

# Gurus and Sexual Manipulation

Abridged from *The Guru Papers: Masks of Authoritarian Power* (Part 1)

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*....A primary social function of religion has been to serve as the moral underpinning that regulates sexual acceptability. To control a person sexually is to have control over a basic aspect of human life. Sexuality is a deep power in human beings that underlies attraction; attraction, the capacity to command attention, is one key to personal power....*

*Religions all want everyone's major emotional bond to be with whatever god figure the religion presents. If the most important thing is salvation—whether of one's soul as in the West, or progressing along the reincarnative chain as in the East—then anything that detracts from this is looked upon as detrimental. This is one reason why sexuality is often regarded as low, carnal, animal, even dirty; for sexuality, if left unfettered, risks putting people out of control—and more importantly, out of religion's control. Thus religions came to define which expressions of sexuality were (and for many still are) acceptable, and also to provide sublimated outlets through ritual and worship. Yet sex is so basic that ideology alone is not strong enough to control it. Fear and guilt must also be used as control mechanisms of repression.*

Gurus likewise do many things to ensure that their disciples' prime emotional allegiance is toward them. In the realm of sexuality, the two prevalent ways control is exerted are through promulgating either celibacy or promiscuity. Although seemingly opposite, both serve the same function: they minimize the possibilities of people bonding deeply with each other, thus reducing factors that compete with the guru for attention.

Celibacy, or at least the image of it, is the easiest route for a guru to obtain this power of being the central emotional focus for large numbers of people. The very nature of sexual connection has within it preference, at least in the moment. For a guru to become sexually involved with some and not others causes a hierarchy of preference. Since the guru's appeal is his ostensible offer of unconditional love to all, this causes an undercurrent of jealousy and resentment among the followers. Celibacy does allow one to maintain a certain kind of control of one's energy and emotions. It also conforms with images of purity. Therefore, it is far easier for a guru to gain and maintain power if he is celibate—or pretends to be.

Celibacy undermines coupling when presented as a higher state than sexual intimacy. This, in effect, gets people in couples to surrender to the guru rather than to each other. Gurus can exercise control over their followers in the most basic areas by decreeing whether coupling is allowed, who marries whom, how often and in what circumstances sex is permitted, whether couples can cohabit, and even whether they reproduce and how to raise the children. Some gurus actively discourage having children or separate parents from them, which is done to decrease distractions from devotion to the guru. One even let it be known that having more children was undesirable, and encouraged vasectomies and tube-tying. Similarly, to counteract family influence, gurus often try to undermine disciples' ties with their own parents.

## THE BETRAYAL OF TRUST

When a religion is transplanted from a conservative culture to a more experimental one, its leaders are no longer constrained by tradition. The West's looser mores make sexuality practically irresistible for foreign gurus from rigidly patriarchal cultures in which the sexes were separated and closely monitored. The availability of sexy, adoring female disciples is a temptation few (if any) can resist. \*This chapter focuses on male gurus, as all the sex scandals we are aware of involve male spiritual leaders. [There are a number of reasons for this that are beyond the scope of this chapter to examine,] among them: women being turned on to powerful men eroticizes the male teacher role; casual sex is less socially acceptable in women; and women in power in general have to be more impeccable.

Without deep cultural constraints against it, sex scandals go with the occupation of guru because of its emotional isolation and eventual boredom. Disciples are just there to serve and amuse the guru who, after all, gives them so much. The guru's temptation is exacerbated by the deep conditioning in many women to be attracted to men in power.

Below are some of the more extreme examples of sexual abuse that have been exposed:

- 1) Religious leaders using their exalted position to seduce, pressure, or coerce disciples sexually, some even at puberty. This is compounded by the fact that they most usually preach either celibacy or marital fidelity.

- 2) Incidents of rape and creating "love slaves."

- 3) Using sex and romantic seduction by other members to entice people to join.

- 4) Separation of parents from their children, sometimes with accompanying child abuse and molestation.

- 5) Encouraging prostitution to support the group.

Openly promiscuous gurus utilize their power to create what amounts to a harem for their pleasure. The real motives behind their sexual excursions are often masked by such words as "teaching" or "honoring" their disciples. One famous guru had a procurer. (This disciple, later sadly disillusioned, described herself as having been his pimp.) He would specify certain physical traits for a given evening (blond, large breasts, petite, etc.) and she would round someone up for his nightly pleasure. When asked how she justified this to herself, she said that at the time she thought of him as godlike and God can do anything. The view that "once enlightened a person can do anything" also justifies anything. (After all, what good is it to be God if you can't do what you want?) Also, he gave so much of himself he deserved whatever it took to make him happy. This ultimate male fantasy apparently did not suffice to make him happy. He was notoriously self-destructive and died young.

Having sex with one's disciples, whether secretly or openly, is a real betrayal of trust because:

- 1) The guru is putting his own needs and pleasures first, which is an exploitation. "Honoring" a disciple with sex is a form of unabashed dominance—how can a disciple refuse who is committed to serve and obey?

- 2) Rewarding women for their sexuality taps into and reinforces deep lines of conditioning in them. Traditionally women's power has been related to sex. So women, especially the good-looking ones gurus seem to choose, generally have deep patterns that link their power and self-worth into their sexuality. Gurus, like fathers, are in a context that gives them enormous power because of their disciples' needs, trust, and dependency. One reason incest is a betrayal of trust is that what a daughter needs from her father is a sense of self-worth not specifically linked to her sexuality. Sex with a guru is similarly incestuous because a guru

ostensibly functions as a spiritual father to whom one's growth is entrusted. Having sex with a parental figure reinforces using sex for power. This is not what young women (or men) need for their development. And when the guru drops them, which eventually he does, feelings of shame and betrayal usually result that leave deep scars.

3) Sexuality with disciples (whether overt or covert) sets up hierarchies of preference where disciples compete for status through who is attracting the guru. If covert, it also creates lies and secrecy among disciples.

Psychotherapists face a similar context of power, trust, and dependency, though not as absolute. They, too, operate as parental and authority figures, both of which are easy to use to stimulate erotic feelings in a vulnerable client. Although it is not impossible for a therapist to develop a viable intimate sexual relationship with a client, the probability of betraying the same kind of trust is great. This is especially true if the therapist treats the liaison casually, or if the sexuality is presented as part of the therapy done for the client's good.

Those gurus who preach celibacy while secretly engaging in sexuality present the latter as an esoteric initiation ritual or advanced spiritual exercise that must be kept

hidden. This makes the disciple feel special while colluding in an enormous lie and manipulation that has severe emotional repercussions. The implications of a spiritual teacher lying about sex are often deflected by focusing on the sex instead of the lying. Here some people actually feel good about the guru's behavior in that it validates for them that there's nothing wrong with sex after all. We have also heard people say they were glad that he "got some."

Lying about sex is so rampant in every culture that structures what is sexually permitted it is commonplace to be inured to it and accept such lying as a given, or a peccadillo. But it is the lie, not the sex, that's the real issue. The lie indicates the guru's entire persona is a lie, that his image as selfless and being beyond ego is a core deception. Many think that though a guru lies about his personal behavior, his message is still essentially true. Lying here as elsewhere is done to cover up self-interest. If the guru's message is that purity without self-interest is the ultimate achievement, not only did he not achieve it, but he does not even know if it is achievable. If being self-centered is an unavoidable aspect of being human, then any ideology that denies this will necessarily corrupt its promoters and believers. This why images of purity corrupt.

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**SPIRITUAL HEDONISM**, *the final section, is posted separately on the Guru Papers webpage at [JoelDiana.com](http://JoelDiana.com).*