

REAL AND FALSE SPIRITUAL TEACHERS

'How can the sleeper arouse the sleeper'
Saadi

In many countries in the contemporary world, especially in the West, there are teachers, groups, organizations and representatives of virtually every cult, religion, spiritual teaching and metaphysical system known to humankind. How can the earnest spiritual seeker distinguish between an authentic teaching and a cult, between a false and a real spiritual teacher?

Not everyone who claims to be a spiritual teacher is genuine and the discriminating seeker is faced with a confusing "spiritual marketplace" in which so-called teachers of all stripes vie for attention and prominence. Individuals with no proper qualifications or training other than a subjective desire to teach, dominate others and/or seek attention can call themselves spiritual 'teachers.' This phenomenon is especially widespread in our current Western culture:

Briefly, the Eastern tradition that one learns until one is permitted by a teacher to teach (an ancient tradition perpetuated in apprenticeship and the granting of degrees in the West), is not adhered to in many non-academic areas in the West. The reason for this is not far to seek. In the West, the prevailing culture's emphasis is on haste, on getting something and passing it on (e.g. products or ideas, after value-enhancing) and so on. This has taken the form, in spiritual, psychological and other areas, of people trying to teach, to expound, to treat or cure, to communicate, before they are properly fitted to do so. The fact that, in the West, anyone can set up as an expert, a teacher, a therapist or adviser, compounds this error. (1)

A number of levels and degrees indicating the capacity, authenticity and effectiveness of a spiritual teacher to guide others on the path of enlightenment can be distinguished:

- Charlatans, frauds and con-artists who are wilfully deceitful, manipulative, self-serving and hypocritical
- Sincere and well-intentioned but self-deluded individuals who are ineffective and lacking in any real knowledge, those guilty of "trying to run before learning to walk"
- Partial teachers or 'deputies' who are able to transmit spiritual knowledge to others but are still bound by subjective ego states and personal desires
- Advanced guides who have largely transcended attachments and egotism and are able to teach selected individuals the path to enlightenment
- Fully realized and enlightened teachers who have directly experienced the true nature of reality and are able to teach people at all levels of consciousness and stages of spiritual development

Many false teachers are self-appointed and have not been given permission to teach from a valid spiritual tradition or lineage. But even those who have ostensibly received spiritual transmission from an authentic teaching source may be misguided, self-absorbed or incapable of adequately teaching others. “Buyer beware” is the watchword when approaching any so-called spiritual teacher for instruction and initiation. This cautionary warning is echoed by a number of sociological and scholarly studies. (2, 3, 4, 5)

Distinguishing Between Real and False Spiritual Teachers

The contemporary world is full of self-proclaimed gurus who take advantage of the many gullible ‘seekers’ who lack the discriminative capacity to perceive the real from the false:

Under the right teacher the disciple learns to learn, not to memorize and obey. *Satsang*, the company of the noble, does not mold, it liberates. Beware of all that makes you dependent. Most of the so-called ‘surrenders to the Guru’ end in disappointment, if not tragedy. Fortunately, an earnest seeker will disentangle himself in time, the wiser for the experience. (6)

Many individuals regarded and accepted as spiritual teachers or mystical masters are actually engaged in pursuing social, therapeutic or community pursuits – not spirituality. Even famous and widely respected figures in the spiritual world may be performing social and psychological functions rather than spiritual ones. Being a source of inspiration, worship or comfort to someone else is not a spiritual activity, but an emotional or social one.

Some alleged spiritual teachers court large audiences and try to recruit many followers out of their own sense of inflated self-importance, “combining the opportunity to indulge their vanity or lust for power over others, with a convenient and easy method of making money.” The famous or powerful personality who attracts thousands or, in some countries, millions of followers is rarely a genuine sage. However, false teachers of this type unwittingly provide an important social service for genuine teachers by attracting the self-deluded and immature spiritual seekers. This removes potential headaches for the real teachers and allows them to carry on their work with those students who can truly benefit.

There is often a great disparity between the outward appearance, behaviour and repute of an alleged ‘spiritual’ teacher and their psychological immaturity and lack of inner development. Teachers who cultivate a ‘saintly’ appearance or signal by manner, dress or behaviour that they are ‘spiritual’ are usually only superficial and shallow imitators or guilty of obsession.

Bogus spiritual teachers relate to their disciples in a manner inconsistent with the mutual honesty and respect inherent in any real learning situation. Attempts to impress, intimidate or mystify the student, or taking pains to fulfill the image of what the disciple expects of a spiritual guide, suggest that the so-called teacher is not genuine. “The false teacher will pay great

attention to appearance, and will know how to make the seeker think that he is a great man, that he understands him, and that he has great secrets to reveal.” The members of cults often form unhealthy dependency relationships with such teachers, or else become sources of personal service and material benefit to the leader.

Pseudo-teachers usually dislike humour and jokes, calling them superficial and irrelevant. One of the telltale marks of a false teacher is an overly serious, joyless demeanour and a distinct lack of a sense of humour. In sharp contrast, authentic spiritual teachers exhibit a wide and flexible range of behaviours depending on the time, circumstances and audience. One of the hallmarks of partial or deluded teachers is a limited, static way of relating to the world, even though this may be perceived as ‘sanctity,’ ‘detachment,’ or ‘calmness’ by followers and disciples:

This inner unification of personality, expressed through a diversity of ways, means that the true teacher does not resemble the outer, idealized personality of the literalist. The calm, never-changing personality, the aloof master, or the personality which inspires awe alone, the “man who never varies” cannot be a real master. The ascetic who has attained detachment from things of the world and is thus himself an externalized incarnation of what seems to be to the externalist to be detached is not a master. The reason is not far to seek. That which is static becomes useless in the organic sense. A person who is always, as far as can be ascertained, calm and collected, has been trained to have this function, the function of detachment. He “never shows agitation,” and, by depriving himself of one of the functions of organic as well as mental life, he has reduced his range of activity. (7)

Many so-called mystical masters lack a basic understanding of the teaching and learning process and have only a superficial knowledge of human psychology and physiology. One of the signs of a false or imitation teacher is that he or she will accept almost anyone as a disciple, regardless of capacity or preparation. “Where there is a demand from ‘learners’ for something which is offered by ‘teachers,’ there is always an abundance of ‘teachers’ and ‘learners’ who are not in fact carrying on any real teaching function or learning activities.”

Although the bogus teacher is often accused of leading their disciples astray, the adherents of such cults are partly to blame for attaching themselves and remaining with the spurious teacher and in a sense they get the teachers they deserve: *‘If there were fewer buyers of stolen goods, there would be fewer thieves.’* People are drawn to charlatans and pseudo-teachers following the principle ‘like attracts like.’ The would-be student needs to learn how to distinguish the difference between genuine spirituality and obsession or indoctrination. When the Sufi teacher Bayazid was asked what would be the most important indication of a true master, he answered: “When he eats and drinks, buys and sells, and make jokes with you, he whose heart is in the sacred domain – that is the greatest of signs of his being a Master.”

Seekers are often unable to discriminate between real and false spiritual teachers because of psychological factors such as projection and wish-fulfillment and a lack of clarity of their true motive in approaching a supposed spiritual guide:

Q: How can we know the false prophets from the seers?

A: A teacher who takes himself or herself as a teacher needs those who take themselves as disciples. In India and now in the United States there is a lot of guru-shopping. You will know when you have met the guru because he is not outside you and you become more and more independent. If you do not deeply feel your own autonomy you can be sure you are attached by projections and reaction. Many come looking for protection, authority, a mother, father, lover, doctor or therapist. Inquire deeply into why you came looking. You will see it arises from lack. You must face the lack directly and not escape into projection. A clear mind is also a peaceful mind and if the teacher does not bring you quickly to intellectual clarity, and greater autonomy, then go away. Do not stay, compelled by secondary factors. (8)

To a certain degree, the competency of so-called spiritual teachers can be evaluated by inner sense and careful observation of the teacher's behaviour:

The student must study the master to see by his words and actions whether he is working on a higher level, or whether he is merely a social phenomenon. The objection to this – that the student cannot tell, since the master is working in an invisible realm – is true only up to a point. When a supposed teacher manifests ordinary foibles or weaknesses as part of his life's pattern, and if the student has also done enough interior work to give him an accurate judging capacity, the truth will be evident. (9)

The goal of an authentic teacher is to selflessly lead others to enlightenment. The false teacher, on the other hand, is more interested in power, exploitation of others and personality worship. The genuine sage is able to teach those who really want to learn. "If there is any definition of a real teacher, it must include that he can tell the difference between entertainment and instruction, between circus and teaching, between didacticism and action, between awareness teaching and therapy."

In Zen, the teacher's aim, apart from bringing a student to enlightenment, is to preserve the student from his influence. He doesn't wish to control the student's life but only to make him strong enough to be master of his life instead of its slave. In certain other spiritual traditions the guru virtually rules his student's lives, even to the extent of telling them whether to marry and have children. His word is law. If his spirituality is deep, there is little danger. If it is not, God help the student! Shun any teacher who says, "I am enlightened." Beware of any guru who claims to be an avatar, and incarnation of a god or

Buddha. Above all, avoid the “master” who allows his followers to shout his praises with arms upraised at mass rallies, and to laud him as the holiest of the holies. He is the greatest menace. (10)

The way in which a genuine spiritual teacher works with pupils is very different from that of cult-based gurus and self-appointed teachers. One of the attributes of an authentic teacher is the ability to prescribe the appropriate course of study for each individual student:

This is one of the functions of real teachers: to tell you what to avoid as well as what to do. Equally, of course, you can tell who is a real teacher and who is not, as often as not, by whether the teacher is merely giving you a bundle of instructions (prayers, meditations, fasting, concentration, and so on) and hence not excluding, or whether he is also telling you what should be avoided. The latter admonition will deal with the time and places, the company and the response to reactions, which are part of the authentic knowledge of the real teacher. (11)

Perhaps the most significant indicator of a real teacher is that learning and inner development actually occurs on the part of the pupil. There is a wise adage: *‘If the student can’t learn, the teacher, effectively, does not exist.’*

The Four Abuses or ‘Poisons’

Four areas of abuse have been identified which ‘poison’ or ‘pollute’ the relationship between a student and his or her spiritual teacher. Interestingly, the same four abuses – power and authority, money and material possessions, alcohol and drugs, and sexual misconduct – are prevalent in much the same form in the worlds of politics, business, entertainment, sports and many other fields of human endeavour.

1. Power and Authority

Power itself is a neutral objective force which can effect either positive change in others and the world or, when corrupt, be used for self-centered and harmful purposes. There is a marked difference between functional authority (doctor, accountant, architect) and authoritarian or fascist authority (dictator or cult leader). There is also an important distinction between mindless submission to authority (a condition of weakness and enslavement) and mindful surrender (a condition of strength and purpose).

Most spiritual teachers, whether authentic or false, hold a great deal of power and authority in their communities, leading to the possibility of abuse and corruption. Misuse of power is most likely to occur in groups and communities where the teacher holds all the power and decision-making authority and when questioning and honest feedback is discouraged.

A common form of abuse is when a teacher begins to control and manipulate the lives of their followers by decreeing marriages, divorces and lifestyles. When the abuse of power is joined with a teacher's sense of self-importance, it can lead to fear, intimidation and the creation of a virtual spiritual dictatorship. When power is abused in this way, rivalry and sectarianism grow, leading to a cult mentality. This may express itself as "cliques and in-groups, secrets and power struggles" or, at worst, paranoia, isolation, spies, guns and weapons, and survivalist scenarios.

In the last few decades a number of spiritual teachers have been accused of abuse of power and authority, including Yasutani Roshi (12), Sri Chinmoy (13), Andrew Cohen (14), Sangharasita (15), Swami Rama (16), Amrit Desai (17), Carlos Castaneda (18) and Swami Muktananda (19).

2. Money and Material Possessions

When people encounter spiritual teachings that have a powerful and profound impact on their lives, they often wish to give generous financial support to the teacher and community. Many teachers are also able to raise large amounts of money for their organization through media exposure, aggressive fundraising, and expensive lectures, workshops and retreats.

If a teacher's desires become inflated or they are unused to an abundance of material resources, it can lead to abuse of money. Certain teachers have misused their community funds for their own needs, taken to an extreme by the behaviour of some notorious American TV evangelists. Some Eastern gurus, overwhelmed by Western wealth and materialism, have demanded only the finest food, clothes, accommodation and transportation. Sometimes the teachers line their pockets while other members of the community are asked to live an austere lifestyle and work long hours with little or no compensation. In extreme cases, the popularity of spiritual teachings have been used to generate large profits, accompanied by secret bank accounts, fraudulent use of student's monies, material excesses and high living.

Among the spiritual teachers who have been alleged to misuse money and material possessions are Sri Chinmoy (13), Swami Muktananda (19), Reverend Sun Moon (20), Zen Master Rama (21), Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (22), Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (23) and Richard Baker (24).

3. Alcohol and Drugs

Certain spiritual traditions celebrate inebriation as a metaphor for conscious transformation. The Zen tradition has a history of poets and teaching masters who were regular drinkers of sake. Other spiritual traditions have employed certain 'power drugs' or psychedelics in sacred rituals and ceremonies as an integral part of their teaching.

Some spiritual teachers such as Gurdjieff and Chögyam Trungpa have advocated the "sacred use of alcohol" through so-called 'conscious drinking.' Gurdjieff believed that drinking alcohol rendered his students' natures "opaque to scrutiny" as it revealed sides of their personalities that were usually hidden. Trungpa claimed that "whether alcohol is a poison or a medicine

depends on one's awareness while drinking. Conscious drinking – remaining aware of one's state of mind – transmutes the effect of alcohol." (25)

However, in a number of spiritual communities substance abuse has led to public scandals, disgrace and disillusion. In some cases the teacher drank or used drugs publicly and openly, and even encouraged their students to do the same. In other instances addiction to alcohol or drugs was hidden. To deal with addiction problems certain Hindu and Buddhist spiritual communities have started AA groups or other forms of intervention and counselling. A further complicating factor is that alcohol and drug addiction is often combined with abuses of power and sexuality. Substance abuse has led to the downfall of whole communities and caused great suffering in the lives of students (and teachers) ensnared in the web of addictive behaviour. Some of the teachers who have abused alcohol and drugs include Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (22), Alan Watts (26), Shlomo Carlebach (27), Maezumi Roshi (28), Chögyam Trungpa (29) and Bubba Free John (30).

4. Sexual Misconduct

In the past few decades there have been many disclosures of questionable sexual conduct on the part of teachers from many different spiritual traditions. The inappropriate use of sexual energy can occur when a teacher is largely unconscious in this area of life and/or the teachings of their tradition are marked by ambivalence toward or denial of human sexuality. In the celibate monasteries of the East the question of sexuality has often been ignored or repressed. Some of the sexual behaviour of Eastern teachers may be a function of long-standing cultural attitudes and beliefs. For instance, some Tibetan lamas would choose a young nun from the monastery every year to become their sexual consort, explaining that it was a "longevity practice." But interviews with female students who were involved in a sexual relationship with their male teachers revealed that many felt that the relationship undermined their spiritual practice, interfered with the teacher-student relationship and led to confusion, pain and lowered self-esteem. (31)

In an attempt to understand the sexual behaviour of spiritual teachers, Buddhist teacher Jack Kornfield interviewed 54 teachers from a variety of traditions (Zen, Tibetan, Hindu, Jain and Buddhist) about their sexuality. (32) Almost three-quarters (72%) of the sample reported that they were sexually active while 28% were celibate. Of the 39 teachers who were sexually active, 34 (87%) said that they had had at least one sexual relationship with one or more students. One of the most striking findings of the survey was that spiritual teachers were not very much different in terms of their sexuality from the average person:

Like any group of people in our culture, their sexual practices were varied. There were heterosexuals, bisexuals, homosexuals, fetishists, exhibitionists, monogamists and polygamists. There were teachers who were celibate and happy, and those who were celibate and miserable; there were those who were married and monogamous, and those who had many clandestine affairs; there were teachers who were promiscuous and hid it; and those who were

promiscuous and open about it; there were teachers who made conscious and committed sexual relationships an aspect of their spiritual lives; and there were many more teachers who were no more enlightened or conscious about their sexuality than everyone around them. For the most part the “enlightenment” of many of these teachers did not touch their sexuality. (33)

After the study was published many readers expressed surprise and disbelief that spiritual teachers were no more evolved than anyone else when it comes to sex. Kornfield commented on the results of the survey:

A person’s accomplishment as a master of meditation does not automatically ensure a similar level of sexual awareness. In fact, teachers are likely to have active and complex sex lives. We have to re-examine the myth that enlightenment implies celibacy, and that sexuality is somehow abnormal or contrary to the awakened mind. (34)

It is now recognized that a sexual relationship between a person in a position of power (doctor, therapist) and a person who is dependent on them (patient, client) almost always involves an element of coercion and a betrayal of trust. The standard code of ethics of universities and professional associations warn against “inappropriate sexual contact” which can range from verbal sexual innuendoes to a long-term sexual liaison with a student, patient or client. Sexual relationships between spiritual teachers and their students can take a number of different forms. Some are conscious, loving and freely chosen, while others, although lacking in emotional depth and commitment, are openly and harmlessly sexual. In rare cases, instances of true tantric sex may occur. But many relationships have involved the exploitation of students, secrecy and deception, and clearly contradict the moral precepts of the teacher’s spiritual tradition.

Sexual exploitation may involve secret affairs, sex in exchange for access to the teacher, or serving a teacher with sexual favours in the name of “tantra” or a “special teaching.” In extreme cases, sexual misconduct has led to secret harems, abuse of underage boys and girls, and even the transmission of AIDS to male and female students by a teacher, Ósel Tendzin, who told his unsuspecting partners that his special powers would serve as protection.

At a conference of Western Buddhist teachers in 1993, the Dalai Lama addressed the problem of teacher-student sexual relations and stressed that they were very harmful for the Buddha-dharma and were due to a lack of inner strength and self-discipline on the part of the teachers. And when asked how many Tibetan teachers were qualified Tantric masters, he replied: “As far as I know – zero.” Numerous spiritual teachers have been accused of sexual misconduct: Sri Chinmoy (13), Swami Rama (16), Swami Muktananda (19), Zen Master Rama (21), Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (22), Richard Baker (24), Maezumi Roshi (28), Chögyam Trungpa (29), Ósel Tendzin (29), Bubba Free John (30), Katagiri Roshi (35), Krishnamurti (36), Kalu Rinpoche (37) and Sogyal Rinpoche (38).

Understanding the Shadow

Many members of spiritual communities have reported some form of hurt and disillusionment as a result of the misdeeds of their teacher. Such betrayal may create a feeling of loss and rage as students feel much like young children again as they re-experience traumatic childhood events such as the death of a parent or an acrimonious divorce. A long process of grief and anger, reflection and inner work, is often needed before the feelings of disappointment, abandonment and betrayal pass.

To understand the shadow side of spiritual teachers and groups we need to familiarize ourselves with some of the psychological factors which lead certain teachers and their followers to a mutual pattern of abuse, deceit and exploitation.

1. Mistaking Power and Charisma for Wisdom

Power and charisma are frequently confused with wisdom, even though the same quality serves demagogues, politicians, business tycoons, entertainers and sports figures. Many powerful and charismatic people are not wise at all. Conversely, wisdom may manifest as simplicity, humility and the most ordinary of lives. And sometimes these qualities unite in the form of a strong, yet wise and compassionate teacher. But such an exceptional being never wears their spiritual realization as a badge or advertisement.

When power becomes corrupted it can lead to egocentricity and arrogance. Some tyrannical gurus have bullied, controlled and exploited their disciples in order to “destroy their egotism.” In some spiritual traditions there are safeguards against the abuse of power, often in the form of wise elders and respected teachers who “watch over one another’s spiritual condition and conduct.”

2. Guru worship and Ego Inflation

The experience of visions and mystical states without integration into everyday life can lead to grandiosity and ego inflation. When teachers over-identify with powerful spiritual energy they can easily become deluded and believe that they should be venerated and served by others. Unfulfilled and unacknowledged human needs may also become entangled with spiritual experiences, creating an expanded form of ego.

Followers should be wary when there is a court around a teacher that focuses more on the person than on the wisdom of the spiritual lineage and teachings. When teachers are highly elevated by others and viewed as perfect, they can become isolated from their peers and immune from genuine feedback. At worst, teachers surrounded by a circle of adoring followers can fall prey to arrogance, blind self-assurance and megalomania:

In most cases where the role of the teacher is abused the teachers are not purposely dishonest. Surrounded by crowds of disciples who want to think of them as perfect, they have come to believe their own press releases, to identify with the authority of being a 'master.' A collective intoxication grows, created equally by teacher and student, each out of good intentions. But within this climate of unreal expectations it is easy for the teacher to get disconnected and out of touch, to feel, like Icarus before his fall, that he or she can fly forever. (39)

3. Projection and Transference

Transference is a powerful unconscious process in which a person transfers or projects onto an authority figure the attributes of someone significant in their past, often a parent. In most therapeutic relationships transference is purposely discussed so that clients can relate realistically rather than idealistically to their therapist. But projection and transference are rarely acknowledged or addressed in spiritual communities.

'Mutual complicity' occurs when a student projects qualities or attributes onto the teacher, and the teacher's ego accepts these projections as though they are indeed true. An already charismatic teacher becomes even more powerful through the influence of the psychic energy generated by the student's projections. Transference and projection make it easier to manipulate and dominate the person who is doing the transferring, leading to an unhealthy co-dependence. Transference and idealization create a climate of unreality, feeding the teacher's narcissism. When students see the teacher as a 'completely enlightened master,' the teacher may become similarly deluded. The combination of unquestioning adoration by students and the susceptibility to ego inflation on the part of the teacher create an unhealthy and distorted situation.

4. Rationalization and Denial

False teachers and their students frequently justify inappropriate conduct with elaborate explanations. For instance, questionable behaviour by a revered teacher may be rationalized as "compassionate skilful action designed to benefit the student in a way that can only be understood from the perspective of the teacher's transcendental wisdom." Other teachers have claimed that they abused money and power "to benefit humanity" or had sex with students because it was a "tantric teaching" or was "in their best spiritual interests."

The human capacity for self-deception is just as strong in spiritual groups as in the general populace. A culture of shared denial blinds people to the evidence of their own eyes, creating the phenomenon of "the emperor's invisible new clothes." Interestingly, denials and rationalizations about the misdeeds of the teacher and the cult-like qualities of the teaching are often more apparent to outside observers than those close to the teacher.

5. Cultural Conditioning

The cultural background of spiritual teachers can colour their beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and teaching styles. Generally speaking, most Eastern cultures tend to be conservative, hierarchical and male dominated. Western cultures value individual freedom and self-expression, and are more egalitarian and democratic.

Eastern teachers who come from cultures where dress is modest and the sexes are often separated sometimes experience confusion and may exhibit inappropriate behaviour when immersed in more liberal Western cultures. Foreign teachers coming to a Western country which embraces the pursuit of money, power, sex, alcohol and drug use often see this as an open invitation to excess and an opportunity to experience “forbidden fruit.”

6. Limiting Full Human Expression

Excellence in one aspect of life does not automatically bring wisdom in other dimensions. The ‘halo effect’ is the unexamined assumption that if a teacher is skilful and awakened in certain areas (prayer, meditation) they will also be competent and wise in all other areas of life (child rearing, finances). Every teacher has his or her strengths and weaknesses. Problems and abuses arise when spirituality ignores or denies certain aspects of our humanity.

The denial of many ordinary human desires and longings is surprisingly prevalent in many of the world’s spiritual traditions. Some even teach an ideal of unworldly perfection and discourage or condemn personal needs and desires. They often do not recognize the value of ordinary human relationships and the importance for a spiritual teacher of having a life outside their traditional role:

A teacher may be surrounded by adoring devotees and yet have no peers, no one with whom he or she can have an open and honest conversation. They may have little private life and always be on duty for the spiritual needs of the community. They will often be mother, father, confessor, healer, administrator, master, and camp counsellor all rolled into one. Few people realize the extent to which teachers can be isolated in their role, especially in communities where they are the sole acknowledged leader. (40)

By denying their full humanity, teachers may repress or ignore certain sides of their being, leading to a fearful and puritanical way of experiencing life. In fact, intimacy, sexuality and the full range of human emotions are part of a real spiritual life. By acknowledging their full human nature, both teachers and students alike can use the challenges of ordinary daily life -- the stresses, emotions and relationship difficulties -- as a rich field of spiritual practice.

Indications and Signs of a False Teacher

From Arthur Deikman, "The Evaluation of Spiritual and Utopian Groups" (41):

- Actively seek large numbers of disciples
- Attract students through their personality and charisma
- Rely on displays of spiritual power to galvanize or intimidate followers
- Spuriously claim transmission from a genuine spiritual lineage
- Inhibit and discourage critical thinking
- Encourage students to compete for the teacher's attention
- Deliberately prey on students' sense of personal inadequacy
- Rely on their spiritual authority as justification for exploitation and abusive behaviour
- Use their followers to advance their own personal interests and agenda
- Enrich themselves with their students' money or free labour
- Order one student to harm another physically or psychologically
- Interfere with the student's bond to children or parents
- Arrange marriages or break up existing relationships
- Enter into sexual relations with their students

From Hoda Azizian in *Sufi Thought and Action* (42):

- Claiming supreme Mastership
- Suggesting that they exert influence in the affairs of the world
- Implying that they are following the 'Path of Blame' (deliberately courting unpopularity); real teachers anonymously tread the 'Path of Blame.'
- Wearing clothes or other apparel foreign to the country in which they are living, or instructing students in a language foreign to them
- Allowing their hand to be kissed by followers or visitors
- Exhibiting signs of alcoholism and loss of coordination
- Convincing others that one is taking a deep interest in them, especially when they are ill or in distress
- Engaging in mysteriousness or hinting
- Telling disciples that "something important is going to happen soon"
- Giving ultimatums or asking someone to choose between two people, two courses of study, or two forms of behaviour
- Appearing on platforms with "other mystics"
- Confusing and mixing friendship with teaching
- Tolerating the deluded and self-absorbed
- Allowing exercises to be carried out without supervisors to intervene at appropriate moments
- Appearing unacceptable to normal members of society

Characteristics of a Genuine Spiritual Teacher

From John Wellwood in *Spiritual Choices* (43):

- Genuine teachers encourage self-respect as the basis for spiritual growth.
- Their relationship with students is based on real, experiential understanding rather than ideology or belief.
- They will themselves have undergone extensive training and practice.
- They have a deep respect for human dignity, rather than appealing to their students' personal inadequacies and insecurities.
- They will allow tolerance for ambiguity and paradox, rather than insisting on absolute certainty in the "One and Only Truth."
- Their concern will be directed to all people rather than elevating a group of followers to a privileged status above their fellow humans.
- They will not manipulate the emotions of their students, but will appeal to their natural intelligence.
- They will encourage people on the path to self-knowledge through example, rather than promises of future salvation and reward.
- Instead of supporting herd behaviour, they will recognize the importance of individual differences, needs and methods of instruction.
- The ultimate criterion is whether they successfully guide their students to self-realization and the experience of their larger universal being.

From Mariana Caplan, *Halfway up the Mountain* (44):

- A true master is one who lives by what they know to be the truth. There is no contradiction between their words and actions. They "walk the walk" and don't just "talk the talk."
- They manifest maturity, sound judgement and a well-developed code of ethical behaviour.
- A real teacher emanates love, compassion and essential kindness. They serve others.
- They do not promote themselves, try to gain material advantage or do anything strictly out of self-interest.
- The authentic teacher is free of attachments to money, sex, power and glory.
- They do not cause suffering to others due to selfish words and actions.
- A real teacher has received spiritual transmission and permission to teach from their own teacher as part of a reputable lineage.
- They have a deep understanding of the teaching and the ability to guide others on the path to enlightenment.
- They are viewed positively by other teachers and their peers.
- Their own students are clear and centered within themselves and demonstrate qualities that others would aspire to.

- The real teacher spiritually transforms their students, producing individuals who themselves eventually become teachers.
- They deal patiently and compassionately with ordinary people who are not their students or followers.

From Omar Ali-Shah, *Rules and Secrets of the Naqshbandi Order* (45):

- Does not invade pupil's lives or create dependency
- Respects and builds upon all family ties and relationships
- Discourages recourse to all artificial stimulants
- Uses the normal time-frame within which we live, which means that progress will often take longer than one would have hoped
- Teaches in a manner appropriate to the time, situation and capacities of the students
- Works with students in terms of harmony rather than conflict, generally avoiding dramatic and cathartic-type experiences
- Shocks or provocation are held in reserve for exceptional cases, for instance when a pupil is falling into a rut of some years duration

From John Grant, *Travels in the Unknown East* (46):

- Has a strong sense of humour and shows it frequently
- Wears, most of the time, the clothes of the country wherein he lives
- Ordinarily eats the wholesome food of the country where he dwells
- Supports himself by his own labour
- Can work "in the world" and makes worldly activities successful
- Has no physical relations or familiarity with his disciples
- Does not allow his disciples to leave the world or cut communication with their relatives or friends
- Recognizes that all 'exercises' and 'books' are temporary formulae, and not to be applied automatically at all times and to all people
- Refuses to mystify you, and has no magical aura
- Produces no atmosphere of "power" around him. As the ancients have rightly said: "The fraud makes people believe that he is a man of power. The true teacher spends much time appearing very normal."

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