

Gurus and Disciples - Part 4

Gurus Who Abuse

A *guru*, teacher or preacher who seeks to control people does so for ego gratification (because he feels a lack of self-worth), a sense of power (because he feels powerless), or material gain (because he feels deficient). This self-deceived *guru* is called a *nishiddha guru* and is not recommended. That there are teachers, preachers, and *gurus* who indulge in this kind of thing goes without saying. It happens.

In most cases, abuse, physical or subtle, is carried out ostensibly for the eradication of the aspirant's ego. Many people, including the abusers, don't understand what is meant by the word "ego." Among practitioners of *yoga* the word "ego" is an attempt at translating a Sanskrit word, *ahamkara* (literally, "I do"), which has to do with the sense of separation brought about by identifying oneself as a doer; it is not about being self-centered, egotistical and proud. Lacking this understanding, the concept of "ego" is misunderstood and abuse is rationalized.

Disciples are told that what the abusive teacher is doing is for their own good, that it will burn their bad *karma*, that it is good for their spiritual development. Even if this were true, the end result would not be what they have been led to believe: that their ego will be done away with so that they can attain enlightenment, rapture, heaven, liberation, and so on. The ego not only doesn't go away with abuse, *it grows*. It just looks good because the individual appears humbled and submissive.

Those who have been abused will not be *feeling* very humble however, but as mad as hornets, though they may be utterly suppressed and unconscious of their own outrage. And many will even defend their "*guru*" to the death.

In spite of all this, in some of these cases a strange phenomena occurs: a sincere and devoted follower may reach his or her goal in spite of the *guru's* flaws. To the rest of us looking on, it seems like a tragedy of deceit and manipulation but, unknown to us, this disciple may have reached the ultimate goal with this charlatan as *guru*. The magic of intense devotion is one of the great mysteries; it defies all logic. Someone who has been "taken in" by one of these control-hungry, or simply ignorant, teachers, may end up enlightened while the rest of us (including the *guru*) continue to flounder.

I think this outcome is fairly rare however, and I would caution seekers to do some shopping and a good deal of self-investigation before settling on a teacher. It is important to know what makes you tick—what makes you do

what you do, want what you want, feel what you feel; how flexible you are mentally; what type of path you're drawn to; what kinds of beliefs you have and what kinds of beliefs you have reactions to.

You need to know how you're wired. If you have early childhood conditioning that causes you to *unconsciously expect* abuse and disrespect, you may be drawn to an abusive teacher without realizing it. This teacher may look good to you at first, and you may not be able to discriminate well enough to get out.

The thing to remember is that you are there by your own choice and you can leave by your own choice. If your choice was inappropriate, you must try not to feel wrong within yourself—*it is not your fault*—and move on. If you think some therapy might be useful, do it.

Get to know yourself. This is critical. And come to accept that who and what you *really* are has unimaginable power and is already using it. You just need to know where to aim.

I say all this at the risk of sounding like I am advocating what is known as "guru hopping." *Guru* hopping wastes time and accomplishes little. You dig a lot of shallow holes and never go deep enough to hit pay dirt. To make any real progress, you need to stick to your path and your teacher. True spiritual development and evolution takes many years to accomplish. But it is very smart to do some serious shopping first.