



Guru? You Don't Need No Stinking Guru.



Joshu Sasaki

Why do you need a guru? If you fall down, then pick yourself up and continue to walk. ~Krishnamurti

As dozens of sexual harassment accusations against renowned Zen Buddhist teacher Joshu Sasaki have come to light, it got me thinking: do you really need a guru to achieve spiritual enlightenment?

In case you haven't heard, the now 105-year old Sasaki apparently **misused his Zen teachings** as a justification to sexually exploit his female students over several decades. Of course, Sasaki is not alone in his sexual misdeeds. **Time** and **time** again, often here on the pages of elephant j, we've seen **reports** of other "gurus" behaving badly. (Not that the Eastern philosophies have a monopoly on **bad behavior**.)

Now, I'm in full agreement that certain gurus have the potential to pass along their wisdom. In fact, you may have a guru in your own life who is now teaching you vital life lessons and leading you down the path of enlightenment. But I strongly believe that while a guru can point you in the right spiritual direction, you've got to walk that path alone.

My favorite guru is a guy by the name of Yogani. He wrote the **best book on meditation** I've ever read and has also written extensively on yoga. Yet you've probably never heard of him—and for good reason. Yogani chooses to live anonymously, openly shunning his guru status. He publishes **his teachings** online for free. And while he believes gurus and teachers can sometimes be helpful, his frequent refrain is "the guru is in you." In his words:

Your enlightenment depends on you more than anyone, because it is only through your desire and action that divine experience can rise in you. It is only through your nervous system that pure bliss consciousness and divine ecstasy can be known. You cannot delegate it. It is only by you making a daily effort to purify your nervous system that anything can happen. It is you who are making the journey.

I'm also reminded of the author and spiritual teacher **Andrew Harvey**. For ten years, Harvey was a disciple of a Hindu guru named Mother Meera, eventually helping her gain a worldwide audience through his book "*Hidden Journey: A Spiritual Awakening*". During this period, Harvey also met and studied with a Tibetan mystic named Sogyal Rinpoche—and co-wrote with Rinpoche the worldwide bestseller *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*.

But everything came crashing down for Harvey during a two-month period in 1994. In a committed relationship with another man for several years, Mother Meera told him to break with his partner and get married—to a woman—and "write a book claiming that her divine force had transformed me into a heterosexual." A few weeks later it was revealed in the press that 11 of Sogyal Rinpoche's female students were suing him for sexual abuse.

Harvey was devastated, realizing his guru "was not the divine master I had believed her to be", then discovering the Tibetan mystic he helped put on the spiritual map was not true to his own teachings. So Harvey began looking for another path. And after months of meditation and prayer, he discovered "the force, passion, and transforming power of the path of direct communication with God."

In other words, **Harvey killed the guru. Or, in his case, two gurus.** He ended up finding his way in what might sound like an unlikely place, a Catholic church. While not a member of any organized religion, Harvey was attending a church service for a friend when he had a moment of real revelation. He came to the conclusion that:

Christ's real teaching was not, as the churches have claimed, about worshiping him as son of God; it was an attempt to transmit to everyone else the intimate, direct, totally transforming relationship he had himself realized with God...after all, if everyone is able to be in unmediated contact with the Divine, to be taught in the terms of their own lives directly by the Divine, then what need is there for a priest class, monasteries and temples, or gurus?

And if you buy into that belief—that what we ultimately seek to achieve on the spiritual path is a direct, one-on-one connection with the divine, do we really need a spiritual guide or master to show us what is already within us?

Which brings me to the teachings of Jesus. I've written previously on these Web pages about "**The Forbidden Sayings of Jesus**" from the Gnostic texts, many of which point to an inner path of enlightenment. And while much of this "find God within" thinking never made it to the four narrowly scripted gospels of the Bible, there is one passage that eluded the early biblical censors. It can be found in Luke 17:20 and 17:21:

One day the Pharisees asked Jesus, "When will the Kingdom of God come?" Jesus replied, "The Kingdom of God can't be detected by visible signs, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

Bam! Don't go looking over here or over there or even to me to find God, for you can find the divine inside you!

This "do-it-yourself" sentiment is echoed by the great Indian religious teacher Jiddu **Krishnamurti**. A deep thinker who was a major influence on Aldous Huxley, Krishnamurti found gurus "*unnecessary*" and renounced the guru role even though many tried to thrust it on him. He wrote:

The pursuit, all the world over, of gurus and their systems...seems to me so utterly empty, so utterly futile, for you may wander all over the earth but you have to come back to yourself. And most of us are totally unaware of ourselves...the more you know yourself, the more clarity there is.

He also gave the advice below to those who choose to follow gurus, a message also aimed at the devotees who sought to follow him:

The man who worships another because that other has realized is really worshiping authority and therefore he can never find the truth.

As a practitioner of self-serve enlightenment, I'm well aware that this particular spiritual path is a bumpy one. As the wise man Krishnamurti himself said: "*it sounds so easy, but it is extremely difficult.*" It requires hard work, a boundless period of study and meditation and reflection, and it has more than its share of ebbs and flows.

But during those glorious moments when it all falls into place, when you feel a genuine sense of contentment—when the bliss wells up inside you to the point you can feel the living presence of the divine within—you realize that all the effort is worth it.

You have reached the peak of Everest, not on the back of another, but on your own.

Incorrect source, offensive, or found a typo? Or do you **want to write** for Elephant?



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