

Neo-Advaita – Deception of Imaginary Awakening



Neo-advaita can be defined as Advaita for the masses. Its oversimplifications allow people with low intelligence and minimal spiritual aspirations to relate to the ideas of non-duality and awakening. At the heart of neo-advaita is the concept of ‘instant enlightenment.’ Instant enlightenment is a distorted and ignorant misrepresentation of the notion of sudden awakening which has been indiscriminately taken from the original schools of enlightenment. It is an exceedingly superficial interpretation of the spiritual path which combines psychological relaxation with developing a connection to so-called ‘now,’ and then calls the result ‘awakening.’ When the masters of old said: “there is nothing to do, nothing to seek and nothing to reach – our pure nature is already present,” they were speaking in metaphors which point to reality; these were not supposed to be factual descriptions of truth. Neo-advaita has taken these metaphors out of their original context – the holistic inner path – and in so doing, has made an unconscious mockery of this ancient wisdom.

The concept of sudden awakening is that there are no stages to the process of gaining insight into our pure nature; either we know it or we do not. In truth, sudden awakening is not in conflict with the principles of practice and gradual cultivation. On the contrary, to remove sudden awakening from the context of our gradual evolution renders it absurd. The purpose of practice is twofold: firstly, to mature to the point at which a sudden awakening can happen, and secondly, to work toward the stabilization

and integration of the newly awakened state. The idea of sudden awakening can be understood in the context of the relationship between original and acquired enlightenment. Original enlightenment signifies that we all carry the seed of our pure nature, while acquired enlightenment points to the fact that this seed is initially dormant – we need to actualize it. This at least is the chain of reasoning in the more sophisticated schools of the non-dual tradition. In reality, original enlightenment does not represent our own pure nature, but the pure nature of the universal reality. To reach enlightenment, then, is to realize both the pure nature of existence (universal self-realization) and to actualize the pure nature of our soul (individual self-realization).

Those who teach that enlightenment as something very simple and accessible to anyone, without the need to go through the process of hard inner work and deep transformation, bring shame on spirituality. They caricature enlightenment, and make it into a joke that is far from funny. Sadly, the current spiritual scene is saturated with teachers and teachings of this kind. They are mostly outshoots of Advaita, whether they link themselves to it consciously or not. These teachings thrive on a shallow interpretation of non-duality, and because such concepts can circulate so freely and abundantly through the internet under the auspices of New Age, pseudo-Zen or therapeutic movements, no one really even knows where they originated.

While it wears many disguises, the concept of instant enlightenment boils down to the idea that we are ‘already awakened,’ therefore, there is no need for practice – it is enough to look inside and recognize our pure nature to ‘wake up’ and be enlightened. It is basically a psychological approach to meditation which aims to ease the excessive mental suffering of western seekers. Its purpose is to reach the condition of calm in the mind through distancing ourselves from our thoughts and inducing a hypnotic state of pseudo-awareness. This hypnotic state is produced by the constant mental repetition of advaitic notions about reality, that ‘all is consciousness,’ or ‘we are not the mind,’ or ‘there is nothing to do or to reach.’ This kind of non-dual programming of the mind in conjunction with the emotional stimulation coming from ‘devotion’ to a guru, releases various chemicals in the brain that create a false affirmation of being awakened. There are shades of grey of course, but we’re referring here to any teaching that simplifies the nature of the spiritual unfoldment to the point of being ridiculous, thereby negating the long, rich path of evolutionary steps that stand between ignorance and self-realization.



Due to the fact that seekers are not being equipped with the tools and concepts which can empower them to take their evolution into their own hands, by default it all becomes about the grace of the guru – guru worship and guru dependence. This imbalance of power between teacher and student results in an unhealthy projection upon the teacher, where adepts put them on pedestals and, in their minds, endow them with magical grandeur and exaggerated significance. Their teachers seem willing to play this game. While they may speak of the need for independence, the whole arrangement forces seekers to become entirely dependent on them, like spiritual slaves. Sitting on the podium as the bestowers of grace, they project an unnatural persona of someone apparently immersed in love and bliss.

Teachers like these, who do not have even a basic knowledge about the spiritual path, have become standard-bearers of the contemporary paradigm for enlightenment. Why is this? Why do so many people applaud this pretend and inherently shallow representation of spirituality? It suggests they are satisfied with a low level of evolution, and wish to just relax, be lulled into a comfortable place inside and be at peace with their misery, rather than standing up, rebelling and fighting against it. Nothing has really changed since we lived in caves – we would rather be numb and survive than be alive enough to challenge the prison of ignorance we are living in.

What are these instant enlightenment teachings about? They are about making ignorance comfortable. Their purpose is to relax and make palatable our fundamental unawareness of who we truly are, and then to introduce the outrageous idea that this is enlightenment. It is fine to help people to relax, to find some stillness in the chaos and pain of their lives, but why use the word enlightenment? This word should not be used in vain. We need to have some respect for the great sacrifices and unimaginable hardships of those who paved the genuine path to self-realization. Others who use this word so freely should think twice before broadcasting their unconscious versions of spirituality. That is respect, and that is truth.

Are There any Benefits to Neo-advaita?

What experiences do neo-advaita satsangs give rise to which may be mistaken for awakening? One explanation is that sitting in a hypnotic way can cause one to experience various mystical states. Mystical states are a very murky area. They are altered states of consciousness that lack clarity and true solidity, but can feel high or exciting. In many ways these states often give a high similar to drugs. Because the



experiences of them feels so different to our ordinary mind, someone who does not have the proper perspective and knowledge may easily confuse them with the correct realization.

There is also a small chance of experiencing a real awakening (through the combination of meditation and grace) on such a path. But here we are not looking for miraculous cases, but trying to find a logical link between a path and its most likely outcome. As was noted, the constant repetition of Advaita concepts changes the chemistry of the brain, actually altering how it thinks and perceives reality. An undeveloped mind can become convinced that such a condition really is enlightenment. On a 'higher' level, one might also experience something deeper than the mere intellectual conviction of being self-realized, but find it difficult to pinpoint exactly what it is. It is neither consciousness nor awareness, but rather a subconscious state of me that abides in a nether land of 'neither here nor there.'

Perhaps the neo-advaita satsang movement has its place, but it must be seen in the right perspective. First of all, people should stop seeing it as a path of self-realization or enlightenment – it is not. Secondly, neo-advaita teachers should not be seen as gurus, but as therapists who apply the basic concepts of spirituality and meditation to help alleviate people's distress, depression and chaos of mind. This should be based on a combination of gentle self-inquiry and basic meditation-relaxation techniques, which in a shallow way, can open the space beyond thought. This process should be supported by the development of mindfulness and clarity, so as to avoid falling into mystical states, which can be a major pitfall with these types of practices. In this way perhaps these teachings could really help some people in their first steps to becoming more conscious.

A key question is whether neo-advaita can be separated from the non-dual mind conditioning inherent to it. At the end of the day, this conditioning is simply harmful, as it distorts the true picture of reality and prevents the dawning of real self-knowledge based on embodying our higher individuality. Additionally, it is difficult to imagine neo-advaita outside of the context of guru-projections, because such projections are what serve as the axle for its mental programming and the resulting outcomes. Without being able to induce that hypnotic state of mind, neo-advaita would die a natural death because people would realize it actually has nothing to offer, that they have been deceived. So, while acknowledging its modest therapeutic and contemplative benefits, the fact remains that neo-advaita is not a solution for our suffering and sadness, no more than opium or alcohol are. Those who walk this path should begin to question their intentions and motives. To seek a way out of suffering by inducing



an artificial affirmation of being awakened is not only very unintelligent and insincere – it blocks our further evolution and closes the door to true freedom. If we fail to follow truth due to our impurity and lower intention we will sooner or later have to pay the price – the inconsolable pain of being completely lost.

Blessings,

Anadi

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

