



IMPORTANT ISSUES TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A SPIRITUAL TEACHER

1. What credentials does this teacher possess that qualifies him/her to give this instruction?
2. How does this teacher maintain his/her authority in the group or in relationships? Does he/she claim to be the only teacher that gives this instruction?
3. Can you challenge the teacher's instruction? Can you question his/her advice? What happens if you disagree with the teacher?
4. Who does this teacher report to? If you were to complain about the teacher, to whom would you go? Is there a system of checks and balances within his/her line of authority?
5. Within this organization who makes the rules? Who can change the rules? How often does this happen? What happens when someone breaks the rules?
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7. What will you be expected to 'give up' or 'sacrifice' to study with this teacher? Ask this question in advance and be as specific as possible.
8. Are students free to leave this teacher/group? What happens to those who leave?
9. When do you graduate from this instruction?
10. How does the teacher talk about those who have left the group? Is contact with: them allowed, discouraged, or forbidden?
11. What attitude does the teacher have toward maintaining relationships with friends, family, and others outside the group?
12. What is the teacher's attitude toward people outside the group in general? Are you encouraged to be tolerant and understanding, or judgmental and elite?
13. Are secrets being kept from you? Are doors locked, access to telephones limited, or is information restricted in any way? Do you watch the news or read books of your choice?
14. Does this teacher insist that the world is coming to an end in the near future? What proof does he/she have of this? Does the teacher use this prophecy to frighten or influence students?
15. Does this teacher repeatedly remind you to listen to your heart and not your head? If so, why must you disconnect from rational thought to learn this teaching?
16. Does the group use 'mind-altering' exercises, i.e. meditation/chanting/praying for long periods of time, sleep deprivation, constant busyness, protein deprivation, or the use of drugs? What scientific, documented proof does this teacher have that these practices will enable the student to reach higher states of consciousness?
17. Ask the teacher about his/her attitudes about sex in the group. If celibacy is strongly advised for the student, ask if the same standard applies to the teacher. If the standards are different, ask why.
18. Who pays for the leader's expenses and lifestyle? Is it dramatically different from the students: Will your financial responsibility continue to increase to maintain good standing? Is there an annual report for this group? Every bonafide church, charity, and non-profit organization has this information available for anyone who asks for it.

These questions are meant to provide areas of exploration. Many teachers will not respond directly to your inquiries. We encourage you to conduct your own research and scrutinize your teacher as closely as possible. Remember: avoidance to your questions should raise a

red flag. A healthy spiritual community, church, or teacher, will encourage questions about their group. Attitudes of avoidance or secrecy may tell you something about what the future will be like in this group. Authors: Sharon Colvin and Rosanne Henry