive identification with ego. Ego then is given its rightful place in the developmental scheme even as it is dethroned from its position of tyrant. These are the three core moves necessary to open the door for the

democratization of Enlightenment. And the democratization of Enlightenment is the Spirit's next great move, utterly essential both for our survival as a planetary civilization and as holy individuals.