



Key issues in the treatment of people traumatised by economic, psychological or physical abuse in Buddhist groups

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Medicalising and idealizing any methods referred to as Buddhism, Buddhist meditation or mindfulness

"The idealisation of Buddhism in general contributes to blanking out the shady sides even after the victims concerned have raised their voices already many years ago and after the required legal investigations are under way." (1, pg. 2)

"identification with the teacher is encouraged by several aspects. From a psychological perspective, all structural arrangements for paying respect to or elevating a person contribute to these identification processes, in addition to admiration and individual projection mechanisms. In this way they turn into behavioural patterns imposed by groups, becoming obvious not only by everyday linguistic patterns, but also by the strict and anticipatory obedience to persons of supposedly higher rank and by the numerous acts of glorification and superelevation." (1, pg. 2)

"At present, that decontextualization of terms can no longer be separated from the silencing of trauma and a linguistic style rationalizing this very issue. It has been facilitated by replacing the clear definitions of the technical terms of Buddhist philosophy with an oversimplification of concepts, together with illogical reasoning, replacing logical conclusions with blind faith." (4, pg. 2)

Objective: analysis of rationalising terms and psychological methods used to silence trauma, discredit and stigmatise victims as well as deprive them of social contacts

"Neologisms such as the concept of '*karma purification*' were developed, ascribing meaning to one person purifying another's so-called '*bad karma*,' or even part of his group implementing such an idea at his command. This reveals a strategy of masking human exploitation and traumatization by using spiritual guises and every available means to achieve concealment." (4, pg. 2)

"It is the voices of the affected people that have shaken the rigidly hierarchical patterns of power and command lines in so-called Buddhist centers, which have been unreflectedly copied from Asia, as well as the demand that group leaders and those passing on orders should have absolute authority, being presented in spiritual attire. Thus, the mainstream of double bind, that is the discrepancy between stereotyping by means of seemingly Buddhist contents and lived realities, is put into question." (1, pg. 1)

"One crucial element of weakening individuals is the way in which their own perceptions are systematically put into question. Furthermore, constant confluency with the (mostly male) master and the required use of stereotyped wording, leads to weakening within. And the physical and psychological damage inflicted is even misinterpreted as a spiritual benefit in the sense of *karma purification* performed without accountability, thus introducing *reframing* in favour of the group leadership." (1, pg. 6)

"As more students verged close to emotional breakdowns because of your 'trainings', you introduced 'Rigpa Therapy' for your closest students. Trained, practising therapists (who are also your students) were given the task of dealing with the pain that was being stirred up in the minds of those who you were abusing physically, emotionally and psychologically. During one-to-one sessions, the therapist heard from the student of your 'crazy wisdom' methods and the trauma that it caused the individual. One such "Rigpa Therapy" method for processing the trauma was to negate the validity of seeing you, the teacher *and* instigator, as the source of the trauma." (3, pg. 4 ff.)

Testimony from the organisation Rigpa: "I saw directly that while they present a very acceptable public image behind that is a lineage of pure violence. They believe they are accountable to no one and are quite capable of taking someone's head off believing they are above any law." (5, #1) "Typical public methods at Rigpa: public humiliation, abuse, exposure, exaggerated false praise, promoting or degrading people in the "Rigpa Ranking"." (5, #2)

Testimony from the organisation Pathgate: "I did not experienced violence towards me personally. I saw PY verbally abuse students on multiple occasions. I saw him humiliate students publicly several times. I saw him physically strike a female student on 1 occasion. On these occasions the students were upset and crying after. I felt uncomfortable but I justified PY's abuse as 'crazy wisdom', that the teacher was using skilful methods to teach the students and 'purify their negative karma', Now I realise that there was no wisdom in PY's methods, he was simply abusive and there was no justification for it. Many students are so brainwashed and fearful of PY that they are conditioned to accept the abuse." (5, #3)

Testimony from the organisation Dharma Ocean: "He constantly tried to turn people against each other, spreading rumors about each person's 'neurosis'." (#4)

Health consequences of manipulation, indoctrination and silencing victims with neologisms and decontextualised terms

Testimony on Rigpa: "A number of the witnesses that I spoke to gave evidence of the serious impact of their involvement with Sogyal Lakar on their health. In addition to numerous examples of witnesses working very long hours, with little sleep, for long periods of time, the following specific examples of long-term harm being caused were given to me: a. Witness F gave evidence of being forced to undergo elocution lessons because Sogyal would refuse to understand anything said by Witness F, insisting that Witness F must speak in a received pronunciation, English accent. Witness F says that this went on for months and months and meant that "my tongue was taken away from me" and that "it was like being gagged". Witness F felt that this was an effort to break Witness F's attachment to Witness F's own country and family. Witness F reports being left with chronic fatigue, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. b. Witness K reported that she suffered from hallucinations and suicidal thoughts and still suffers from chronic insomnia and anxiety. Witness K says she has spent thousands on therapy since leaving Rigpa. c. Witness J reported having suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and extreme anxiety. Witness J described being terrified of the phone ringing and explained how this anxiety had negatively affected Witness J's relationships. Witness J felt able to start therapy after several years of processing what had happened and the therapy is ongoing. I was informed that there are a number of other students who suffered breakdowns as a result of their involvement with Rigpa. I was not able to corroborate this information with those individuals. Overall, based on the information available to me, I conclude that Sogyal did indeed push some of his students to the verge of emotional breakdowns." (2, pg. 31).

Testimony on Shambala: „• Sexual Misconduct by Shambala Teachers and Staff • Child Abuse • Physical Violence • Emotional Abuse • Racial Harm • Abuse of Power • Rumors/Slander" (6, pg. 19) "in total, 62 people contacted the Listening Post. Of these contacts, 55 produced information that is contained in this report. [...] These 55 comprise the "reporters of harm" whose experiences are summarized in this report. Twenty-eight of these submitted written reports of harm, 16 participated in an interview only, and 11 did both. Of the 55 total reports, 39 were self-reports and 16 were reported by bystanders. Bystanders include people who witnessed the incident or its aftermath or were directly told about it by the person who was harmed. [...] Information about a total of 67 incidents of harm is presented in the report" (6, pg. 31).

Treatment of victims

Diseases: "Even though the diagnostic range mostly covers reactions to severe stress, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety disorders and dissociative disorders, careful analyses regarding the process of separation, current life situation and prospects as well as specific damaging mechanisms are useful for both diagnostics as well as selected approaches to treatment." (1, pg. 8)

Key issues: "issues such as the loss of confidence and rationalisations that were learnt far away from one's own feelings constitute substantial and diagnostically meaningful aspects." (1, pg. 8) "restoring the trust in one's own perception" (1, pg. 8)

Rationalisations: "in the case of a given identification with the stereotype of a *good Buddhist*, it is precisely this very mask of perceptually distant rationalisations and shifts behind which the person has sought protection from the various kinds of assaults that becomes apparent." (1, pg. 8)

Stereotyping and introjections: "it is important to understand stereotyping as well as introjections in the sense of adaptation measures of the individual to protect its own psychological structures, and to adapt therapeutic interventions accordingly" (1, pg. 9)

Societal challenges

"The corresponding progression towards developing specific psychotherapeutic approaches for the affected persons raises societal implications in dealing with authority, self-responsibility, spirituality and cure." (1, pg. 10)

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