

# The Horse's Mouth

*An essay on the 'lineage' game*

Unlike animals and enlightened beings, human beings seem to need validation for any number of things: their activities, beliefs, opinions and even their very existence. Nowhere is this need more obvious than in the modern spiritual world's obsession with status. Forty years ago the word '*avatar*' was virtually unknown in West. Although a few rare souls were familiar with it through their contact with Vedic culture, it was definitely not a household word. These days the old words that served to indicate an exalted spiritual condition...guru, yogi, lama, sage enlightened being, etc....have been eclipsed by the word *avatar*, God in human form...but God miraculously free of all human foibles. To cut the mustard spiritually these days, one definitely need to be an *avatar*.

Another validating word is 'lineage.' A lineage is meant to confer status because it suggests gravitas. And the modern spiritual world...in so far as it comes out of modern life, which certainly lacks gravitas...seems of late to be particularly prone to inventing lineages. Any Tom, Dick or Harry who 'sat' with a brown-skinned Indian...preferably in India...for twenty minutes suddenly becomes part of a great lineage. With a lineage to back you up your spiritual resume is enhanced and your words are meant to be particularly weighty.

One of the most noticeable modern 'lineages' is the Ramana-Papaji lineage, although a two individual lineage seems to be a little gravitas lite . Papaji is the titular father of the modern 'Neo-Advaita' movement. Neo-Advaita has spawned a suspicious plethora of self proclaimed 'enlightened' beings who cooked up the *satsang* culture that has attracted tens of thousands of seekers in the last fifteen years.

Papaji, who was virtually unknown in India during his life, came to the attention of the Western spiritual world shortly after Bhagavan Rajneesh, the notorious ninety-three Rolls Royce guru died. Rajneesh, the horse's mouth concerning the topic of enlightenment for Westerners for many years, was a particularly clever man who created a very large following by wedding two largely incompatible concepts, sense enjoyment and enlightenment. His 'Zorba the Buddha' idea gave a whole generation of rebellious disaffected community-seeking Westerners a good excuse to party hearty on their way to God. When Rajneesh...who rechristened himself Osho to avoid the bad karma his notoriety produced...died, his devotees, ever on the lookout for the next master, 'discovered' Papaji, by this time an old man languishing in Lucknow, a hot, dirty noisy city on the banks of the Gomati river. Papaji, like Rajneesh, was a clever man with an outsized personality, a *shaktipat* guru. A shaktipat guru is someone with a superabundance of 'spiritual' energy. By 'hanging out' with such people one often 'experiences enlightenment.' It seemed lost on Papaji...and his followers certainly didn't know the difference considering their provenance...that reality is non-dual 'light' or Awareness and therefore all experiences are the experiences of enlightenment. In any case many people got high on his energy and imagined themselves enlightened, a condition known in yogic culture as *manolaya*, a temporary cessation of thought...or if you prefer an English term, an epiphany. A new horse's mouth had

appeared...by the grace of God.

It so happens that the Osho people, in spite of the fact that most of them spent long periods in India, had virtually no knowledge of Vedic spiritual culture even though they paraded around in red clothing...much to the consternation of the locals...and called themselves *neo-sanyassis* which translates as 'new renunciates.' Renunciation is a tried and true Vedic spiritual idea but in this case it is not clear what was actually being renounced. It is not surprising that they knew virtually nothing about Vedic culture because Rajneesh was not a Hindu and seemed to have had a certain contempt for the great spiritual tradition that surrounded him. His role models, who he was not above criticizing, were Christ and the Buddha. Papaji, on the other hand, was a died in the wool Hindu from a family of Krishna devotees. His contribution to the spiritual education of this group was two-fold. He introduced them to Ramana Maharshi who he claimed was his guru...thus giving himself a golden, nay platinum, credential. And he introduced them to the word *advaita* which means non-duality. Hence, the *advaita* movement.

Although Ramana was Papaji's guru their idea of spiritual practice, self inquiry, was quite different. Ramana's involved persistent and intense effort moment to moment basis to dispel the mind/ego's idea of duality while Papaji's involved only the question 'Who am I?' and then 'keeping quiet' until the answer appeared. Papaji was no fool and understood quite well that he was not talking to *yogis*, serious practitioners, but to *bhogis*, enjoyers. Most took Osho seriously when he told them that spiritual life was a big celebration and encouraged them to get on with it. And, to be fair, most thought they were doing spiritual work...although therapy would be a more accurate term. *Sadhana*, spiritual work, presupposes a healthy mature individual with a clear, discriminating, dispassionate mind and a burning desire to be free of the quest for satisfaction in this world. Whether Papaji was enlightened is open to question...many unenlightened yogis can give *shaktipat* more or less at will and speak eloquently about the truth...but whether he was or wasn't isn't important, only that he gave *shaktipat* and reserved his 'final teachings' for qualified aspirants, who were by his own admission non-existent.

In an extraordinary interview in a book about his life entitled 'Nothing Ever Happened' by David Godman he talks about his teaching and the people who received it...or not.

David: "You used to give experiences to a lot of people. Why did you do it if you knew that the effect would not be permanent?"

Papaji: "I did it to get rid of the leeches who were sticking to me, never allowing me to rest or be by myself. It was a very good way of getting rid of all these leeches in a polite way. I knew that in doing this I was giving lollipops to the ignorant and innocent, but this is what these people wanted. When I tried to give \$100 bills to them, they rejected them. They thought that they were just pieces of paper. So I gave them lollipops instead.

David: Many of the people you gave lollipops to left Lucknow thinking that they were enlightened. Does the fact that they accepted the lollipop and left indicate that they were not worthy to receive the \$100 bills?

Papaji: "If one is not a holy person, one is not worthy to receive the real teaching. Many people think that they have attained the final state of full and complete liberation. They have fooled themselves, and they have fooled many other people but they have not fooled me. A person in this state is like a fake coin. It may look like the real thing. It can be passed around and used by ignorant people who use it to buy things with. People who have it in their pocket can boast of having a genuine coin, but it is not real. But it has no value. When it is finally discovered to be a fake, the person who is circulating it, claiming that it is real, is subject to the penalties of the law. In the spiritual world, the law of karma catches up and deals with all people who are trafficking in fake experiences. I have never passed on the truth to those whom I could see were fake coins. These people may look like gold and they may glitter like gold, but they have no real value. There are many people who can put on a show and fool other people into believing they are enlightened." "Why does hearing the truth only work in a small percentage of cases? The simple answer to that is that only a small percentage of people are interested in the truth."

David: "Many people have heard you say, 'I have not given my final teachings to anyone'. What are these final teachings, and why are you not giving them out?"

Papaji: "Nobody is worthy to receive them. Because it has been my experience that everybody has proved to be arrogant and egotistic... I don't think anyone is worthy to receive them."

Here we have the horse's mouth, the father of the *satsang* movement, saying that those teaching in his name are not enlightened. Traditional Vedanta, the source of the idea of non-duality would agree in so far...as stated above...reality is non-dual Awareness and therefore the search for a discrete permanent experience that one might call 'enlightenment' is gratuitous. This is not to say that the occasional intense experiences of non-duality...the lollipops...that power the searches of many are in any way unhelpful, although they may become a source of frustration and disappointment if not properly understood. *Shaktipat* is indeed a wonderful experience but it is simply another experience and will not set you free...although it can give you an idea of what you are seeking...in so far as freedom is the nature of the Self. This freedom cannot be produced by anything, particularly an experience, because it is limitless. What is limitless i.e. the Self can, as Ramana conclusively says...and traditional Vedanta agrees...be only gained by knowledge since you have it already. The purpose of Self inquiry is to gain Self knowledge and remove ignorance about your nature...not to get a discrete permanent experience of the Self. In any case an epiphany is not enlightenment and it is certainly not the proper basis for a 'teaching.'

Papaji's insistence that a seeker of enlightenment be qualified is in harmony with the teachings of traditional Vedanta. Why should one be qualified? Because enlightenment...the knowledge that one is

whole and complete actionless Awareness and not this body mind...will only arise in a pure mind, one free of the limited perspective and the consequent suffering it produces. And secondly this knowledge will only stick in a pure mind. A pure mind can be produced by action, unlike the Self. And finally, action in a spiritual context is Self inquiry, the consistent application of Self knowledge...the idea that I am limitless Awareness...until the mind accepts it completely. It is clear that while Ramana gained that knowledge when he was very young he spent many years applying it to his mind, hence his teaching of self-inquiry. If he didn't do *sadhana*, as many believe, where did he get the authority to teach Self inquiry? The belief that he didn't do Self inquiry stems from the unfortunate idea that Self inquiry is simply asking the 'Who am I?' question when it is in fact a willingness to examine all one's thinking in light of the truth of one's being. It is, as traditional Vedanta states, 'the practice of Self knowledge.' What else are you going to do once you wake up? You see the Self and you see the mind and you see that there is some disconnect between them and you either let the mind be, knowing that it isn't you...which is not Self inquiry but is a perfectly legitimate path...or you make an effort to get the mind in alignment with the Self. Self inquiry is a continuous discipline until the mind no longer throws up limiting concepts about the nature of the 'I' at which point one could be said to be 'fully' enlightened.

Evidently Papaji neglected to inform his followers that they needed to prepare themselves for the 'final teachings' and that self inquiry was a lot more than getting high from 'getting it' and then running off to 'teach' enlightenment. Consequently they had no idea how to prepare themselves apart from developing therapies on their own to clear up psychological problems. If they were informed the message somehow got lost in translation because this teaching is conspicuous by its absence in the Neo-Advaita world. Instead, in Papaji's inquiry lite method, you were meant to ask who you are and then sit still, presumably waiting for the answer, as if there was somebody other than you in you that knew the answer. The obvious problem with this approach is the fact that who you are is not a secret. Even if it is to you and you are lucky enough to get an answer from within as you sit in 'silence' how will you evaluate its meaning? What does it mean to say I am limitless non-dual actionless Consciousness? What does it mean to say I am the Self? How should this knowledge impact on my life? Do I get up and shout for joy and get on with my doings because nothing ever happened? Do I shut up and keep silent the rest of my life? Do I hang out a shingle and make a business of enlightening others? Knowing that I am not a doer do I quit eating, die and merge with the Absolute?

The purpose of scripture...teachings...is to remove one's ignorance. It is meant to guide Self inquiry. Ramana read and wrote scripture dedicating at least one work to Shankara...indicating the importance of getting the overview and not just relying on one's own interpretation of the revelations that come when the mind is quiet either as a result of conscious Self inquiry or from an outside event like *shaktipat*...or an intense pleasure or tragedy.

Yes, you are temporarily enlightened...assuming wrongly that you aren't enlightened all the time...when you have your non-dual epiphanies but when old patterns return you will invariably re-identify with them and return to endarkenment. Unless a seeker understands the value of purifying the mind along scriptural lines, he or she will not remain enlightened...in so far as 'permanent enlightenment' depends on the nature of the mind. Enlightenment is only for a Self ignorant mind. The Self is enlightened by default.

Another point that Papaji makes concerning the search for enlightenment is also in harmony with the teachings of traditional Vedanta: very few people are actually interested in enlightenment, not only because they don't know what it is but because their presence in the spiritual world is due to other factors. Take away the unrestrained sex, the discos and the touchy feely sense of 'community' from the Osho experience and you would not have had a mass quasi spiritual movement. Add some straight talking purified teachings devoid of a guru's beliefs and opinions harkening back to the Upanishads...like those of Shankaracharya...and you will be left with a small handful of dedicated people. I have interviewed hundreds of people in the forty years I've been in the spiritual world concerning their motivations and well over ninety-five percent...after paying lip service to the idea of enlightenment...will admit that that they are really looking for a sense of 'community.' They want to associate with people who think and feel like they do about the spiritual nature of life. There is nothing wrong with it but it is an emotional need, not the desire for freedom that is the hallmark of a true spiritual seeker.

The only question remaining concerning Papaji is that if he really believed what he said why did he open up his life to a crowd of parasitic people...and then complain vociferously about their presence? Presumably enlightened people are free to say 'no.' Many truth seekers survived both the Osho and the Papaji experience and have continued to grow spiritually but it is impossible not to notice the downside of this so-called 'lineage': the many aging middle-aged Zorba the Buddhas still trolling the spiritual world in search of the next big 'celebration of life' and the raft of modern Neo-Advaita teachers desperately trying to cobble together a 'teaching' from their own limited experience. Enlightenment does not a teaching make.

What Papaji meant by enlightenment is anybody's guess but it obviously wasn't experiential...the experiences were only 'lollipops.' Somehow, it involved his 'final teachings' which presumably involved some kind of knowledge...although what that knowledge was is not clear. You will notice that in this interview he does not answer the question, 'What are your final teachings?' And it need not be clear because the idea of a 'final teaching' is absurd in so far as you can crack any Upanishad or any of the hundreds of great Vedantic texts...or listen to any traditional Vedanta master...and discover that the final teaching is that you are non-dual Awareness and not the body mind entity you think you are. The Upanishad's roar, "You are That!" meaning limitless non-dual Awareness. This teaching is not secret or 'final' in any way. It is simply a fact to be appreciated, assuming you are mature i.e. qualified. And the permanent appreciation of this fact depends on the nature of the mind...how free it is of beliefs and opinions to the contrary. What's apparently secret and a final bit of unappreciated and wanted knowledge is the idea that you need to roll up your sleeves and get to work on your mind...if you are going to actualize this teaching.

One suspects...and there is no way of knowing in so far as Papaji is no longer with us and would probably not be inclined to 'share' if he was...that the 'final teaching' myth was one of the tricks Papaji picked up in guru school...keep them dependent on you by shrouding yourself in mystery. Why would a truly enlightened teacher perpetuate this myth? He or she wouldn't because the whole purpose of enlightenment teaching is to give you the tools that will set you free, including freedom from gurus.

When you take into account the contemptuous and cynical attitude that Papaji expresses in this interview toward his 'disciples' and the fact that he knew that the people coming to him were not qualified for enlightenment...and neglected to tell them and also neglected to provide teachings and techniques that would prepare them for it...one is tempted to conclude that less noble motivations were at work.

In another portion of the interview Papaji says that he did not authorize people to teach in his name, only to send them to Lucknow to get the 'final teachings.' One wonders why people who were obviously not enlightened and not qualified for it would be successful in attracting those who would be prepared for the 'final teachings' which, as far as I know, Papaji never declared. But he couldn't really declare them because it would make him seem foolish in so far as they are an open secret.

Does this mean that there is no value to the teachings of Neo-Advaita? Not at all, only that the truth stands on its own and does not need validation by any guru or any lineage...although it certainly becomes more desirable when purified gurus with proper teachings...like Ramana...teach it.

A lineage is much more than a couple of gurus. In fact the guru is only one small link in a vast teaching tradition...the Sanskrit word is *sampradaya*...that stretches back to the first enlightened being, the Creator, and even beyond to the non-dual unborn Consciousness that makes the apparent creation possible. These teachings and the understanding that contextualizes them have survived repeated attempts to corrupt them with the personal views of Johnny-come-lately gurus who think they need to modernize them to make them palatable for modern audiences...or hide them for want of qualified aspirants. As the poet says, contrary to the opinion of most modern seekers, there is nothing new under the sun, including *advaita*, non-duality and *sannyass*, renunciation. Human beings are human beings and will always be human beings. We suffer the same fundamental problem today that the first human being suffered, a crippling sense of limitation. And from the very beginning the knowledge that removes this problem has been with us. That it is still unsullied today...in spite of repeated attempts to modify it...is a tribute to a lineage that outshines all the individuals in it.

Why is Neo-Advaita not a skillful means of Self knowledge? Because it is a victim of level confusion, the belief that you can simply negate yourself by saying that you don't exist or shouldn't exist. Yes, it is true that from the Self's point of view 'you' don't exist as a separate entity but this teaching only creates spiritual frustration if you are not ready to receive it...which most aren't. Ignorance...the belief that one is separate from everything...is hard wired. It does not go away because you deny it. The logical conclusion is that you need to get rid of this belief. But this is precisely the point at which the teachings of no doer, no work, no guru, etc. float off into fantasy land because getting rid of it is very hard work. Denial is much easier; you just tell yourself that you are 'awakened' or 'cooked' and you avoid noticing that you are still the same old fool. Or you explain your foolishness away with some clever non-dual tidbit like "I'm not chasing things in this world, I'm playing in Consciousness." Or 'nothing ever happened' or 'I'm not really here' or 'what I'm teaching is crazy wisdom.' Or "Ramana got it without doing anything so that means I don't have to do anything." Or, "How can I do *sadhana*, I'm not a doer."

Yes, it would be wonderful if life was that easy. But it isn't. We do not choose to be here...New Agey theories to the contrary notwithstanding. We appear here, the result of vast complex of factors that nobody understands. Life somehow wants us here...it needs us. And one of life's nasty inconvenient little truths is that there are no free lunches. You have to pay all the way. It provides a lovely world and a beautiful body and mind with which to enjoy it. But it also requires you to play your part. If you don't, you suffer. Why? Because along with the good stuff it infects you with a completely debilitating disease, the beginningless disease of ignorance. This disease will not go away because you want it to. You have to take your medicine. You have to admit that you are a human being and do the work. Neo-Advaita fails because it is basically dishonest. It wants the fantasy, not the truth, because the truth is a hard sell.

A successful teaching is not content to merely preach non-duality from its ivory tower. It comes down into the dream of duality and shows the way out...from within the dream. This is why traditional Vedanta has survived for thousands of years and Neo-Advaita will rate little more than a footnote in modern spiritual history. It humbly accepts you where you are at, shows you the goal and supplies the tools you need to succeed: the karma yoga attitude, discrimination, the hugely effective three guna model, devotion and many others. It is sophisticated enough to understand the human tendency toward self delusion, its desire to cut corners and take the easy way out. So it supplies the logic that cuts through age old spiritual myths.

To its credit Neo-Advaita has awakened many to the idea of non-duality and pointed out a fact little known to extroverted people looking for relief from their suffering...that you are not your mind/ego. And through the *satsang* vehicle it has given many seekers experiential validations of this truth along with rudimentary bits and pieces of Self knowledge...which unfortunately only serve to confuse without the big picture. It disappoints, however, in so far as it does not provide a detailed road map to enlightenment because it is...like Osho's teachings before it...isolated from the great teaching tradition of Vedanta...which provides just such a map: time tested profound and brilliant teachings about the nature of the Self, the nature of the mind and the nature of the cosmos in addition to a huge database of techniques...the scriptures of yoga...that help the sincere seeker to prepare the mind for this noblest of human pursuits.