

To the people of Royal Way
A radiance of light . . .

A friend has asked: “In your last letter, you state you have never claimed to be a guru. I myself have never heard you make such a claim. Yet I hear other people say you *are* a guru. I ask you directly: Are you a guru? And if you are a guru, does that mean Royal Way is a cult?”

The word “guru” is very popular these days. It is used both reverently and derisively. Actually, the word and the concept are foreign to our Western culture. The word, if not the concept, is also alien to my own background. In my genealogy, the word “rebbe” (not to be confused with the word “rabbi”) was used for the same title. “Rebbe” is as different from “rabbi” as “guru” is different from “priest.”

Unlike popes, priests, ministers, rabbis, and monks, who are either ordained, appointed, or elected, the guru and rebbe are both *self-evident*. No university ever conferred the degree of guru or rebbe on anyone. No theological seminary ever ordained a guru or a rebbe. No government ever appointed anyone to such a position. No elections were ever held to determine who would be a guru or a rebbe.

I am not speaking here of the endless dynasties that ensued from many of the inceptors. They simply inherited the mantle by virtue of the need and yearning of the crowd that was left leaderless and clinging to the remains of the originals. I am speaking of the originals—*they were self-evident*.

“Guru” and “rebbe” are also similar in that they both foster relationships with disciples that are deeper than, stronger than, and different from any other human relationships.

Too, it is difficult to define precisely what those titles mean. The title “guru” is even murkier because it plays with the notions of divinity in a way that is difficult for the rational mind to accept. Conversely, the title

“rebbe” is very clear, at least on this subject: The divinity of the rebbe is in no way different from the divinity of the disciple. There is a clear delineation between the divinity of the Creator and the divinity of the creation, which includes the rebbe.

To avoid unnecessary ambiguities, I will use the word “master” for both. This word is often used by Hindu and Buddhist gurus when speaking in English and is the literal translation for the word “rebbe”—master in the sense of a teacher who has mastered the teaching rather than an owner of slaves. Of course, a master is different from an ordinary teacher. A master does not merely share information and knowledge; a master shares himself, the world, and God, and leads the student to his or her own divinity through the process of discipleship.

Still, those on the outside cannot say what a master is. Certainly, a master is wise—but so are other people wise. Sometimes a master heals—but so do others heal. Miracles? As many masters did not perform miracles as did. Even as many miracle workers were not masters. One might go on with all manner of criteria without ever pinpointing that special quality of a master. The only specialness that can be pointed to with certainty is the phenomenon of discipleship, that special and unique relationship that exists between a master and his disciples. That quality also cannot be expressed in words. Words are of the mind. This special relationship, while encompassing all, apexes at the heart, and words cannot contain the heart.

While we cannot say exactly what *is* a master, we can say with certainty what *makes* a master. *You make a master.* You decide—not with your head, but with your heart—who is a master.

Many masters worked miracles in order to convince people that they were masters. Many did not have that need, or the times did not require miracles, or whatever reason, and those men were often greater masters than the ones who did perform miracles. The simple point is that *you* make a master. If you feel that a teacher is a fountain for your divinity,

then you become a disciple. If you are a disciple, then for you, he is the master. If other people also feel that he is the mirror of their divinity, then he is the master for them also.

There will always be many for whom a teacher will never be a master. To this day, there are millions who call themselves disciples of Moses, Buddha, Mahavira, Jesus, and Muhammad. But to millions of others, these men never were and are not now masters. Sometimes a great master has only a small gathering of disciples. Lao-tzu had only two or three. I mention the famous ones because they are well-known, but there have been hundreds through the centuries. In our own time, I have known a number of true masters, some with thousands of disciples and some with only a roomful of ardent, devoted, highly developed disciples. Some masters became famous through their writings. Some refrained from writing, preferring direct contact. Others were wholly silent and communicated with the heart only to those who were open and receptive. Some were like the rain, falling on everything—soft soil, hard rock. Others were like lightning bolts, directing their fire with pinpoint accuracy to the right antennae. Still others embodied both qualities and used both at different times.

Thus my answer is simple: A master is a guru to those who accept him and is not a guru to those who do not accept him.

There are a number of reasons why a master is not accepted. One reason is a fear of being overwhelmed and possibly hurt. This is a legitimate fear. When people are in deep darkness for a long time, a great light will only hurt their eyes, causing them to shut their eyes even tighter than before. What is needed is a tiny little candle that they can tolerate. That is why it is good that there are many gurus with many different lights, so that every individual can find for himself or herself the appropriately tolerable voltage. Another reason is the fear of having to give up all the old ways, which have become so familiar, so comfortable, and so intimate. Above all is the fear of having to surrender the ego, which is equated with a loss of identity. These also are legitimate fears, because a

true teacher will indeed dissolve the ego, leaving a pure emptiness where once was clutter and turmoil. Such is the path of transformation. Love replaces ego, thus . . . transcendence.

Kabir the sacred poet writes: “Cling to the feet of your guru as the boatman to his boat.” Kabir does not write *the* guru or *a* guru. He writes *your* guru. *Only you can make the guru.* “The river is deep, the boat is old, but the boatman must not be separated from the boat.”

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You also ask: “If you are a guru, does that mean Royal Way is a cult?” There is nothing wrong with a cult—if the leader is a true teacher. You do not hide from God because of Satan. You do not shun the saints because there are devils. Similarly, you do not condemn cults because of a Reverend Jones or a Reverend Moon. You use discretion, discernment, judiciousness. You use your God-given brain to differentiate in all areas of life, including cults.

From the surface, oil, gold, diamonds, and all precious metals look like dirt. You have to dig deep to find what you are looking for, and it is worth every bit of effort. If you are looking for oil, dig the earth. If you are looking for truth, dig the cults. If you find an empty, dark hole, abandon it. If you find gold, keep digging. To use the word “cult” as a negation or criticism shows ignorance.

Would anyone condemn the medical profession because some doctors are charlatans and do great harm to their patients? Would anyone suggest shutting down the legal profession because some attorneys are more crooked than their clients? Would anyone want to eliminate psychotherapy from our society because so many therapists are in worse shape than their patients? Of course not. One does not destroy a barrelful of sweet apples because of a few rotten ones. Why then this hullabaloo about cults? The fact is that throughout history, cults have been incredible power sources for spiritual creativity, for the benefit of all mankind. In my own time, I have been to a number of places that, were they

known, would be labeled as cults. They are not known because truth does not go on television. Why condemn cults merely because there are some stupid ones and a couple of dangerous ones? But this is the way our culture deals with problems. First we become paranoid, then impotent. This is the way we deal with crime, with disease, with educating our children, etc., etc.

Cults are inevitable. They are a natural phenomenon that arises around anyone who touches people deeply. To be part of a group rather than the only one with a true teacher is often the most powerful aid—next to the teacher himself—toward higher consciousness.

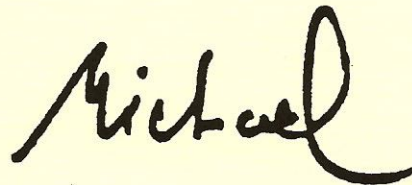
The word “cult” at its root means “to cultivate.” A true teacher cultivates those around him, even as a farmer cultivates the earth: plowing, tilling, watering, planting the seeds, protecting the harvest from all who would destroy it—rats, insects, thieves, etc.

To surrender to all these efforts is what is known as the work of discipleship. During that long process, the teacher, male or female, is the male principle, and the disciple, male or female, is the female principle. From the teacher comes the greatest love. From the disciple comes the deepest devotion . . . beyond boundaries, beyond time. It is the most natural-supernatural phenomenon. In its purity it brings the greatest joy. By comparison, all the romance in the world, all the power in the world, all the money in the world, all else . . . is reduced to Disneyland. The fortunate few who realize and pursue this path, when they recognize others such as themselves, together create a collective around the teacher, generating a more powerful and more profound energy for themselves *and for the teacher*. Yes, a true teacher continues to grow even as the disciples grow. If he stops growing, his teaching will grow stale. Better to stop teaching. (There are other reasons why a true teacher stops teaching, but that is another story.) This is how a cult of light is born. Throughout history, it is these cults that have slowly raised the consciousness of the race. Some of the cults grew into mass movements—Christianity, Buddhism, etc. Others remained esoteric, keeping the embers glowing.

However, there is a dark side to everything. There are cults of light and there are cults of darkness. Even within a cult of light, there are shadows. Such is the nature of our physical plane. Hence, the problems that often arise. Hence, a Judas. Hence, the perversion of truth in the established religions. Nevertheless, a cult of light presents the greatest opportunity to drop all the confusion, the loneliness, the bitterness, the fears, the anxieties, the pointless suffering—and to achieve our greatest potential.

Finally, the word “cult” is not one of my favorite words, simply because it has been misused, maligned, and debased, turning it into a “hit” word. It is perfectly fine with me if the word disappears altogether. I am not stuck with it. Nor am I enamored with the words “sect,” “movement,” “group,” or any of the other words. I like the word “host,” even though it connotes doing battle. Indeed, the work does at times involve doing battle. But the word “host” is archaic and does not really define the subject. I believe it is perfectly good not to have a word. The most important experiences in life have no words.

So, be not taken aback when the word “cult” is thrown at you. Catch it, and ask: Are fish in the water ever thirsty?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael". The script is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the letter 'l'.