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## **Playing the Enlightenment Card (The Matrix Dictionary)**

This article is related to the article on [Spiritual Placebo](#).

What should one think when New Agers and Self-helpers (actually quite many) on their websites write about themselves that they are enlightened?

Well if they start out writing this you ought to be skeptical! Presenting oneself as enlightened is just about the opposite of anything that has to do with enlightenment. It's really getting me annoyed. But the claim can also be stated in more subtle suggestive ways, and that's even more annoying. The first trick is to write about yourself in third person, as if it is someone else who are writing it. But from here the suggestions are branching out in a wilderness. It's called *Playing the Enlightenment Card*.

Shortly said: It is a trick used by unenlightened people to fool other people into believing you are enlightened.

That people really can take on their shoulders to play the role as an enlightened master without being it, is beyond my imagination. It really puzzles me - (I like to think that this simply has become a "normal" marketing tactic which falseness they are completely unaware of) - but a lot of thought distortions come to mind here (besides the obvious possibility of mental illness, which I won't come into here). In the following I will therefore write central thought distortions in Bold, so that you can find them in my book [A Dictionary of Thought Distortions](#).

Thought distortions are an explanation of how incredible self-deceptive the mind can become. Thought distortions are "techniques", that, unconscious or conscious, are used from an interest in finding ways of getting on in the world, rather than an interest in finding ways of discovering the truth. Thought distortions are the background for poor reasoning, diversionary ploys, seductive reasoning errors, techniques of persuasion and avoidance, psychological factors, which can be obstacles to clear thought.

Critical thinking, or philosophy, is in opposition to thought distortions. Critical thinking is about spotting thought distortions, and examining them by presenting reasons and evidence in support of conclusions. Critical thinking is the only tool you can use in order to explore, change and restructure thought distortions.

There are especially two kinds of thought distortions involved in *Playing the Enlightenment Card*:

1. Truth by Authority
2. Ego-inflation

### **1. Truth by Authority**

Playing the Enlightenment Card is a reversed form of the more famous Playing the Nazi Card.

Reductio ad Hitlerum (pseudo-Latin for "reduction to Hitler"; sometimes argumentum ad Hitlerum, "argument to Hitler", ad Nazium, "to Nazism"), or playing the Nazi card, is an attempt to invalidate someone else's position on the basis that the same view was held by Adolf Hitler or the Nazi Party, for example: "Hitler was a vegetarian, X is a vegetarian, therefore X is a Nazi". A variation of this fallacy, reductio ad Stalinum, also known as "red-baiting", has also been used in political discourse.

Coined by Leo Strauss in 1951, reductio ad Hitlerum borrows its name from the term used in logic, **Reductio ad Absurdum** (reduction to the absurd). According to Strauss, reductio ad Hitlerum is a form of **Ad Hominem Move**, ad misericordiam, or a fallacy of irrelevance. The suggested rationale is one of [guilt by association](#). It is a tactic often used to derail arguments, because such comparisons tend to distract and anger the opponent, as Hitler and Nazism have been condemned in the modern world. The argument is that a policy leads to – or is the same as – one advocated or implemented by Adolf Hitler or the Third Reich and so "proves" that the original policy is undesirable.

Another instance of Reductio ad Hitlerum is asking a question of the form "You know who else...?" with the deliberate intent of impugning a certain idea or action by implying Hitler held that idea or performed such action.

An invocation of Hitler or Nazism is not a Reductio ad Hitlerum when it illuminates the argument instead of causing distraction from it. See **Reductio ad Absurdum**.

Playing the Enlightenment Card has a lot in common with all this, for example it is also a form of association fallacy. The argument is that an ideology, a spiritual teaching advocated by the one who uses the card, leads to, or is the same as – one advocated or implemented by enlightened masters and so “proves” that the ideology or spiritual teaching is desirable. The suggested rationale is a reversed form of Guilt by Association, namely Truth by Association, or **Truth by Authority**. It’s an attempt of validating instead of invalidating; to create admiration instead of contempt.

There are today a vast amount of non-enlightened, self-proclaimed New Age/self-help gurus (in science of religion they actually have no numbers of this enormous market) who get authority by claiming, that their teaching/technique, either is coming from a state of enlightenment, is being channeled from some kind of divine source, or are coming from clairvoyant abilities (see my articles [Paranormal Phenomena seen in Connection with Channeling](#), and [Paranormal Phenomena seen in connection with Clairvoyance](#)). In this context the card can take the form: Playing the Channeling Card, or Playing the Clairvoyant Card. These are very common.

They might very well have strange paranormal abilities, it doesn’t matter in this question, because if such teachers put their teaching forward in this way, you can be hundred percent sure, that this teacher has a problem with **Ego-inflation** (see below). Why? Because no real enlightened master would argue in this way. True enlightened masters, or sober spiritual teachers, speak from their own source, and are always characterized by humility. Just look at Dalai Lama, who incessantly claims, that he hasn’t reached the full Rigpa, and that he just is a beginner. True enlightened masters, as well as sober spiritual teachers, are also always philosophers, who are giving reasons and presenting arguments to support conclusions.

Truth by Authority is about taking statements to be true simply because an alleged authority (experts, teachers, states of enlightenment, divine sources, paranormal abilities, etc.) on the matter has said/justified that they are true. A level of critical thinking is always appropriate, because the statement may be based on different kinds of thought distortions, for example **Nondual bias**.

People, who in their arguments/teachings, again and again, have to defer to some authority (experts, teachers, states of enlightenment, divine sources, paranormal abilities) in order to justify their arguments/teachings, are hundred percent on the wrong track, even if they should have some paranormal abilities. Again it is interesting to see, that true enlightened masters, as well as sober spiritual teachers, never do this. And interesting, that probably most of the many people, who have

made a business on being clairvoyants/mediums/channelers etc., will fall for *Truth by Authority*.

## 2. Ego-inflation

Where Truth by Authority easily can be exposed by the use of logic, this is not the case with Ego-inflation, which is a psychological state, and therefore very dangerous. Ego-inflation is intimately connected with Truth by Authority though.

The "positive" aspect of a spiritual crisis is the most self-deceptive, because it usually ends up in ego-inflation and total lack of self-realization (read more about spiritual crises in my article [Spiritual Crises as the Cause of Paranormal Phenomena](#)).

Self-help gurus, and New Age devotees, can be breath-taking in their combination of self-confidence and absurdity, where they with no hesitation are bullying highly educated and/or experienced experts. They don't care whether it is scientists, philosophers, or mystics, what they care about is whether such persons dare to be critical towards the ideology of the self-help industry (see my articles [Management theory and the Self-help Industry](#) and [Six Common Traits of New Age that distort Spirituality](#)).

The reason is that the subjectivism and relativism in these environments (as well as in many other areas), eliminate critical thinking (discrimination), and thereby makes you vulnerable for magical thinking and ego-inflation.

Through this we have reached the highest level of postmodern development for better or for worse. The same fully individualized core of personality, which makes us able to step out of the past's fixed and subconscious attachment, has itself become our main interest, center for our identity in a degree, that almost all our awareness are directed inwards in a global seen exceptional narcissism.

Individually we have created a large scale self-image, which in a quite high degree is based on assumptions/ideas. This self-image we almost continuously defend, by filtrating the impressions we receive from the world. We want to be in peace with our self-images, and quite convenient we therefore have created a cultural pluralism (=culture relativism), which forbid actual value judgment. I have my truth, and you have yours. Respect! Self-accept! I am Okay, you're Okay! It all run together in a fear of hierarchies, or a fear that someone might know something better than yourself, and where it is political incorrect to claim that something is higher than something else. "You judge", is the same as "you condemn."

Within the New Age and self-help environment this has opened the doors for people claiming just about anything about themselves, spirituality, science and philosophy, without having any knowledge or experiences. At the same time the enormous alternative grey market of private educations offer people educations, where they in one or two weekends can get themselves a certification in just about anything within spirituality.

And, in connection with Playing the Enlightenment Card: If you think that the only thing left is a weekend education to enlightened master, then I can tell you that it already exists in the Indian Oneness movement, where you can get enlightened in 21 days, and get a certificate. If you then ask, that no serious person would buy this, then I can tell you that the famous American success guru Tony Robbins is one of main figures behind, and that thousands of people follow it, hereunder a large group of celebrities.

For a couple of years ago I had to spend some days with a meditation teacher in Los Angeles. He had a certificate and quite a large group of followers. To my astonishment I discovered that he actually didn't had any meditation-practice. He wasn't meditating in the mornings, afternoons, evenings, or any other time. At one time he showed me that he could sit in the lotus position, and that I didn't understood meditation, and wouldn't do any progress, because I wasn't sitting in this position when I was meditating. It was impossible to lead a normal dialogue with him, he was the teacher and couldn't be adjusted. There wasn't any sign of experiences in what he told, or any interest in spirituality at all. The only thing he was interested in was his business as meditation teacher.

It is clear that the many people within New Age and self-help who have been caught up in this, will spoil their spiritual practice, if they actually have any – it will leave the rails, and end up blind. But worst of all, they will lead other people on the wrong track as well.

The economic interest in this "*the land with the many paths*-ideology" lies in, that real spiritual seeking people are being manipulated to become a kind of spiritual tourists, or postmodern pilgrims, who go shopping in the supermarket-like labyrinth of spiritual paths (theories, myths, ideals, conceptions, images), take a little this and here of what happens to sound interesting, and throw it out again when it gets boring. The spiritual self-deceit in this is, that such a "shopping mentality" is without any continuity or ongoing *practice*. Because the paradox (the ingenious manipulative) is, that the relativistic theory of the ideology in itself is making impossible, that any spiritual practice can open in towards the absolute truth (which in the context of spirituality is without paths; that is: theories, images, ideals, conceptions). What before characterized the spiritual practice, was, that it was a calling to you. Today

”spiritual practice” has become a project (or as the management-theorists say: a good story, a good branding, a good spin), which quickly is being carried out and dropped for the benefit of a new project, which can maintain the constant demand of intensity and seduction. From management-theorists you hear slogans as: ”It is not facts, but the best story, which wins!”

Ego-inflation happens when the ego has embezzled itself energy, which rightly belongs to the collective time. The collective time manifests itself in a widely and indefinite area, for example could a broad spectrum of common human activities and organizations be called manifestations of the collective time: parties, state formations, wars, work communities, concerts, clans, tribes and sects, mass psychological phenomena, religious parishioners, fashion streams, group souls, etc.

When the ego is getting inflated there comes a feeling of, that the “old” ego has been altered, even disappeared. This feeling is sensed a being good, positive, yes it can even be a peak experience. The illusion is that the ego hasn’t disappeared, but instead has been inflated. Therefore the dark side of the ego, the whole complex of thought distortions, also has been inflated.

Ego-inflation is the cause of the sense of improvement, healing, or religious experiences people can have, when for example working with therapy, coaching, healing, clairvoyance, or when they have discovered a new ideology, religious or political. It is closely related to thought distortions such as **Subjective validation, Communal reinforcement, Groupthink, Illusion of control, Classical conditioning and placebo effects.**

There are three main forms of ego-inflation: intellectual, identifi- cal and euphorical inflation.

### *1) Intellectual ego-inflation*

Intellectual ego-inflation is extremely widely spread, especially today where so much knowledge is made common, and where practically everybody goes through one or the other form of theoretical education, or at least get knowledge of it through the medias. Intellectual ego-inflation is in fact one of the fundamental hindrances for the opening in towards the source, a malfunction in the mind, which is the crucial cause of the ignorance, conflict and sufferings of Man (see the thought distortion **Four philosophical hindrances**).

Intellectual ego-inflation has to do with lack of rationality. You take your assumptions, conceptions and values as absolute truths (hereunder subjectivism and

relativism), whereby you end up in a contradiction between your thoughts and lived life. It is actually a lack of ground connection.

In general, in intellectual circles, in cultural connections, and in the political life, they have always accepted intellectual ego-inflation – but as mentioned: it is one of the most crucial causes of all the conflict, war and violence, which the world is characterized by. People and their opinions and –isms, political directions etc., all of it is, as a rule, mainly an intellectual play characterized by a contradiction between thoughts and lived life. One is idealist, another realist, one is Marxist, atheist, another Christian, charitable, but if you look these people after in their existence – in their lived life – then you soon discover the contradictions.

Kierkegaard called it “the litany madness”; people can repeat the right doctrines and principles by rote, but when it comes to reality, to their way of living, then you discover all the contradictions.

Within the alternative environment of New Age and the self-help industry, intellectual ego-inflation is, as mentioned, extremely widely spread, and when the game, as here, is about the development of Man, about the depths of the mind, about archetypical powers, about the source of life, then intellectual ego-inflation can be a hazardous play. When the intellectual knowledge begins to approach religious areas, wisdom of life, therapy, meditation, spirit, then the ego can misjudge itself by being intoxicated by its intellectual understanding of deep phenomena. It is easy to understand the profound in an intellectual way. Everybody can say: “meditation is to become silent, without thoughts, without words, images”, but try to be silent, try to be awake without thoughts.

It is a widely spread misunderstanding in the meditation-circles of New Age and self-help, that meditation consists in being completely without thinking (time after time I have been criticized for that I emphasize the significance of philosophy in the meditationprocess). An enlightened master has admittedly no need of thinking, of philosophy, because he is in a condition of being (though he always uses a philosophical kind of counseling). But a person, who then just repeat this (“I have no need of thinking, of philosophy, because I am in a condition of being”), *without* being enlightened, has a seriously problem with ego-inflation.

Socrates was fully aware of the problem in this, when he consistently called himself philosopher (a lover of wisdom, one who seeks wisdom, but who has not yet found it) – and *not* a sage (guru/enlightened master). It namely gives ground connection. All people, who are not enlightened, are in need of thinking, of contemplation, of reflection – of *philosophy*.

Many people caught up in intellectual ego-inflation (and the other two types as well) commit the thought distortion called **Nondual bias**. Nondual bias arises when you describe something as nondual, while forgetting that you can't describe anything without implying the negation of it.

Intellectual the whole thing with development, with dream-understanding, with therapy and chakras, is very easy to understand. And very easy to tell others about – and get success on. There is incredible many in the world today, who speaks and talks about energy and chakras without ever really having had experiences with chakras and energy. This is intellectual theft. It is self-deception, it is ego-inflation – and it will unavoidably lead to misguiding of others.

Add to this the weird phenomena within New Age and the self-help industry, where most of the followers take an education as therapist, coach, clairvoyant, even spiritual teacher, without having any experiences (there are not many people in New Age, which you could characterize as disciples, students). Furthermore there are the many New Age speculators, that constantly are speculating in creating new forms of therapies, techniques and systems, which are deeply filled with scientific, philosophical and spiritual distortions – precisely because of the lack of training (see my articles [Humanistic Psychology, Self-help and the Danger of Reducing Religion to Psychology](#) and [The Devastating New Age turn within Psychotherapy](#)).

Futhermore: a special danger in relation to the self-help industry is, that secularization here apparently has been removed. Self-improvement (personal development) has directly been introduced on EUs project on lifelong learning and education. You therefore meet it everywhere in society: in schools, education, workplaces, etc. I seriously think this is a sign of the rising of a very dangerous ideology, which I have called [The Matrix Conspiracy](#).

The tool to be used against intellectual ego-inflation is in other words rationality and critical thinking, therefore philosophical training, where you investigate the validity of your assumptions, conceptions and values, and seek after coherence between your thoughts and lived life.

## *2) Identifical ego-inflation*

Identifical ego-inflation is of two kinds: 1) Identification with an outer power, which not belongs to the ego (an institution, a teacher, others' techniques, meditation-centres, one's role, etc.). 2) Identification with an inner power, which nor belongs to the ego (God, master, healing energy, the collective time, collective images, etc.).

The tool to be used against this form of ego-inflation is authentic spiritual practice; that is to say: where you understand the difference between the content of consciousness and the form of consciousness – that in neutrality to separate yourself from the content of consciousness, for thereby to direct yourself towards the form of consciousness; discrimination, which again is a central part of critical thinking (see my article [Paranormal Phenomena seen in connection with Spiritual Practice](#)).

### 3) *Euphorical ego-inflation*

The euphorical ego-inflation is mainly due to up-streaming energy. There are then real transformation-processes in the chakra-system, and the transformed, or released, energy is rising upwards – it feels and is described this way, for then, in the consciousness, to bring about states of ecstasy, spiritual intoxication, exaltation, blissfulness. Oneness-consciousness as a spiritual *crisis* belongs to euphorical ego-inflation. Mystics in the West have called this euphorical ego-inflation “jubilatio”. It can escalate and completely take the ground connection away from a human being, so that you think, that you can fly, that you will be carried by angels. You fly in Sukavati, in Firdaus, in Paradise, in Elysium, as a balloon in the blue air.

The euphorical ego-inflation lies behind oneness-consciousness as spiritual crisis; that is to say: it is not a real experience of enlightenment, but precisely a crisis; rather than being a genuine mystical experience, it is a so-called peak experience.

It is without doubt the euphorical ego-inflation, which lies behind the so-called Deeksha phenomenon (transfer of enlightened energy or oneness-consciousness - see my article [The philosophy of Karen Blixen](#) about transmission of energy and consciousness).

The Deeksha phenomenon is today specially connected with the Oneness/Deeksha-movement, which is founded by Amma and Bhagavan, two Indian gurus, wife and husband, who claim they have created the entire Universe (and are the first 100% Avatars throughout history) and that mankind will get enlightenment only if we will cooperate with them.

This movement spreads as a lightning these days, with slogans as: “Become enlightened in 21 days!” (For a huge sum of money of course). Thousands of people walks around and are claiming they are enlightened, and themselves able to give the enlightenment forward to others. After you yourself have become ”enlightened” you yourself are becoming an ”Oneness blessing giver”, and ready to make money. You are even getting a certificate in this. Why on Earth waste time training yourself

cognitional and ethical, when you after all just can have the enlightenment transferred by an Oneness blessing giver?

In parenthesis remarked, then many of these "enlightened" people never have experienced anything at all, but have become seduced into a web of lies, because the movement functions in that way, that you yourself shall get hold of new members by telling about how your life has been changed after you now have become enlightened – and you will after all prefer to keep a straight face to members you yourself have brought about. That is: they are also characterized by other forms of ego-inflation.

The spreading of the message is functioning in precisely the same multi-level-marketing-sales-networking-way as Large Group Awareness Training programs (LGAT), The Law of Attraction and so on – see my articles [Neuro-linguistic Programming \(NLP\) and Large Group Awareness Training \(LGAT\)](#) and [The New Thought movement and the law of attraction](#) - probably because of the involvement of the famous American success coach Tony Robbins, who has trained the movement's teachers in success coaching (read more about this in my article [A critique of the Indian Oneness movement and its use of Western success coaching](#)).

Tony Robbins has often been connected with NLP, and LGAT. He is probably the most successful "graduate" of NLP. He started his own empire after transforming from a self-described "fat slob" to a firewalker to (in his own words) "the nation's foremost authority on the psychology of peak performance and personal, professional and organizational turnaround."

Robbins says: "I built my fortune by modeling the success of others...Now **you** can copy **my** mindset and make **your** millions!" Tony Robbins is himself apparently a designated Oneness blessing giver, and oneness blessing is apparently a regular part of his seminars today.

The mystics (for example Meister Eckhart, Tauler, Seuse) discriminated between "jubilatio" and "inflammatio", the ecstasy and the inflammation. And the euphorical inflammation is dangerous, very dangerous (see my articles [The Awakening of Kundalini](#) and [Spiritual Crises as the Cause of Paranormal Phenomena](#)).

The tools to be used against this ego-inflation is partially ground connection (Hara, earth bound work, preferably with other people, for example as a health care worker), partially again realization work, discrimination, humble separation of the ego and the spirit, between the ego and the rising, bubbling, jubilant delight. Moreover ethical practice, training of compassion, for example Tonglen practice (in my book *Meditation as an Art of Life – a basic reader*, I have described both the Hara practice

and the Tonglen practice in the supporting exercises The Hara meditation and the Heart meditation). Focus on yoga, Relaxation meditation and Hara meditation, and only keep the other exercises in mind. The most important though, is the development of Hara, which is fundamental to all wisdom traditions and natural healing professions.

One of the deep reasons why they in monasteries anywhere in the world are letting the monks and nuns work with dirt, cleaning, cooking, taking care of sick people and dying, was in order to, that they never should lose reality and the ground connection of sight.

People who are being caught by ego-inflation, begin, as a rule, to act like kings and queens, they shall not anything practical do, they shall not be adjusted, they fly.

To all three kinds of ego-inflation there are in other words some philosophical principles and supporting exercises you ought to hold on to. And generally it is good to have knowledge about the thought distortion called **Truth by Authority**.

Last: how should one discriminate between a false enlightened guru and a true enlightened guru?

Filmmaker Vikram Gandhi is a young East Coast American from an Indian family. He is astonished by the success of Eastern-style gurus in the wealthiest parts of the world. As an experiment, Gandhi learns the trick of the yoga trade, dresses himself as a guru, lets his beard grow, adopts a thick accent, and sets off under the name Kumaré to the desert city of Phoenix, Arizona. There, he quickly gathers a group of followers around him, whom he teaches to meditate to catchphrases such as “Be all that you can be.” The tone of *Kumaré* remains lighthearted throughout. Despite taking his disciples for a ride, much in the style of Sacha Baron Cohen’s character Borat, he always treats them with kindness and sympathy.

Gandhi/Kumaré stitches the narrative together with a matter-of-fact commentary recorded after the event, never disclosing to what extent he became wrapped up in his role as wise spiritual Indian leader. In a world Kumaré conceives as pure illusion and a product of our inner eye, the filmmaker raises the question of whether the part he plays means he has become illusion incarnate. And this triggers the question in the viewer’s mind of whether what is apparently a fake documentary actually hides a deeper truth.

Kumaré also refers to himself as “The Mirror.” His method is the so-called Mirror Yoga (The Kumaré Method). What is interesting in connection with this article is that

he also performs Shaktipat, and his followers report having precisely the same experiences as the Oneness Blessing followers. Clairvoyants and channelers claim to see his pure aura and chakras, and how an archangel is standing behind him, etc.

Kumaré uses some common New Age phrases such as references to vibrations and energy, advices to avoid the negative, stop doubting, follow your intuitions and premonitions, flow with coincidences, believe in the purposiveness of everything, join thousands of others on the quest, turn into your feelings and evolve to a higher plane. Follow your intuitions and dreams as you go through your spiritual evolution. Fact or fiction, it doesn't matter. Truth is what you make it. Life's too short and too complicated to deal with reality. Make your own reality.

This New Age subjectivism and relativism encourage people to believe that reality is whatever you want it to be. The line between fact and fiction gets blurry and obscured. And therewith people are directed into the area of magical thinking, where you don't discriminate between image and reality, illusion and truth. And therewith you also have the elimination of critical thinking, which precisely is about discriminating between image and reality, illusion and truth.

Critical thinking is not only crucial in science and philosophy, but also in spirituality. The Dominican mystics call this steps *discriminatio*, the ability to discriminate between how the energy is used temporal or religious. And despite that magical thinking actually can create something magical, then in true spirituality it is still something temporal, or relatively (black magic/occultism), which will create negative karma if practised. The Orientals call it *viveka*, discrimination, the ability to use your will on that part of the energy, you can steer yourself, and steer it towards exercises, prayer, mantras, meditation, instead of towards career, worldliness, self-unfolding, as for example New Thought does (see my article [The New Thought Movement and the Law of Attraction](#)). The central teaching in both science, philosophy and spirituality is: discriminate between image and reality!

So, where does New Age have this idea about subjectivism and relativism from? It doesn't come from spirituality, but from the postmodern intellectualism on Western Universities. The scary thing about it, is how widely spread it is, creating hostility towards critical thinking. Management theory and self-help is accepted as a central part of EU's project on lifelong learning and education. There exists no secularism when it comes to this psycho-religiousness – a global spreading totalitarian ideology which I under one has called The Matrix Conspiracy.

But if truth is what you want it to be, then you must accept, that everything from Nazism, Fascism, Dictatorship, popular murder, terror and violence is as equally true

as democracy, negotiation and dialogue. Subjectivism shuts down people's critical faculties, making them suggestible for any ideology. It involves making people quit thinking critically in order to open them up to thinking magical about that subjective validation and communal reinforcement lead to bliss. In New Age hypnosis is directly used as a means for inducing in people certain worldviews (see my article [Hypnosis, Hypnotherapy and the Art of Self-deception](#)).

Watch the trailer, and a longer movie clip, on my [YouTube playlist](#)

Kumaré received fair reviews upon release. Many movie reviewers criticized Gandhi's deception as immoral, but partially forgave Gandhi for realizing that the experiment had grown out of his control. Many compared the character of Kumaré and the deception by Gandhi to Sacha Baron Cohen's Borat character and film. Those who liked the movie, like Stephen Holden of the New York Times and Roger Ebert of the Chicago Sun-Times, praised the film's message of "finding the guru within." Which is something I only partly can follow, because you also need outside teachers who have walked the path and can point out dangers and pitfalls, for example false teachings.

Vikram Gandhi has used the concept of Spiritual Placebo. Does that mean that the whole concept of a true enlightened master is false? I have characterized **Classical Conditioning and Placebo Effects** as a thought distortion.

Classical conditioning is a form of learning or physiological change. It is based on forming an association between a stimulus and a response. The association is remembered and affects future similar experiences. Some physiological responses to stimuli are unconditioned: they happen naturally and involuntary, like blinking, flinching, or the salivation response to the taste or odor of food. Other physiological responses are conditioned: for example, a dog can be conditioned to salivate when a bell is rung because the dog has been taught to associate the bell with food (Pavlov's famous experiment). Dogs injected with morphine begin to salivate and can be conditioned to salivate from any injection, whether with morphine or not.

Relief from pain is often attributed to the placebo effect when no active pain-killer has been administered and the patient reports that the pain has lessened. A more accurate description in some such cases, however, might be that the patient has learned to associate pain reduction with pushing a button that releases morphine or with getting a morphine injection.

Conditioning and associative learning – along with owner or practitioner expectation and self-deception – might explain why some animals appear to get relief from Reiki, Homeopathy, or Acupuncture.

Conditioning can involve much more than obvious factors like getting an injection, taking a pill, or being touched where it hurts. Conditioning can involve the theater of the medical setting and medical rituals, including the medical uniforms worn, medical jargon spoken, and medical gadgetry used. These conditions affect the patient's expectation of relief from the treatment, as does the manner of the healer. Patient expectation, it turns out, plays a significant role in the effectiveness of many kinds of treatment. Therefore related to **Communal reinforcement** and **Subjective validation**.

Classical conditioning is hypothesized to be the primary triggering mechanism for the placebo effect, which must be learned before it can manifest itself. When conditioning is combined with desire and motivation for relief, the placebo effect is boosted for both active and inert substances. Related to **Wishful thinking**.

So, the next time you are wondering how healers can cure people with a simple touch or by waving their hands in the air over a body part or by uttering some ineffable incantation, think that maybe, just maybe, some sort of conditioned response is going on. You don't have to call it a placebo effect. There may be other explanations for some placebo responses and the issue may be more complicated than you think. Your first inclination might be to think magic or miracle (especially when you have heard other people say the same), but first inclinations may be responses to the **Availability bias**. If it is truth you're after, you might want to consider alternative explanations to what your intuition tells you. Here related to **Ignoring alternative explanations**. It is also important to be aware of **Proof by ignorance**.

All in all: it is important to be aware that the placebo effect doesn't relate to any facts about a "healing energy", or a "proof" of the "power of thought" as for example NLP psychotherapists, New Thought thinkers, and hypnotherapists often claim. The placebo effect is very limited, most often it only has a short lasting effect, whereafter your problems return.

The placebo effect should therefore never be seen as a valid "cure" for anything. Furthermore, the placebo effect often involves, as for example in NLP, New Thought and hypnotherapy, intentional manipulation of behavior and the inducing of certain worldviews, that are very problematic (see my articles [Neuro-linguistic Programming \(NLP\)](#) and [Large Group Awareness Training \(LGAT\)](#), [The New Thought movement and the Law of Attraction](#), and [Hypnosis, Hypnotherapy, and the Art of Self-deception](#)). Also see my Matrix Dictionary entry on [Joe Dispenza](#).

Reversely it should only partly be seen as an invalidation of a true guru.

One of the more important responses placed under the rubric of the placebo effect is the reduction of stress. This is often discussed separately as the relaxation response. A caring therapist who exudes confidence and caring in a comfortable and professional-looking clinical setting can be very therapeutic by relaxing the patient. The resulting reduction of stress is physically therapeutic by reducing stress hormones and perhaps stimulating the production of hormones that enhance one's mood. The tapping, the waving of hands, the movement of a light source, the hypnotic repeating of "positive" confirmations, prayer, or whatever gimmick the therapist might use is actually superfluous.

But this doesn't mean that I think *all* spiritual healing phenomena are due to Classical conditioning and placebo effects. Precisely the term relaxation is important, and therefore the practice of, for example, meditation; that is: spiritual practice (see my article [Paranormal Phenomena seen in connection with Spiritual Practice](#)).

I also believe that a spiritual healing phenomenon can come from an outer source; that is: when all the above-mentioned thought distortions have been ruled out. I have examined this in my articles [The philosophy of Karen Blixen](#), [The Value of Having a Religion in a Spiritual Practice](#), and [What is Karma?](#)

But certain healing methods can also be extremely powerful in a demonical sense. In my article [A Critique of Stanislav Grof and Holotropic Breathwork](#) I mention the problem of spiritual crises provoked by such therapeutic methods. Also see **Painbody**.

The demonical use of energy is also explained in my article on the philosophy of Karen Blixen. Furthermore it is examined in my article [A Critique of the Indian Oneness Movement and its use of Western Success Coaching](#).

Again: see my Matrix Dictionary entry on [Spiritual Placebo](#).

All this indicates ways of discriminate between a false guru and a true guru.

When you have had a regular meditation practice for say, 2 hours a day for maybe twenty years, you'll for certain begin to experience what is called progressive karma (also before that – see my article [What is Karma?](#)). The experience of progressive karma will provide you with discrimination: you'll easily could discriminate between a false and true guru. You could also say that in a true guru there is no contradiction between teaching and way of life; there is no hypocrisy, well, in fact no thought distortions at all. Most of all: a true guru will radiate love. But the latter is tricky,

because people would say that any charismatic person is radiating love. In fact, it is not a good argument.

Avoid anything called “Crazy Wisdom.” Crazy Wisdom quite certainly has a root in something authentic, but, as I have told many times, if anything can be abused within New Age, it will, for sure be abused. About Crazy Wisdom: The headline to an article in the Telegraph by Mick Brown (21 September 2017) says:

**Sexual assaults and violent rages... Inside the dark world of Buddhist teacher Sogyal Rinpoche.**

Here is a quote from the article ([click here](#) and read it in full):

*In 1976, Sogyal visited America to meet with another Tibetan lama, Chogyam Trungpa, who was regarded as the most extreme exemplar of ‘crazy wisdom’ teachings. Trungpa drank like a fish (he would die in 1987 from complications arising due to alcoholism), openly slept with his students and ran his organisation like a feudal court, surrounding himself with an elite bodyguard, sometimes amusing himself by dressing as a Grenadier guard. ‘The real function of the guru,’ he once said, ‘is to insult you.’ ‘Sogyal looked at what Trungpa had,’ says Mary Finnigan, ‘and said “That’s what I want.”’*

Sogyal Rinpoche is not a New Ager. For some within Rigpa, the paradox between being beaten and abused while being told it was for their benefit was causing predictable problems. ‘It creates split personalities in people,’ one student told me. ‘People feel a loyalty to the teachings which is constantly being contradicted by Sogyal’s behaviour; their hearts are split in two.’

In 2007, Sogyal introduced a programme that he called ‘Rigpa Therapy’, in which a number of qualified psychotherapists, who were also Rigpa students, were assigned to treat those entertaining doubts about the teachings. Drolma was among them.

‘The crux of every session,’ she says, ‘was exploring how what Sogyal did related to other past relationships in my life. It was all about that, and how my difficulties were nothing to do with Sogyal, and how his blessing was letting me go back to that time and work through it. Basically, the therapists had been brought in to stop people leaving.’

With this mix with Western Regression Psychotherapy and Cathartic Psychotherapy, you have a typical New Age model, where “Crazy Wisdom” can be used as a justification for abusing people “for their own good.” (see my articles [Cathartic](#)

[Psychotherapies](#), [Regression Psychotherapies](#) and [The Vampirised Spirit of John Rosen](#). Also see my book [Lucifer Morningstar – a Philosophical Love Story about spiritual vampires](#)).

Therefore, most important: You must develop the use of critical thinking, and study both yourself and the guru. Instead of focusing on whether the guru is radiating love or not, ask yourself the more philosophical question: Is this person a highly developed ethical person? Always remember Dalai Lama's words about that you'll never attain enlightenment without developing an ethical mind. You can't be ethical and unethical at the same time. It is a lie.

A quite central thing is to be openminded to fallibility (unfortunately this is also abused in New Age, which accuses any doubters and critics of being closedminded). But to be openminded to fallibility is to be open for that both yourself and the guru could be wrong or even false. Here you ought to be aware of thought distortions such as **Selective thinking** and **Confirmation bias**.

In this context a good advice would be to study all sources of critique of the guru you can find. There will always be some critique, but if the bad things are overshadowing the good things, there is reason for consideration.

*Related book:*

[A Dictionary of Thought Distortions](#)

*Also Related:*

[The Matrix Dictionary](#)

*All articles and books referred to are available in free PDF Versions. Links can be found on my blog: [www.MortenTolboll.blogspot.com](http://www.MortenTolboll.blogspot.com)*

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