

Is Enlightenment a form of Neurodiversity?

Recently I came across the word “*Neurodiversity*”. Great concept. It relates to a brain that functions differently. Since the term has been coined by the social scientist Judy Singer¹ in 1999, it was applied to all kinds of neurodevelopmental conditions a person can suffer from.²

Neurodiversity – two networks of the brain

I am neurodivergent as well, but I don’t suffer from it. I don’t think my kind is a disease. On the contrary, I think it is the cure for what is called “the human condition”. In my experience, the normal brain caused a lot of suffering in me, until I found out how to go beyond this. I will explain.

My story with neurodivergence in short: when I was born, my brain functioned great. I was in the flow continuously, in constant awe and wonder about this thing called life. Later neuroscientists contributed this state of consciousness to the working of the so called task positive network. It is that part of the brain that is operative when new tasks are performed with maximal awareness. I call it “the flow network”. Like an artist doing his/her thing at a performance, or creating a new work of art. Or any task that we do so concentrated, that we forget who, where and when we are. Ego, Space and Time dissolve into One. Being in this flow resulted in me being a pianist in youth, later in life a professor, painter, poet, photographer and philosopher as well³ – and vice versa.

Growing up, my brain was programmed by parents and society to develop the so called default mode network, but Gary Weber, a physicist who experimented for twenty-five years with meditation and nondual practices to calm down this feature of the brain, calls it “the blah blah network”⁴. In this network the brain creates our sense of time, past and future, our sense of individuality, the whole Christmas tree of identifications⁵ we form and we think we are. It is

¹ **Judy Singer**, *Why can't you be normal for once in your life? From a problem with no name to the emergence of a new category of difference*, in Marian Corker, Sally French (eds.), *Disability Discourse*, McGraw-Hill education UK, p. 59-67, February 1, 1999.

² See Wikipedia about the lemma Neurodiversity.

³ See the [website](#) of **Debbie Parkins** and me, where many examples of our creativity can be seen. Many great occupations seem to start with “P”. Priest is another one. And then there are Parent, Potter, Pilot, Physicist and Plumber. Politician seems to be the odd one out, or is it? We had president Mandela of course.

⁴ For further explanation about these two networks see the Wikipedia lemma about Default mode network, and the relation to liberation/enlightenment [this article](#) about **Gary Weber**: **Jeff Warren**, *The neuroscience of suffering – and its end*, Psychology Tomorrow magazine, November 26, 2013. Also **Matthew A. Killingsworth** and **Daniel T. Gilbert**, *A wandering mind is an unhappy mind*, Science, vol. 330, 12 November 2010, and **Judson A. Brewer**, **Kathleen A. Garrison** and **Susan Witfield-Gabrieli**, *What about “the self” is processed in the posterior cingulate cortex?* Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, 2 October 2013, volume 7, article 647.

About **Gary Weber** see his [website](#) Happiness beyond Thought.

⁵ See **J.Paul Jordaans**, *The Santa-Clausness of Life*, Atelier Raadhuis Staete 2021, [Tale no. 16](#).

called default, because in most people, this is what happens "normally" in 99% of time. This function of the brain I call "the mind" or "ego". It is the human condition, where the roller coaster of everything that happens "to me" is observed, experienced, delighted and suffered. Here we also experience fear, anxiety, depression, and all the rushes of short lived happiness's, ecstasy. In most people, the other (more natural) flow network is only seldomly used, when in awe, or wonder, or in creativity and – probably – when in deep sleep. In them, the return of the flow network can produce a sense of Satori, or, when permanent, liberation (enlightenment).

It is typical of the confusion that current society is in, which shows in language as well, that what we call "asleep", for the brain is possibly the most "awake" state possible, not being veiled by the separation of the blah blah network. It is also the state where the brain performs most of its magic in repairing and sustaining the body, growing, replacing, re-balancing – all things that by any measure can be called "miraculous". Perhaps this is why most people love to fall asleep at night. Not only the body is tired, but their brain is longing for silence to do what it does best. In freedom at last.

Liberation: the demise of the blah blah network

Even later in life I learned to distinguish between the blah blah network and the flow network, and learned in meditation to go out of the blah blah network, also without doing other concentrated positive tasks. Just being quiet, still, I recovered the feeling I had as a kid of how it feels to be in the flow network again. The oceanic feeling of oneness. And slowly, I learned to ignore the workings of the blah blah network and got rid of almost all separating identifications⁶. The experience of being a separate person in time and space disappeared almost completely. This is sometimes called enlightenment, but I don't use that term often⁷, because it has connotations of sacredness and sage-hood that are not my own experience at all. It is quite ordinary actually – and miraculous as well. It is just about being free again. Free from the mind. It is also present any time that I am absorbed in the arts and creativity. Writing, piano playing, listening to music, writing poems, drawing and painting. Constantly in the flow, without having to do anything for it. Not lost in the flow (as absent), but found in the flow (as highly choiceless awareness). It presents as awe, wonder, delight, completeness, creativity, joy, impersonal closer than closeness, being already there, effortless. I am not religious, but if I were, I would call it god. Jesus called it "*the Kingdom of Heaven*"⁸. *Moksha* is a term that many Eastern philosophies use for it, or the *Dao*. I call it liberation, or Love.

Nowadays with modern neuro-imaging techniques, evidence to support Gary Weber's conjecture is starting to build and become more solid, but when he first experimented with it himself (from 1972 on) it was by all means a daring endeavour and proposition. I remember

⁶ **J.Paul Jordaans**, *Falling Awake – the non story of Realization*, Atelier Raadhuis Staete, 2022, [Tale no. 32](#).

⁷ I chose the word Enlightenment in the title of this Tale intently though, to try and make it dismount a bit from his high horse, to let it descent to a more normal form of divinity that we all are and can be. I hope in the future it will be more and more referred to as Liberation. I will certainly promote that.

⁸ **Matthew** 11:11, 12 and 13:11, 13:24, 13:31, 19:23, 22:2 called it the Kingdom of Heaven, while in other places it is called the Kingdom of God, see **Mark** 4:11, 26, 30, and 10:14, and the gospel of **Luke** 11:20, 13:18, 20, 29, 18:16, 17:20, 21. Also other place in the Bible refer to the term: **John** 18:36, **Isaiah** 35:1. Clearly the two phrases refer to the same thing, which is Oneness, the Self, the Source.

though when reading about it, I immediately knew he was on to something remarkable. I delight in honouring him in this little talk. Currently, he is working to develop a neuro feedback training to make it possible for everyone to get into the flow network in one or two runs in an fMRI machine.

Enlightenment is normality again

I don't mind this “abnormal” working of my brain. Because I know it is in fact how my brain was designed to be working originally. It is what in Zen (for instance by Zen master Bankei) is called “*the unborn mind*”⁹ since four hundred years ago. It is how my brain was intended to function, before other people (who were programmed into the blah blah mode) pushed me into the wrong mode myself. Since liberation, this will not happen to me anymore, or only for a very short time, after which my flow network swiftly prevails and the good flow returns again. I got to know quite a lot of other people who had the same experience. Among them are remarkably many artists. Some are only in the flow network occasionally, for instance when creating, others are there almost permanently¹⁰. When in that state, they are happy without exception. No single one of them wants to get lost in the blah blah network¹¹. Stillness leads to Oneness and vice versa.

Drugs are not about enlightenment but need to be researched

This might also explain why many people like to use sedative drugs, like alcohol and tranquilizers. These substances mostly subdue both networks in the brain, so using them doesn't really produce a state of flow, but the reduction in the blah blah network will produce some feeling of relief. Some other drugs, like hallucinogens, seem to excite the flow network without numbing the brain, but often they over-stimulate the brain and produce strange ways of consciousness that prevent us from being present in a productive way. Unfortunately, the Powers that Be (protecting the 24/7-production lines of economy) in many countries of the world have swiftly forbidden many of those drugs, except alcohol and nicotine because they were so easy to produce in private setting that they couldn't be suppressed effectively - and many of the law makers were fond of these themselves. Perversely, they also saw these drugs to be a money maker for government by taxing them. Sadly, this also means that many of the substances that, in the right dose, could be very effective medication for many illnesses of the brain, were not allowed and not further developed anymore. Only recently we see a renewed

⁹ See for instance **Norman Waddell**, *The Unborn, The Life and Teachings of Zen Master Bankei 1622-1693*, North Point Press, 2000; **Peter Haskel**, *Bankei Zen, Translations from The Record of Bankei* edited by **Yoshito Hakeda**.

¹⁰ See **David R. Loy**, *Nonduality in Buddhism and Beyond*, Wisdom publications 2019, p. 155-168 for a good impression of what being in this flow of the task positive network feels like for creators, like poets or many composers of classical music like **Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Richard Strauss, Wagner, Puccini** and for the writers **Thomas Wolfe, William Blake (Milton), Goethe, George Eliot, Dickens and Lewis Carroll**; also **Nietzsche's** definition of inspiration directly refers to the revelatory aspect of creativeness. I might expand on this in future Tales. Watch our website!

¹¹ As I explained in my earlier Tale (*What has happened? – Liberation in practice*) the end of blah blah thoughts does not mean, thinking is not possible anymore. Problem solving, reasoning are still functioning, and even better than before liberation because they are no longer troubled by self-referential stories. “Outside the box” thinking emerges more often and successfully.

interest for using and developing this type of medication¹² for problems amongst which are chronic pain, cluster headache, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mood disorders, substance use disorders and psychological distress associated with life-threatening illnesses. Seeing the effects of these medications and of mind-medication in general, I can't refrain from a conjecture that maybe Charles Darwin only saw the positive sounding half of the truth when he indicated "the survival of the fittest" as a driving force behind the evolution of life. In many biological life forms, there may be also (or perhaps predominantly) another negative force at work, which I would call "the survival of the scariest"¹³. This anxiety will have a favourable effect on survival and therefor on procreation, but at the cost of an innate disease I like to coin as Post Natal Anxiety Disorder (PNAD), not as a problem that can overwhelm the parent after the birth of his or her offspring, but as sort of pseudo psychosis for the offspring itself, that all humanity has fallen victim to. Taking to drugs is then the natural and clumsy attempt of the mind for self-medication, to be released from the anxious feeling of imprisonment in this weird incarnation. Food for contemplation.

The story of Ram Dass

Returning to enlightenment: history shows that using drugs to induce enlightenment is not possible. One can get into a temporary state of Satori at most, only to return to the normal suffering of the blah blah network as soon as these drugs wear out. Most prominently this can be learned from the story of Richard Alpert (1931 – 2019). He was a famous professor in psychology at Harvard in the 1960's, and together with Timothy Leary he pioneered in the research of psychedelics, with substances like Psylocibin, LSD-25 and mushrooms¹⁴. He liked the altered states of consciousness it produced, but to his frustration he noticed that he always returned to his normal suffering and desperate brain after a short while, no matter how often or in what dose the drugs were applied.

These experiments in the end were not to the liking of his employee and the authorities, and he and Leary lost their prestigious jobs in 1963. It was not before he went to India in 1967 learning the secret that the enlightened sages seemed to know even without the help of drugs, that he found liberation himself after living in the ashram of his guru Neem Karoli Baba¹⁵, who affectively gave Richard his new name, Ram Dass¹⁶. After that, returning to America as a liberated being, he startede teaching his newly found wisdom and became famous and colourful on a culture that has reverberated with the words "Be Here Now"¹⁷ ever since.

His eclectic approach based on a mix of Hindu and Buddhist meditation in the Theravadin, Mahayana, Tibetan and Zen Buddhist schools, and Sufi and Jewish mystical studies, combined with karma yoga and spiritual service are what we experienced as most inspiring in his being. Ram Dass referred to his realization as being a Hinduist-Jewish mix, what he called being "a

¹² **Albert Garcia Romeu, Brennan Kersgaard and Peter H. Addy**, *Clinical applications of hallucinogens, a review*, Pub Med Central, 2017 Aug. 1, published in *Exp Clin Psychopharmacol* 2016, Aug. 24 (4): 229 – 268.

¹³ And, subsequently, "survival of the scariest", for fear is a well known and strong precursor of aggression, as we can see at this very moment in history in the Ukrainian war. See the [Tale](#) "*What's in War?*" for more about this.

¹⁴ He mentions also marijuana, peyote, mescaline, DMT, DET and hashish.

¹⁵ Also known as **Maharajji**.

¹⁶ Meaning "servant of God".

¹⁷ **Ram Dass**, *Remember - Be Here Now*, Hanuman Foundation, 1978. On pages 92 – 95 there is a clear analysis of the pro's and con's of using psychedelics as an upaya (method) to gain enlightenment.

HinJew”. His alive and humouristic way of talking about his mistakes and insights, combined with mild self-irony, are very enticing and endearing.

Enlightenment remains unknowable

Of course, at the end of the day even Gary Weber’s findings are only an attempt to explain (or better: describe) what might be happening in the brain that allows us to realize Oneness through our body. But what this realization is *itself* intrinsically, is still completely unknowable. And it is no theory, not even a thesis and not even a conjecture, for it will always stay the miraculous and unfathomable unknowing that it really is. No science or drugs can ever help this. On the contrary, more and more I prefer my brain to be as clear as possible, and even drinking alcohol occasionally (one glass a week at most like I did for some years in adulthood) left me completely since liberation happened¹⁸. What can ever be explained about Oneness, is not the real Oneness.

Neuro diversity? That is fine with me. I prefer to be happy divergent and in the flow (for instance the flow of ink), silly me. I need no drugs for this, other than the ones my brain produces by itself with a little help from liberation. Life is a splendid dance, *Hua Mai*¹⁹.

Hua Mai (fka J.Paul Jordaans)
Grathem, 25 April 2022
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¹⁸ I never tried other mind drugs, except the tranquilizer Alprazolam (which is a benzodiazepine) for a few weeks, and consequently an SSRI antidepressant for continuing the tranquilizing effect on the brain, when twenty years ago I suffered temporarily from a severe anxiety disorder after a prolonged period of personal stress. After six months I slowly waned off it and never needed it since.

¹⁹ From the Chinese Hua 华 (huá) meaning "splendid, illustrious" or 花 (huā) meaning "flower, blossom" and the Japanese 舞 (mai) meaning "dance" or 麻衣 (mai) meaning "linen robe". It can also come from 真 (ma) meaning "real, genuine" combined with 愛 (ai) meaning "love, affection. The poem of this relatively unknown seclude Dutch Zen poet “*I am That*” can be read as conclusion of the Tale *How Oneness dissolves the predicaments of Life*.

J.Paul Jordaans

Inky Fingers, 2022

Fountain pen Inks on *Tomoe River* paper, 20 x 15 cm

