

This is an article I wrote for the [TAT Foundation](#) a few years back. It is still pertinent in today's spiritual climate so here it is again:

In Advaita there is the notion of no doer, which denotes that there is no individual I and therefore implies that seeking and spiritual practices are of no value for who would do it and who would attain enlightenment ?

On this basis many modern teachers propose that practice and preparation are not needed since practice and preparation are not the cause of enlightenment. I would agree to the extent that a practice or set of practices cannot cause enlightenment. Enlightenment is certainly not a cause and effect phenomena. However it is an acausal phenomenon which has certain implications and this aspect is often misunderstood in the spiritual community.

In every case of genuine enlightenment that I have come across there has always been a seeking component even amongst those teachers that posit that there is nothing to be done. I can understand the mindset involved here for if I look at my own history and set of practices, I cannot say they caused enlightenment or even moved me an inch closer to it. Remember that enlightenment is not the attainment of something, rather it is closer in nature to the removal of ignorance which demonstrates that enlightenment has always been the case, irrespective of whether there is recognition of it or not.

Even though a practice or set of practices are not the cause of enlightenment, what I can say is that some practice and preparation are related to enlightenment. It is the term related that often causes the confusion as it is often thought of in terms of cause and effect.

As some people know, I have a background in psychology and as part of that training this involved a lot of experimental design and statistical analysis which I would like to utilize in order to explain the relationship between seeking and enlightenment. Do not worry there will be no complex mathematical formula or equations in this paper, but some rudimentary understanding of what is meant by causal and acausal may be fruitful.

When the term relationships are used in statistical analysis it denotes that there is a relationship between two or more things. We can find a near perfect relationship between two things, which many people would assume that one thing causes the other. But that is extremely misleading.

Consider for a moment the relationship between foot size and intelligence quota as measured by a standard intelligence test. What we would find is a near perfect correlation

between the two. A correlation is the term used to describe relationships in statistics. Does that near perfect correlation mean that one causes the other? The answer is no.

The near perfect relationship exists because when we are babies, we have tiny feet and a non-existent IQ: Non-existent because a baby does not have the capacity as yet to undergo a standard intelligence test. As we grow, our feet also grow and so does our IQ. It may not grow as much as we would like but it does grow. However, we cannot say that having larger feet is the cause of IQ because obviously one does not cause the other. All we can say is that there is a strong relationship there.

Correlations are important for many reasons but one of the primary reasons they are important is they allow for some reasonably complex predictive analysis to be made. To understand consider the relationship between academic success and IQ.

The best and most consistent predictor we have of attaining a Ph.D. is IQ. Generally to get a Ph.D. an IQ of at least 115+ is needed. The term predictor is an unfortunate term to use as it again tends to imply causality. To remove those implications think of a predictor in terms of probability.

We might say something like if there an IQ of 115+ then there is a 20% probability of attaining a Ph.D. That 20% figure is arbitrary by the way as I am far too lazy to look up the actual probabilities and when all said and done it is not that important. The more central thing is to understand the concept.

Obviously we cannot say that having an IQ of 115+ causes the attainment of a Ph.D. It would be sheer nonsense to say so. But what we can say is the probability of attaining a Ph.D. is significantly improved if our IQ is above 115. In short the odds are more in our favour.

We can factor in other variables and begin to build a model. For example, we might add motivation, amount of stress etc. and see that probability rise further. Let's say to 40% just for the sake of it. So now the odds are beginning to swing more in our favour and the chances of attaining a Ph.D. have significantly improved.

I would urge caution here in assuming that if we know enough variables we can build a near perfect model. That will never be the case as there is too much individual diversity and there is also the notion of randomness that comes into play in these sorts of predictive models. For example, we might have an IQ of 115+, be highly motivated, handle stress reasonably well and so on, but none of these, even in combination guarantee a Ph.D. They

only signify that the probability has increased.

So let us bring this knowledge home and apply it to seeking and enlightenment. The seeking in itself is not the cause of the enlightenment in much the same way that motivation would not be the cause of attaining a Ph.D. Yet seeking swings the odds more in our favour in exactly the same way that motivation or IQ swing the odds in our favour when it comes to attaining a Ph.D. It isn't the cause, but it does bear a relationship.

Of course seeking is such a generic term that covers so many facets that some practices will hinder the cause. An obvious example to illustrate, someone may be attempting to attain enlightenment via the use of hallucination drugs. The chances of them discovering that they are already what they seek are remote. Not impossible mind you, but extremely remote and unlikely.

A person who has purity of purpose, is willing to explore themselves more fully, has a high degree of motivation, is seeking to remove ignorance from their lives, willing to explore intuitive processes, has an experiential approach, is attempting to loosen their stranglehold

It is simple, if they were not born in the first place then ignorance could not be removed and the light of consciousness could not shine through the vessel. Being born didn't cause enlightenment, but it did bear a relationship to it. Without that relationship there could never be the recognition of consciousness within the vessel.

In enlightenment even under the best of circumstances we are likely speaking of a 1 in 10,000 probability. But that is far better probability than a 1 in a ten million probability. And that to me seems to be the gist of the whole seeking business. We should not seek under the impression of cause and effect, i.e. if we adhere to a certain set of practices then enlightenment is guaranteed. We should seek under the impression that we are incrementally increasing the probability of enlightenment with no guarantees. Bearing in mind of course that at best it is only a small probability to begin with.

One final thought to consider. What is the fundamental structure/essence of the dream reality (universe) built upon? Why probabilities of course. Our notions of cause and effect are antiquated, remnants of a paradigm which is slowly dying via new and exciting scientific