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Be Your Own Guru:

Authoritarianism and the Problem of the Guru in Conscious Evolution

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an exploration of the problematic nature of the guru/disciple relationship, specifically, in Western Society. It begins with a discussion of the nature of spirituality and the spiritual quest. To contextualize the process, I also discuss my own spiritual path based in Roman Catholicism, Taoism, Buddhism and my thoughts on the philosophy of Krishnamurti.

I explore the topic of the authoritarian follower in some depth. Its connection is symbiotic to the existence of the authoritarian leader. This connection is demonstrated within this paper as well. Additionally, I look at the flaws in some well-known guru figures and how that has led to an erosion of confidence in the idea of the guru in the Western World. Additionally, more subtle forms of authoritarianism are explored; politically, in the world of television news, entertainment and, even, sports.

Finally, I explore Krishnamurti's ideas of creative thinking and how it opposes the static nature of the guru. I ask the question: might Krishnamurti be considered a guru, though he rejects gurus? Ultimately, I conclude with the idea that while the guru/disciple relationship may be healthy and beneficial for some people I have found it more beneficial, based on my own experience, to develop without one.

Keywords: Krishnamurti, Guru, Roman Catholicism, Taoism, Buddhism, Aleister Crowley, Bhagwan Rajneesh, Jim Jones

Introduction

One of the major focal points in terms of processing the idea of spiritual teachers is wondering to what extent they are necessary at all in the development of the individual as a spiritual being. The atheist, obviously, would not see a need for a spiritual teacher and would, perhaps, be quite hostile to the idea of one. Being open to the idea of a spiritual teacher implies, first and foremost, that one has some sort of spiritual life, however meager or robust. Yet, how does one define the

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spiritual life? How does one define a spiritual teacher? These are questions with answers that would likely be as different as the people asking them.

Whether or not a person feels the need for a spiritual teacher, whether a teacher in the flesh or via a philosophical text, is also a very individualized process. Whether or not a person is open to the idea of having a spiritual teacher or guru likely has much to do with how they have been conditioned socially. If a person has been conditioned to be more accepting of a guru, then they will have a greater openness than someone who has been conditioned to be more or less open or hostile towards the process (or someone who has had a negative guru experience or been exposed to negative news reports about certain religious sects).

J. Krishnamurti uses the concept of the awareness of social conditioning as the basis for his philosophy. He advocated a philosophy that, essentially, put forth the idea that there is no guru, there is no teaching, and only the individual can know his or her own consciousness. Only the individual can dig deep enough into his or her own consciousness and explore and, potentially, be free from social conditioning. Again, social conditioning would definitely factor in to whether or not one is open to the guru/disciple relationship. Krishnamurti said are you aware you are conditioned? That is the first thing to ask yourself, not how to be free of your conditioning. You may never be free of it, and if you say, 'I must be free of it', you may fall into another trap of another form of conditioning. So are you aware that you are conditioned? Do you know that even when you look at a tree and say, 'That is an oak tree', or 'that is a banyan tree', the naming of the tree which is botanical knowledge, has so conditioned your mind that the word comes between you and actually seeing the tree? To come in contact with the tree you have to put your hand on it and the word will not help you to touch it (*Freedom From The Known*, 25).

If the very act of identifying a tree by a certain name is a sign of being conditioned, then certainly, whether or not one is open to the idea of having a guru or spiritual teacher is also influenced by conditioning. To put this idea into context, my own spiritual conditioning involved being raised as a Roman Catholic. Being raised Catholic was an integral part of my worldview and remains the foundation of my spiritual conditioning. As I grew, I became aware of other religions and became drawn to the ideas of Taoism and Buddhism. I also became interested in rationalistic points of view espoused by Secular Humanism.

With Roman Catholicism as my spiritual foundation there was a clear idea that the Catholic Church was the one, true religion and anything outside of it was not legitimate. While Catholicism relied on the ritual of the mass and of the priest, it did not rely on a guru/disciple relationship in its application (despite the fact that the founders of Christianity were disciples of Jesus Christ). By the time I came around, Catholicism was nearly 2,000 years old so I was a contemporary human being living in modern society with a spiritual connection dating back nearly two millennia.

When I became aware of Taoism and Buddhism, I became very interested in their philosophical principles (specifically in Taoism), but did not seek out a spiritual teacher to help me along my path. For one, I assumed that if the animating principle of the universe felt I needed a spiritual teacher one would appear, and having been raised a Catholic I had a very deep skepticism of anyone purporting to be a spiritual teacher of any kind both because of being raised within the Church and being aware of charlatans and criminals within the Church and news accounts of cult leaders. I often wondered how I could combine my background in Roman Catholicism with my new exploration for Taoism and Buddhism, along with my passion for scientific reasoning.

Along the way, though, I never had a “deconversion” experience or “conversion” experience. My awareness of the universe was, simply, changing. I now see that all wisdom traditions are points of entry to accessing the transcendental. They do not, by nature, have to conflict with each other. Though, most certainly, all are forms of social conditioning. As time passed I became drawn to the ideas of Krishnamurti and his philosophy. And, really, one could spend a lifetime simply becoming aware of how one has been conditioned.

The above “spiritual autobiography” represents a brief snapshot of my own spiritual development to demonstrate a type of conditioning that was open to learning about new spiritual principles, but not being particularly open to the idea of the guru/disciple relationship.

I was far too skeptical of the idea of having a guru, too concerned that they might be a charlatan or worse, as I was skeptical of the authority of the Church’s representatives, I did not see it as likely that trading one set of spiritual teachers for another would be of any benefit to me. I had too much of a hunger for knowledge and wanting to discover things for myself. Was there danger in this? Some of my reading in eastern philosophy seemed to think so, however, I continued along my path. There would be no guru for me. This brings us to the general difference in thinking about gurus in Eastern and Western societies and the authoritarian personality that often fuels such relationships.

Authoritarian Followers As Symbiotes

While eastern cultures have a greater tradition and support for the guru disciple relationship, those in western cultures seem to have a greater skepticism towards them. Part of the mythology of America is that of the “rugged individualist” who “goes it alone” if need be while relying on the Christian God for spiritual support. In their popular mainstream forms, neither Roman Catholicism, Protestant Christianity or Fundamentalist Christianity seem particularly open to a guru/disciple relationship in the eastern sense; whereas, in “eastern” societies such a relationship has been a part of the culture for thousands of years. There is also a greater, and well documented, sense of collectivism in eastern societies versus what many like to think of as individualism in western countries (though I think the idea of individualism is highly debatable, especially in terms of how people in the west are socially conditioned on all sorts of levels).

While such attributes as collectivist versus individualistic may hold true, it is also important to avoid over-generalizing in terms of broad-based cultural attributes at the risk of essentializing a culture. Be that as it may, one thing that does link most modern cultures is some form of authoritarianism.

Unfortunately, authoritarianism in seems to be at work in many ways in terms of how individuals relate to religious and spiritual pursuits. Specifically, I am discussing the authoritarian follower personality. These are people who would be easily described in a general sense as “followers”, often seeming devoid of reason or critical faculties when it comes to their spiritual, religious or political views. While this may not always be the case, or may not even be the case most of the time in terms of religious or spiritual seekers, it is the case often enough to warrant scrutiny.

Indeed, the idea of the authoritarian follower personality is often at work in terms of defining to which extent individual is open to submitting to the guru/disciple relationship. It is also very much present in most of the world’s major religions where a guru/student relationship is not present. The authoritarian follower personality is not the exclusive property of any particular culture or era. These personality types appear to exist throughout cultures and time periods, both religiously and politically. In *The Authoritarians*(2006), Bob Altemeyer explores the idea of the authoritarian personality in great depth. He sees the related concept of dogmatism as a particular threat to free-thinking. Altemeyer says

Once dogmatism turns out the lights, you might as well close up shop as a civilization and pull up the covers as a sentient life form. You get nowhere with unquestioning certainty. It’s thinking with your mind wide shut. But that would not faze most fundamentalists, because they know that their beliefs will get them exactly where they want to go (122).

To a further extent, Altemeyer explores the concept of fundamentalism along with its dangers as relates to, in this case, the authoritarian follower personality. It is clear from Altemeyer’s sociological findings that this authoritarian follower personality is socially driven i.e. it is a socially conditioned aspect of a human being’s life. Altemeyer says of fundamentalist Christians

That they are highly likely to be authoritarian followers. They are highly submissive to established authority, aggressive in the name of that authority, and conventional to the point of insisting that everyone should behave as their authorities decide. They are fearful and self-righteous and have a lot of hostility in them that they readily direct toward various out-groups. They are easily incited, easily led, rather un-inclined to think for themselves, largely impervious to facts and reason, and rely instead of social support to maintain their beliefs. They bring strong loyalty to their in-groups, have thick-walled, highly compartmentalized minds, use a lot of double standards in their judgments, are surprisingly unprincipled at times, and are often hypocrites (140).

Analyzing Altemeyer's reflection, it becomes apparent that if there are not authoritarian followers, there can be no authoritarian leaders. Both the authoritarian leader and follower must exist in a symbiotic relationship or they cannot exist at all. No authoritarian leaders, no authoritarian followers. The reverse is also true. This has implications for religion and spirituality, but also has implications for the greater idea society. When an authoritarian follower of a cult, religious sect or religion is deprogrammed, the symbiotic connection to the authoritarian leader is broken, lessening that leader's power by at least one follower. However, the individual's authoritarian personality traits are still there in latent form and may find another outlet in the future. I reject the idea of a guru, not only because of my initial Roman Catholic religious conditioning but because at the same time I was raised with the opposite approach to dogma: question authority.

While some level of leading and following is necessary for the functioning of modern society, it does not need to be the rule of the authoritarian leader or follower. More consensus driven societies are likely to have more of everything that authoritarian society's lack: creativity, openness, and freedom. The difference can easily be seen by example in the more right-wing authoritarian Bush Administration as compared to the more liberal, consensus driven Obama Administration.

Giving Gurus a Bad Name

Another reason many people resist the guru-disciple relationship is that some deeply disturbed authoritarian leaders have given the term guru a bad name. Enough instances have occurred in recent memory where authoritarian followers and authoritarian leaders have come together and havoc has ensued to lead to very understandable questions in the popular press and the popular mind about the nature of the guru/disciple relationship and the very nature of the guru. Whether it's Aleister Crowley, Bhagwan Rajneesh or Jim Jones these "bad" gurus have run the gamut from bizarre and abusive to murderous.

By definition, people are naturally drawn to charismatic personalities. Most, if not all, gurus whether deemed positive or negative in their impact have some level of charisma to them whether in personality or vital energy. Like the pop stars of today, however, it is not unusual for these charismatic personalities to go over the edge and fall into the abyss. Like the rock star Jim Morrison, Aleister Crowley was a compelling, yet ultimately, dark figure. Morrison attempted to harness shamanic forces through rock n' roll as ritual, but could not conquer his addiction to drugs and alcohol. Crowley, too, delved into forces beyond his control. In the case of the Mad Magus Aleister Crowley author Georg Feurstein says

Crowley lived at the brink of madness daring to walk where angels fear to tread, unleashing enormous creative and dark forces in and around him. His charisma was great, as was his ego. His life story graphically exemplifies the failure and jeopardy of an individual who unlocks the

gates to the hidden dimension of existence without first having become grounded in such universal values as love and compassion. He had all the drive of a Doctor Faustus, but lacked the bodhisattva impulse and was destined to fall (122).

Crowley's ego outweighed his compassion for others. His authoritarian tendencies destroyed anything that may have given him any degree of legitimacy to some people at some time. Still, though, even today, Crowley is a revered figure in some circles because of his darkness and excess.

Beyond excess, there is also spiritual inconsistency that can bring a guru back down to the all too human level. Such was the case with Bhagwan Rajneesh whose humanity was sacrificed on the altar of his supposed enlightenment. Before the time his thousands of followers started to become disillusioned with both him and his teachings his radical inconsistencies had come to the forefront, clouding the vision of Rajneesh as a legitimate spiritual teacher or guru. Ultimately, he combined both excess and inconsistency. Of Rajneesh Feurstein says

Here we have a guru who, by his own admission, is not in his body; who has declared that he does not want to have followers, yet has for years served as the spiritual head for thousands of men and women demanding their exclusive devotion; who presented himself as a renunciate but hated having photos taken showing his baldness, favored the rich and influential, and encouraged the acquisition of a fleet of 93 Rolls Royces; who claimed to be fully enlightened yet felt the need to regularly use nitrous oxide and compulsively watch videos to dispel his boredom; and who permitted a group of power hungry women to run his large organization and his own life (127).

Non-gurus regularly exhibit inconsistencies in their behaviors. However, followers of gurus expect these spiritual teachers to be more than human. The inconsistencies listed above, demonstrate that faith in a guru can be shaken or, ultimately, shattered by a guru having them. The question remains as to the nature of Rajneesh's enlightenment considering his well known excesses and inconsistent behavior.

Perhaps the most notorious modern guru is Jim Jones of the Peoples Temple. The mass suicide of his followers in Guyana at Jonestown is well documented. His power was maintained through his own charismatic authoritarian personality and radical teachings. Jim Jones is very much the "poster guru" for malevolent gurus. The Jonestown tragedy shocked and disturbed the world. It also gave further insight into the dark nature of authoritarianism.

Beyond the leadership of Jones himself as authoritarian guru, there is another face to Jonestown which brings me back deeper into the concept of the symbiotic relationship between authoritarian leader and follower. While many might exclusively blame Jones for his hypnotic like hold over his followers, indeed, it was not without the full participation or intimidation of the very same authoritarian followers in groups such as The Peoples Temple that such a leader as

Jones could come to, and sustain, power. Constance A. Jones explores this topic in “Exemplary Dualism and Authoritarianism at Jonestown” (1989). Jones concludes

Jonestown occurred, not because of external control alone, but also because individuals cooperated in their own oppression. A complex process, this cooperation involved the construction of individual motivation and social reinforcement around belief in exemplary dualism. This phenomenon is not unique to Jonestown. Contemporary and historical movements, religious and political, have adopted exemplary dualism as the basis for their worldviews. All adaptations of this system have not resulted in a Jonestown, but all, inevitably, have created an environment in which authoritarian submission breeds (227).

While authoritarian leaders serve as symbols for the negative aspects of the guru/disciple relationship, it is the followers who do not get the same “press” as their charismatic spiritual teachers. Perhaps popular culture would somehow like to simplify the nature of the guru/disciple relationship. Perhaps the general public does not want to acknowledge their own authoritarian tendencies, whether as leaders or followers.

Though these “gurus-gone-wild” have come to be symbols of darkness or excess, over time they continue to crop up again and again. It is unlikely that society will see a complete end to such tragedies as Jonestown or thousands of disillusioned followers, as was the case with Rajneesh, until the authoritarian personality itself is fully explored, understood and, eventually treated. Unfortunately, for many involved with bad gurus, by the time the problem is discovered, it is often too late to stop psychological or physical harm from occurring.

Authoritarianism in Society

Examples of authoritarianism can be seen throughout recorded history. Some of the most powerful examples of authoritarianism would be Nazi Germany under Hitler and Soviet Russia under Stalin. However, even in more recent times authoritarianism has led to havoc and the deaths of many.

In the United States of America, the era of the George W. Bush Administration will likely be remembered as a time of wide-spread right-wing authoritarianism. I have taught a class on called Propaganda and the Media at Sonoma State University and all classic techniques of misinforming the public toward achieving political ends were used during that time period from manipulation of the media to selective use of information. Following the Sept. 11 Terrorist Attacks, Americans themselves found civil liberties being undermined, torture of suspected terrorists, widespread domestic wiretapping (that is only now being curbed) and the U.S. invading another country that had nothing to do with the initial attacks. The invasion and, now, the occupation of Iraq which began in 2003 under Bush lasted through both his terms in office and the problem has now been left for President Obama and the current Congress to solve. The war has lasted longer than World War II and it remains a very real possibility that some amount

of American troops will remain in Iraq indefinitely. This is all the result of right-wing authoritarianism in American society.

During the lead-up to the Invasion of Iraq, I was a full-time reporter, like many, was aware of the anti-war protests taking place throughout the country and the world. However, as the war continued, the protests tapered off. At the time, I noted it followed Bush's announcement to the media that, essentially, the protests did not matter to him because he was going to do whatever he felt was right despite whatever vast numbers of the country might think.

As the war went on, I often wondered what happened to all those protesters. Why did they pick up and go home? Even if the president wasn't listening didn't that make the idea of protesting even more important? Some people speculated the protests had stopped because there was not a draft. No one many ever really know why people gave up. Perhaps, they became disheartened. I continued to reflect on Bush's statement about him not really caring about public opinion as the main reason, however.

The question of why people did not take greater action during the Bush Administration often comes up. The answer discussed by the some of the many people I've spoken with connects directly to my exploration here. Was it possible, some have asked, that it was our own authoritarianism that stopped any significant social action from taking place? Perhaps. The only benefit to this time period is that it set the stage to make history with the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States.

Authoritarianism in society, specifically American society, factors directly into this exploration of the guru/disciple relationship. If Iraq did, indeed, have weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) as was claimed, many Americans could see an invasion of the country as reasonable, if regrettable. However, when it became apparent that no such WMDs existed and the Iraq War appeared to be a political ploy by the far right-wing to entrench the United States in the oil rich region of the Middle East, many Americans began progressively opposing the war, but from the comforts of their living rooms. Again, could this be the result of an authoritarian streak? Is the guru/disciple relationship similar to that of the Political leader/citizen relationship to a certain extent throughout vast segments of "middle" America? It seems likely.

I have discussed the social conditioning that goes into forming the authoritarian personality, how such a personality is not limited to country and culture as well as used the example of fundamentalist Christianity here in the United States as a prime example of authoritarianism. Looking at what I have called "bad" gurus has given an example of the other

side of this symbiotic relationship between leader and follower. But, there are also more subtle aspects of socially conditioned authoritarianism that exist in American society that may, on the surface, seem benign but factor into the larger issue of an authoritarianism that can wreak madness if left unchecked.

One need look at the agenda setting power of the media and the manner in which readers or viewers often process what they read or view uncritically as a sign of them being, at some level, authoritarian followers. The now-historic spate of “tea-bagging” episodes urged on by the right-wing media outlet Fox News to protest non-existent tax increases by re-staging the Boston Tea Party across the country, is a sign that a certain number of the population (albeit small, though increasingly influential, in this case), will directly respond however the seemingly charismatic and powerful television news talk show hosts tell them to respond. It stands to reason these people also have other right-wing authoritarian personality traits. How is someone who participates in this sort of “tea-bagging” any different than a follower of a cult leader? How is a host on Fox News any different than a cult leader? Viewers are all too willing to suspend their critical faculties. Instead of asking if any taxes have been raised, they are all too willing to go out and vilify others following a call from their “guru” at Fox News.

Another prominent indicator of the authoritarian follower streak in American society is the entertainment fan. A die-hard fan, short for fanatic, is someone who follows a media star, show, or franchise to the point of having it take over large parts of their lives. Some shows or films are known for getting a “cult” following. Again, while seemingly benign it is important for the individuals involved in the fan lifestyle to be aware of when a passion for something might cross over, in some cases, into being an indication and manifestation of the authoritarian personality. While such “fan-bases” can increase a human being’s group identification, which is important to socialization, it’s important to understand whether such identification is healthy or unhealthy be it political, religious or in the world of entertainment.

Rounding out these seemingly more benign examples of the authoritarian personality in society is the professional sports fanatic. This is an individual who identifies so heavily with a particular sports team to the exclusion of all others that his or her identification takes on a cult-like aspect. Again, there are important aspects of group identification here than can be healthy. However, with the seemingly ritualistic consumption of alcohol, cheering, and other components of a professional sports game, such sport (similar to a rock concert) can have all the elements of a religious ceremony. Ritual and, again, group-identification are not the problem and can, in fact, be very healthy. It is only when these attributes take on negative aspects that they can feed into the darker implications of the authoritarian personality; whether that means giving rise to a despotic political regime or submitting to an illegitimate guru figure.

Krishnamurti and Free-Thinking

A great focus of this paper is not on the benefits that many people find in following the eastern guru-centered spiritual traditions, but a critique of the authoritarian follower personality that makes such relationships often dangerous to the psyche or more of the would be follower. While I, personally, reject the idea of having a guru for the many reasons stated in this paper I very much feel that there are likely many spiritual teachers of great merit and many individuals who benefit as the recipients of their teachings. Ultimately, though, I feel that it is far too likely, especially in Western societies, that an individual has a much greater chance of being taken in by an illegitimate guru if they are either naïve of the process and background of the guru or have an unquestioning authoritarian follower personality and, thus, far more likely to do or have damage done to them. When authoritarianism is present thought becomes static, inventiveness and openness are gone. In *Total Freedom* (2006) Krishnamurti said

What we call happiness or ecstasy is, to me, creative thinking. And creative thinking is the infinite movement of thought, which is emotion, which is action itself, if unimpeded in its movement, is not compelled or influenced or bound by an idea, and does not proceed from the background of tradition or habit, then that movement is creative. So long as thought – and I won't repeat each time emotion and action – so long as thought is circumscribed, held by a fixed idea, or merely adjusts itself to a background or condition and, therefore, becomes limited, such a thought is not creative (44).

To what extent does the guru/disciple relationship circumscribe or limit thought in the manner that Krishnamurti is discussing? That would seemingly depend on the guru and the guru's teachings and the personality of the follower. Krishnamurti rejects the idea of attachment to abstract concepts as being forms of conditioning. The mind is never free as long as it is fixated on anything. The very idea of the guru, in Krishnamurti's terms, could be seen as a socially conditioned idea. If, as Krishnamurti suggested many times, only the individual can know her or his own consciousness, if there is no guru needed, if there is no religious or spiritual organization needed, if there is no path, then the very nature of the guru/teacher and the disciple/student is called into question. Krishnamurti went on to say

Now this movement of creative thinking does not seek in its expression a result, an achievement; its results and expressions are not its culmination. It has no culmination or goal, for it is eternally in movement. Most minds are seeking a culmination, a goal, an achievement and are molding themselves upon the idea of success, and such thought, such thinking is continually limiting itself, whereas if there is not idea of achievement but only the continual movement of thought as understanding, as intelligence, then that movement of thought is creative (44).

In terms of Krishnamurti's "teachings" the individual would not reach this freedom of thought, this creative essence by relying on anyone outside themselves. Certainly, the individual would

not reach the essence of this creative thought by relying on a guru. It is, again, in this sense that in Krishnamurti's rejection of the guru that he reminds individuals of the power they have to look within and discover themselves, most likely, for the first time.

Yet, despite his teachings, to what extent was/is Krishnamurti a guru? To what extent might Krishnamurti be my guru? It would be unfair for me not to ask these questions. Can someone be a guru who says that gurus are not necessary? That tells people not to follow him, but only to look within themselves for truth? Surely, this would be no ordinary guru. However, Krishnamurti certainly fits, at least outwardly, many of the basic aspects of the guru and had and has seemingly many followers, adherents or disciples despite his teachings to the contrary.

Krishnamurti was a charismatic, well-spoken figure with an eastern mystique who spoke on transcendental matters to people around the globe for most of his entire life. He seemingly had come to an inner realization about the nature of existence similar to that of a Buddha-experience. However, rejecting organized religion with the Dissolution of the Order of the Star in 1929, Krishnamurti set out on his own with the goal of letting people know that they must free themselves from their chains and that no one else would do it for them. And he continued to speak on the same message of freedom for the rest of his life.

While I can see that connections can be made to Krishnamurti being "guru-like" he, ultimately, was/is not a guru in the sense that he was not asking anyone to adhere to any system or form of religious worship or spiritual practice. He was not asking anyone to believe in anything. He, essentially, was telling people repeatedly throughout this life to look into themselves, to explore their own consciousness and anytime someone would approach him as a guru he would tell them, again, to go back within themselves. I consider him a great, transcendental philosopher. Is this just a matter of semantics? Some may argue yes, but I believe that there is an important distinction between a guru in the traditional guru/disciple tradition and someone who is a philosopher on transcendental matters who urges people to be free of a guru, of religion, of spiritual practice and to go into their own consciousness and set free their own chains.

Be Your Own Guru

Throughout my spiritual path, thus far, I have found much to be gained from being open to the various ideas and wisdom traditions that have been the foundation of the spiritual lives of millions for thousands of years. I have also found the idea of being in the present moment, without dogma to be very attractive to my own personality. While I rejected the dogmatic aspects of following Roman Catholicism without question, the religion still formed the basis for my moral and ethical view of the world. My discovery of philosophical Taoism exposed me eastern mysticism outside the realm the Western mode of thinking and, certainly, outside of the dogmatic aspects of Catholicism. Buddhism provided me with another rich philosophical and ethical system from which to learn and appreciate, just as the scientific method and Humanism

demonstrated to me that people could exist outside of a “supernatural” framework and live fulfilling lives that made as much sense as the transcendental made to me.

As mentioned earlier, I have never had a “conversion” or “deconversion” experience, though I have experienced some form of what I would deem the transcendental, at least for brief time periods. I have had periods where I rejected mysticism, though not entirely, and periods where I rejected scientific rationalism, though not entirely. I have periods where I have accepted and rejected aspects of all of the above traditions I have mentioned as I continued to experience life in the world and the life of the world within me.

But, I have never found a guru. And, ultimately, while the idea of having a spiritual teacher who exclusively would help me along my path is appealing in some way I never pursued having a guru and do not feel it necessary for my spiritual development. Beyond being far too socially conditioned against the idea of seeing the guru as beneficial, I do not feel intuitively based on my own spiritual experiences that a guru is necessary to the path of my spiritual development. While I grant that each of us is on a different path, I believe they all go to the same place. Perhaps, I am just stubborn and like to discover things on my own.

Does Krishnamurti’s philosophy appeal to me because I am socially conditioned to accept the idea of “questioning authority” or because it is reflective of my life experiences? Perhaps it is a combination of both. However, I do agree with his well known idea that “truth is a pathless land.” Indeed, to me, I cannot see any other way for the individual to truly have the potential of freeing themselves from social conditioning and realizing the transcendental without going into their own consciousness and exploring its nature. While I will leave the argument in favor of the guru/disciple relationship to others, I will conclude only by saying:

Be Your Own Guru

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