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Book Review

The Guru Papers: *Masks of Authoritarian Power*
by Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad

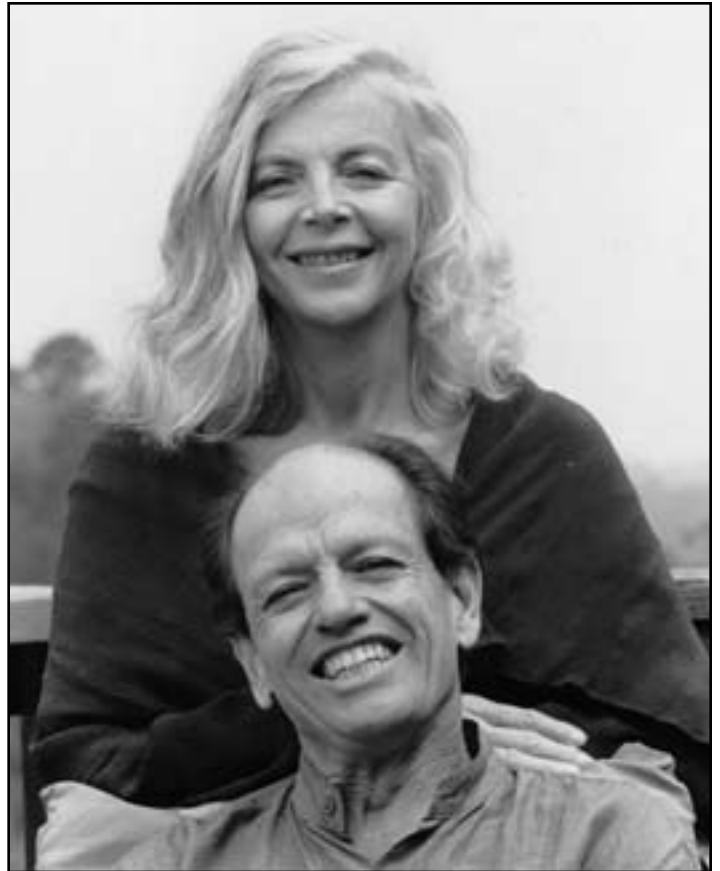
By **Ford Greene**

God. The God of Science, The God of Papal Infallibility, The God of National Security, The God of Family Values, The God of Buddhist Selflessness, The God of Unconditional Love. What are they good for? Absolutely nothing.

The Guru Papers elegantly identifies the masks that power uses to hide its abuse of others. Authoritarianism is the exercise of authority which, presuming an unquestioning obedience, can tolerate neither question nor challenge, meeting either with disregard or punishment. Assiduously distinguishing the everyday exercise of authority – living life and making choices amongst the propositions it presents – from the bullying domination intrinsic to the type of power unwilling to recognize an equal, the authors carefully dissect the threads which, woven together, comprise the cloth of abuse. Whence abusiveness flows, certain features are invariably present.

When a “leader” sets up an ideological standard of perfection or purity that no human being can attain, and our consequent failure of such attainment becomes the *raison d’être* for a double standard of treatment whereby the leader gives orders and we obey them, we have lost our freedom, particularly if we believe it is for our own good.

Whenever one pole of a duality is identified as essential to good living and the other pole leads to evil, behind that mask an authoritarian moralist weaves his tale positing that which he believes is most important, that which he says is God. Gurus and religions, politicians and governments, educators and schools, parents



and families, and lovers and spouses frequently equate evil with selfishness and goodness with selflessness and sacrifice. They say if I am sufficiently sincere and pure of heart, I will sacrifice what I want for what they tell me is best. Thus, I will be a better man.

There is little difference between the cult leader who demands allegiance to the unproven presumption of his godliness, and the lover who, crying “let me be myself,” claims his imperfections should be accepted without limit in the name of unconditional love. When a moral demand for sacrifice is made in the name of something sacred, be it the Immaculate Conception or an Idealized Lover, one best be brave and ask one’s questions. If such courage is met with punishment or disregard, one better run. If one does not, one’s conduct will commu-

nicate that there is something wrong, and it's not with the other guy.

The essence of authoritarianism attacks the inner certainty of individuals by claiming that it knows a superior, more moral path. It not only condemns an individual's assertion of self as selfish and wrong, but also is unwilling to engage in dialogue which does not adopt an unquestioning regard for that which it deems sacred. If an individual adopts this moral dichotomy, he can only mistrust himself as inferior. This, Alstad/Kramer say, is the purpose of authoritarian control: to generate internal self-mistrust which makes the individual available to imposition of control by an external authority.

They correctly expose the deception that such externally imposed control is benevolent. According to Kramer/Alstad, authoritarian persons are never benevolent because such persons use others for their own selfish purposes while lying about it, saying they are not, if they are saying anything at all. "Do as I say, not as I do; and if you dare question what I do, you are questioning what all good people know is beyond reproach. You, too, would have respect *if only you were a good person*. Since you are not, you must do as I say. It is for your own good." Such is the circle of authoritarian ideology.

The language of authoritarianism is the language that Orwell named double-speak. There's no Orwellian double-speak in this book, just hard-hitting practical logic that rips the guts out of sacred cows that have fed too long in pastures provided by a naive and idealistic population. Such a populace, wanting to be good, denies that someone who directs their focus on great and beautiful-sounding ideals could be ripping them off, as was one of Hitler's more notable tricks.

Thus, the book shows how both the willingness to

psychologically dominate, and to surrender to such, are embedded in one another. The dominating and the dominated persons both believe in an unattainable and essential purity which requires extreme sacrifices, both in its name, as well as for its attainment. One person makes the sacrifice, after the other has convinced him he must, erstwhile he would be morally condemned as selfish and self-centered for having disobeyed the other who claims to know best.

The Guru Papers recognizes that both self-centeredness and selflessness exist – you cannot purge the self of selfishness – and must work together in oneself *in balance*. It forcefully argues why intelligent negotiation is life-affirming whereas dumb submission invites death. It meticulously dissects the myriad protean tricks authoritarianism employs to maneuver its subjects into place and keep them there. Access to information and accountability for one's conduct are essential for the brave new world that might emerge if the repentant strain of authoritarianism in humankind does not destroy this world first in the name of knowing better.

The book says listen to yourself and if you are degraded or expelled for asking questions, recognize that the inadequacy lies with the authoritarian character, not with you. *The Guru Papers* makes the authoritarian predicates accountable and exposes them when they are not. It's about time! ■

Ford Greene is a leading anti-cult attorney and expert on brainwashing, indoctrination and exploitation who has won nationally recognized cases against the Unification Church (Moonies) and Scientology, among others. He is a specialist on the interplay between first amendment religious liberty claims and the effective civil prosecution of cult abuse. His law practice is in San Anselmo, CA. www.fordgreene.com
