

In his book *The Way of Kabbalah*, Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi warns that one of the hazards of the spiritual path is that the seeker may mistakenly study with a false teacher, someone who is either self-deluded or an imposter. He also writes that of even greater danger—

... is the man who has reached some level of realization. His quality is usually enigmatic, and he often possesses remarkable powers which he uses to intrigue and manipulate people who are not so evolved as himself... Alas, such men have the ability to fascinate and imprison people by their personal charisma, which is the exact reverse of Kabbalah, whose object is to free men from bondage... Such a man can leave the path and descend to the ego, where he exercises all the powers and skills he has acquired nominally for the sake of spiritual work, but in actuality for the glorification of his ego. To such people the image of themselves is most important, and with it comes clothes and mannerisms, all of which suggest that they know about the next and upper World... The phenomenon occurs on the edge of all Traditions... Temptation is possible all the way up Jacob's Ladder. Lucifer was among the highest of archangels before he fell. Only God is perfect.

To come in contact with a dark or fallen Teacher is often part of a seeker's training. Many dead ends will present themselves; but all will teach him something, if only... how to extract himself from the subtle net that a false teacher weaves around his followers so that his ego may feed on them.

Halevi's warning fits the latest chapter in my spiritual journey. I'd like to share it with you to make my own position known, and in order that you might be forewarned of a more than questionable teaching. Whatever there is to be learned from this is, I think, of importance to the spiritual community as a whole.

Let me bring you up to date. My guru, Neemkaroli Baba (better known as "Maharaj-ji"), died in 1973. Since then I had been with a few other teachers, but none could begin to replace him. I was also lecturing and teaching on a full schedule, but I found I was getting caught in more worldly play, and I felt more and

more depressed and hypocritical. By the end of the summer of 1974 I decided to return to India. I didn't know what I'd find, but I'd go anyway. I knew I was different than I had been ten years before but I was still not cooked.

Driving East, I stopped overnight in Pennsylvania at a motel where I was planning to watch the House Judiciary Committee Hearings on television, but a storm put out the electricity. It was too early to go to sleep so there was nothing left to do but meditation. After Maharaj-ji came to me in a vision. He looked just like he always had looked.



He laughed and spoke to me. It's interesting—he had always spoken in Hindi, and my Hindi was very bad. In India there was always somebody translating. But on these other levels, the transmission is in thought forms, and then it comes out in whatever language you think in. So he said to me, in very good English, "You don't have to go to India. Your teachings will be right here."

It was so valid, and so real that at that moment I decided not to go to India. I decided to go to New Hampshire, meditate a month or so in a cabin, clean out my head, and see what would happen next.

On the following day passing through New York City, I called Hilda Charlton, a spiritual teacher, to say hello. She told me there was a woman in Brooklyn who I should meet. When I resisted because I

wanted to be alone, she told me this woman said my Guru was sitting in her basement. Of course I decided to stay one more night, and the next day I went with Hilda to see a lady named Joya. We went down into the basement of her home and there she was, sitting in what Hilda said was samadhi. I checked; I could find no breath or pulse. She was like a rock. She was a very unusual looking woman; she had long false eyelashes, heavy mascara, and a low cut dress. Maharaj-ji was an old man in a blanket, but I'd given up having models about what packages the next message was supposed to come in.

Finally she came out of it, looked at me, and said, "What the fuck do you want?" Hilda said, "Oh, dear, this is Ram Dass," which didn't seem to make any impression on her at all. She said, "I don't care who the hell he is. Does that old man over there belong to you?" I looked and there was a blanket with nothing on it. So I said, "I don't know." She said, "He's buggin' me; get him the hell out of here."

Then her consciousness seemed to shift just a little bit as she went into a very light trance, and suddenly I felt Maharaj-ji was speaking to me through her. He was talking about things that he and I had been discussing in India when I had seen him last, little matters about maintenance of the temples in India and all kinds of very picayune  
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