

The Guru Thing

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[Note: this was originally written as a side-bar for the articles on yoga for HSPs, but it was not published with those articles. It may be useful for some people.]

Many yoga traditions say that a guru is essential for spiritual development. In the yoga centers, the founding guru is generally viewed as an all knowing, perfect being whose word is never questioned.

In the early 1990's, the majority of yoga centers in the U.S. were rocked by revelations that the founding gurus were having manipulative, exploitive sexual relationships with disciples. In at least two cases, juries in lawsuits awarded over a million dollars in damages to sexually exploited women. In some yoga centers the guru was forced out. In others, many disciples left, but some stayed and remained loyal to their guru with the traditional guru-disciple logic that the guru is perfect and therefore whatever happened must be for the best in ways that less perfect people cannot understand.

At this point I'm not sure what the role of a guru can and should be, but I am certain of two things. First, substantial progress on all levels can be made without becoming a disciple of a guru. Second, any setting where a person is viewed as all knowing and perfect almost inevitably leads to abuse of authority.

One of the traditional goals of a guru-disciple relationship is to help the disciple develop discrimination of what is true from what is untrue. Ironically, the most profound lesson in discrimination has often come from a traumatic break with a fallen guru.