

Advaita of the Hollow Men



*We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless...*

*This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper*

- T. S. Eliot

The devil's apprentice comes to his master, terrified to report to him that the first man has become enlightened. Soon, the apprentice feared, they would be out of business. The devil said "Don't worry. We will use enlightenment to our own ends, and we will prosper." Unfortunately, the devil seemed to understand humanity quite well.

Modern day Advaita, through the personas of a proliferation of so-called spiritual teachers, is spreading the good news of instant enlightenment. This is clear confirmation that the devil has done his work – and succeeded. The increasing popularity of Advaita within the less discriminative masses of humanity is a flowering of mediocrity. It is not that there ever was a time when humanity was not mediocre. It is that mediocrity has become elevated to the position of defining itself through the concept of enlightenment and non-duality. This is the tsunami of fake spirituality that proudly waves the flag of Advaita.

Those who possess a basic level of discrimination and common sense have begun to speak about the recent 'decline of Advaita.' This statement is worth questioning. Was there ever a 'rise' of Advaita, a golden age? Certainly, if we compare the ridiculousness of today's satsang culture with the teachings of great sages such as Ramana Maharshi, there is a monumental difference. But this comparison isn't so relevant, because Ramana was unique; he was an exceptional individual who represented his own self more than he represented Advaita per se. With the exception of such isolated cases, where great beings expressed themselves using the language and concepts that Advaita provided, there never really was a golden age of Advaita. In any case, whether or not it represents a decline, the current voice of Advaita is naive and superficial. While a few very high caliber teachers used Advaita to articulate their profound experiences in the past, now people talk about it without even having a shallow realization of its essence.

Advaita was mostly popularized in the West as a result of the influence of Ramana Maharshi, whose teaching managed to reach many Western seekers. However, the boom of neo-advaita teachings has happened after the death of Poonjaji, who during his lifetime, had gathered a great number of enthusiastic but confused and often insincere western students around him. Poonjaji is popularly considered to be Ramana's successor, but Ramana did not have any successors, and in truth Poonjaji only spent a few weeks with the Maharishi in total.



Even though Poonjaji explicitly stated that none of his disciples had reached enlightenment, many began to claim they were awakened once he had passed away. After the first figure emerged, many more followed. As time went on, and he was no longer there to expose them, the number of people teaching in the name of Poonjaji kept multiplying. The environment that grew out of this – a combination of satsang hysteria, advaita instant-enlightenment brainwashing and the deep insincerity of this group of western seekers – proved to be very unhealthy. The line between following an actual spiritual path and egomania, ignorance, even insanity, quickly became blurred. Individuals with little to no experience of their pure nature began to put themselves in the position of teachers, using Poonjaji's name to promote their own ego. Some people have called this scene 'neo-advaita' in an attempt to forget what it in fact is – the epitome of stupidity. All these events seem to represent the final fall of the ancient teachings of the *Upanishads* and of Adi Shankara, as they moved west and lost their sacred essence.

On some level Poonjaji can be held partially responsible for initiating the proliferation of neo-advaita. The fact that he did not have the conceptual tools to differentiate between partial awakening and actual enlightenment created a lot of confusion among his disciples. So, after his death, many of his followers seized the opportunity to claim enlightenment based on various ambiguous hints that Poonjaji may or may not have given. The combination of not having a full understanding of the awakening process and opening to teach western seekers, whom he did not really understand, escalated into an atmosphere of increasing misunderstanding hinging around a diluted concept of enlightenment.

The second, lesser known 'school' of neo-Advaita was connected to Nisargadatta Maharaj. He, too, did not officially approve the enlightenment of any of his followers, with the single exception of Maurice Frydman, who is known for having compiled Maharaj's famous book *I Am That*. According to Maharaj, however, Frydman was already self-realized before they met. Considering this, it is interesting that Frydman himself claimed that only upon meeting Maharaj had he found true and abiding peace. If he was already realized, why had he not yet found abiding peace? This is rather off-topic, and deserves a separate exploration. Suffice to say that to understand this paradox is to understand the true complexity of human enlightenment – something which is so evidently missing from this 'pseudo-advaita' trend. Other than Frydman, Maharaj had only a handful of students. As often happens, he became more widely known only after his death. He was a great being, very dynamic and rather eccentric. Although



he was not very educated, he developed his own unique version of Advaita based on extreme disidentification, in which even pure consciousness is seen as a limitation which needs to be transcended.

After Maharaj died, Ramesh Balsekar began to teach in his name. But the true message of Maharaj's teaching had clearly eluded him. Instead, Balsekar created an entirely intellectual version of Advaita. As we have explored elsewhere, Advaita is already highly intellectualized; Balsekar multiplied this by ten at least. His teaching of non-duality was all about semantics: 'there is no witness only witnessing,' 'there is no doer, all is happening in consciousness,' and so forth. People were travelling to Bombay from all over India and beyond to listen to him, believing themselves to be on a spiritual path.

All that clever-sounding talk about consciousness is not even true. If things were merely 'happening' in consciousness, it would indicate that we are in trouble. Nothing is just 'happening'; it is happening because everything is interconnected, within a dynamic relationship with the complex organism of life. We are not merely witnessing what is happening in consciousness - that would be ridiculous. In fact, every single act of perception or recognition requires the involvement of our whole being, and consciousness cannot recognize anything without going through the channel of me. Moreover, to say that we are not 'doers' is only half of truth. When we take this half to be the whole, that truth becomes a lie. We are doers and we are non-doers. We are co-creators in consciousness and existence; consciousness is a creative process, not a spectacle of puppetry. Everything is 'just happening' to those who have not taken control of their lives and destiny, and who are not in control of their own minds. We should feel sorry for those to whom reality is 'just happening,' for they have not yet started to live. And although they have not started to live – they have started to teach Advaita.

Advaita has become more and more diluted, like weak wine that was once strong and potent, but is now just pale, colored water. Most of those who teach Advaita and pretend to be gurus are simply very inane and insincere. Why are seekers not more discriminative and intelligent? Why do they flock like sheep to all of these satsangs? Is it because they are naive and don't know any better, or is there a deeper problem? What is the problem with humanity? Is all this just indicative of the fakeness, mediocrity and hollowness of the collectively fabricated human?

The path to self-realization is not for everybody. In fact, most humans need first of all to evolve exclusively in the psychological dimension, where they can learn how to express their human nature in



a positive way and learn how to love. Before we can step into the realm of I am, our me has to reach the requisite levels of maturity and integrity. If we do decide to enter the inner path, we must have our hearts in the right place, or it is better to take a step back. Otherwise, through making these types of life choices, many seekers end up worse than they were before. They become imbalanced, ungrounded, disconnected from normality and lost in mystical states. If we wish to avoid these pitfalls and truly evolve and grow, the essential qualities of character are required. We must be smart, sensitive, critical and watchful of various snares on the inner way. We must know how to distinguish true progress from imaginary awakening and spiritual games. We must be real and seek truth above all else. We must walk the path from our existence with the clear purpose of becoming whole, so that we do not get lost in spiritual experiences or look for affirmation from our egos. The path is designed for those who have the capacity to go beyond their lower identity; it is a process of deep surrender into our soul and of disappearance in the beyond - from which place we can finally embody our universal individuality.

One of the main dangers of present day Advaita is that it introduces overly simplified and distorted concepts of enlightenment and non-duality. The ignorant statement that 'we are all awakened' crudely confuses the concept of original enlightenment with acquired enlightenment. It completely fails to see the basic distinction between the idea that all beings are originally endowed with their pure nature and the empirical fact that we have to realize it in order to experience it. We do not realize our pure nature by convincing ourselves that we are all Buddhas anyway, but through a very subtle and complex process of self-actualization. Most adepts of these Advaita movements do not meditate at all, or sit in false devotion at the feet of their 'gurus', hoping for a miracle. There is no spiritual practice here, but rather a form of non-dual hypnosis, where the mind, through constant repetition, programs itself with fixed ideas about reality. The mind then confuses this hypnotic psychological condition with actual self-realization. When a beggar is fully convinced he is a king, does it make him a king? Perhaps in his own mind, but not in reality. In reality he is now both a beggar and a fool.

Shallow Advaita needs a shallow audience to reproduce itself in the collective mind. If we want to heal the disease of superficiality in human spirituality, we must start with the very foundation of those who seek evolution. It is the aspirant on the path who must awaken to the higher truth of the spiritual dimension and begin to serve the purpose of his very existence. The moment he sells his soul for the promise of cheap, imagined enlightenment, he becomes responsible for the downfall of spirituality.



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While neo-advaita is Advaita at its corrupted worst, Advaita was always incomplete: it failed to embrace the dynamic nature of existence and consciousness. The only difference between pseudo-advaita of the past and its present manifestations is that it is no longer even geared toward self-realization. It has become a game of programming the mind with the illusion it is awakened.

Blessings,

Anadi

For a full glossary of terminology please visit our website www.anaditeaching.com/glossary

