

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM JOEL¹

Q: What is the difference, if any, between realization and illumination?

A: In some ways, realization and illumination may be used interchangeably, in the degree that we may be illumined on a certain subject. Realization is usually used in this way: that if we have a problem, we receive a *realization* of some specific truth regarding that problem. So, while realization may be used in a general sense as to say, “I have had the realization of truth,” it isn’t often used that way. It is most frequently used in the sense of “I have had a realization regarding this particular problem, this particular ill, or this particular truth.” But illumination really means an illumination of consciousness on the subject of truth. We are never illumined just on one subject or on one problem. When illumination comes it comes in the form of an illumination of truth, an illumined consciousness of truth.

Now, realization then, may be correctly used when we have some problem or other, or are thinking of some particular truth, and we say, “Oh, I’ve had a realization about that”—either about the problem, its solution, or the truth. But when we talk of illumination, we will talk of it as the illumination of consciousness, which means illumination in truth, and that would cover the broad subject of truth.

There would be—there may be—degrees of illumination. For instance, Saul of Tarsus had an illumination on the road to Damascus, but he didn’t start out on his ministry for nine years after that. So we may assume that that illumination on the road to Damascus was merely the first of a series; that it was merely the beginning; and that somewhere in the next nine years that illumination continued to grow and evolve until he had the complete sense that sent him out on his missionary tours.

In the same way, I often think of my experience in 1928 as an illumination. It wasn’t an illumination in the sense that I gained a consciousness of truth. That’s true. It was merely an illumination of consciousness, which lifted me above the human sense of existence and enabled me to be doing healing works the very next day. Now, if you had asked me what the truth of being was, or if you had asked me what truth is, I could no more have told you after the illumination than before. The only difference in me before and after was that before the illumination, I was just an average businessman indulging the usual business experiences, social drinking, card playing, horse racing, and all the things that belong to an ordinary businessman’s human existence. But after the illumination, I never even had a thought in my head about smoke or drink or cards or horses or any of the things that ordinarily had filled my time and thought.

On the contrary, when, two days later, one of my customers who was an alcoholic, out of a clear sky said, “You could heal me if you would,” I was stunned and surprised, but I said, “If you think so, I will.” And she was healed. And the next day, another man asked for help and had a healing, and the next week someone else, and within a year, I was professionally practicing

¹ *This excerpt is from Recording 612A-1, from the 1951 Second Portland Series, “Confidential Material, Part One.” It is posted with kind permission from the Estate of Joel Goldsmith, which holds the copy protection on the recorded classes and the copyright on the transcripts. The full transcript of this recording is available at www.joelgoldsmith.com or by calling 1-800-922-3195.*

healing. Yet if you had said, “What did the illumination consist of? What was the truth of being?” I couldn’t have told you anything. I didn’t know a thing about it.

At a later period, there came little, tiny experiences of illumination that showed me the truth about certain aspects of life. It wasn’t a whole picture. It was just a glimpse here, a glimpse there, a little light here, and a little light there. It came piecemeal in that way until 1945, when the voice said, “Next year, 1946, is your year of transition.” And it was. In 1946, beginning in July, I went through an experience of being awakened out of sleep every morning at five o’clock and being caused to sit in a chair until seven—for two solid hours every day for two hours. I went through an inner illumination that seemed to open up as if I were witnessing ... oh, the equivalent of a Masonic initiation. It was as if I were witnessing a marvelous initiation, a ceremony, and being initiated into spiritual truth. That went on for two months. And that is what I really consider the first illumination that was an illumination of something that I could specifically grab hold of and say, “Now I know what this is, and this is, and this is, and I can tell it.”

That was the year in which *The Infinite Way* was completed, and from then on, every few months, I had one of those experiences that carried me further along the line. That is illumination. But if I sit down to work on some problem for you, and all of a sudden, I get the answer, I call that realization. Is that clear?