



Has a Self Help “Guru” Ripped You Off?

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We have recently witnessed the furore over the deaths of three people in a “sweat lodge” in Arizona during a “Spiritual Warrior” retreat run by self-help guru James Ray who has now been charged with three counts of manslaughter as a result. Allegations from participants in the retreat include that people who were complaining of feeling faint or dizzy or who were clearly feeling the effects of dehydration were forced to stay in the sweat lodge, whilst others claim that a thirty six hour enforced fast also played its part in the tragedy. Whatever truly happened will, no doubt, emerge in time – but the key question has to be asked as to why people would pay up to \$9,000 to be subjected to a rite of passage such as this.

The current publicity surrounding this incident masks a deeper unease that the public should have with people who encourage their followers to believe them to be gurus because no one needs a guru, you don’t need any representative to act on your behalf on introducing you to your true inner self. You don’t need to become dependent on someone else to help your self to emerge. Self help means that, ultimately, you’ve got to help yourself.

I’ve been working with people since 1996 and regularly come across the ill-effects of guru dependence. One guy told me that he didn’t know how he would survive the next six months because he’d been told to attend the Annual European Sales Conference of his company on the same weekend that he’d booked his “annual pilgrimage” (his words, not mine) to partake of Tony Robbins at London’s Excel Centre. “How will I do without my Tony fix?” he asked – and he was serious. And, it is serious – if you’re seeking the inner you, you need to detach yourself from the transient things of this world that drag the normal soul down – you certainly don’t need to attach yourself to some new addiction.

I’ve had to assist people in re-directing their minds away from clearly self-destructive (either in a business, personal or relationship sense) courses of action that “came to them” in the pressure-cooker, cult-like environment of one or other self-help guru’s retreat. One guy ended up stalking his ex-girlfriend after being encouraged to “follow his heart” (repeatedly chanted at him) in some form of “group therapy” session. He was told that positive thinking would bring her to him (suggesting his thoughts could control someone else – very dangerous). Indeed, if you want to explore the havoc

that positive thinking can wreak, take a look at Barbara Ehrenreich's latest book, "Smile or Die: How Positive Thinking Fooled America and the World".

But back to my point – and another client who I had to assist. He had just returned from a \$90,000 (yes, you read that right!) two-week retreat to find his wife had left him – she discovered that he had taken out a new mortgage on his home to pay the \$90,000. The staff of the guru in question are well known for arranging multiple car loans for those who wish to attend but who don't have the wherewithal to re-mortgage their house. I was informed by my client that he was told that this guru believed himself to be Jesus Christ re-incarnate and that he "recollected giving the Sermon on the Mount" – some saviour though because, having a penchant for large-breasted girls, the front row of his retreats were jokingly known as "Silicon Valley"!!

Why am I giving you these details? I want to make a couple of very important points. Number One: All of us need all the help we can get to find our true passion, discover our inner potential and live life to the full. But only a fool would take a paracetamol for a headache and then become addicted. Number Two: You don't need anyone to come between you and God (however you define God) – all major spiritual traditions intimate that we are an integral part of the divine, quantum physics states that we are an indivisible, quantum entangled part of the underlying entity. Find God by finding your inner self – not by becoming hooked on some guru.

Number Three: Self help means helping yourself. Yes, as I've said, we all need guidance – we all know, in truth, little or nothing about our universe and our place in it. Most of us instinctively feel, however, that there is more to life than meets the eye – and we want that "more". Not only that, it is ours as a natural inheritance. But the journey to discovery (of the self and our purpose) is one we can only make for ourselves. Sure, we need the signposts but each step taken is a step that can only be taken alone.

So, by all means, read your self-help books, watch your self-help DVDs, participate in your self-help seminars – but use them as nothing more than the valuable resources they are to assist you on your journey – for to arrive you need to free yourself from all attachment.