

Gaslighting 1 of 2

Not letting other mess up our mind with lies
[Previously published as fb200523 PiyaTan]

Why do some monastics and teachers dress impressively, use lordly titles (Datuk), wear academic degrees (PhD) or professional status (Dr, of anything except Buddhism), and gas us with an air of dignity and holiness? Now having said that, please note that I am not blaming them for all this. I'm only observing and explaining why such strategies actually work and benefit them.

I'm also not saying that anyone who puts up such a personal façade or marketing ploy is a bad person. In fact, I have many friends amongst such people, and I have no reason to see them as bad people at all. They are Buddhists who are trying to promote Buddhism.

There is more to be done

My point is that we should know why we are doing this. How we can be even better and wiser, starting from here. After all, Buddhism is about personal growth: it means that we can be better.

Even after we have attained streamwinning, for example, the Buddha would declare that "There is more to do" (*uttarim karaṇīyam*), and we should work for "progressively higher distinction" (*uḷāram pubbenâparam visesam*). The Buddha is saying: Aim for self-awakening!

When, instead of learning and teaching Dhamma, and bettering ourself, we use our position, ability, power or charisma to manipulate others who look up to us for our own benefit, then, it is very negative karma. One of the worst forms of such manipulating of others is called **gaslighting**.

Gaslighting

Gaslighting is a form of psychological manipulation or abuse in which a person or a group covertly sows seeds of doubt in us, making us question our own memory, perception, or judgment, often evoking in us cognitive dissonance and other changes such as low self-esteem; in other words, doubting our own mental health. Gaslighting can take any form from an abusive person insisting that the abuse never happened, to fabricating strange incidents to confuse us.

The term "gaslighting" comes from the play by Patrick Hamilton, "Gas Light" (1938), and its movie adaptations (such as in the 1944 movie, starring Charles Boyer, Ingrid Bergman and Joseph Cotten). In these works, a character uses many tricks, including turning the gas lamps lower than normal, to convince his spouse that she is crazy. Since then, the phrase has become a common expression which has also been used in clinical and research literature.

Guidelines

Here are some things we should do to avoid being victimized by gaslighting.

- (1) Keep our eyes and ears open wide in the presence of a Gaslighter. Pay **attention** to details of their scheme.
- (2) Build up a strong **self-confidence** in our own intuition (wisdom). When a Gaslighter speaks to us, listen unassumingly, even with respect.
- (3) Understand the gaslighter's **true motive**. It's basically getting us to believe what we have experienced as true is actually untrue, and what is actually untrue to be true. This is often done privately so that he has our full attention, and so that we will not have the benefit of others' concern and help which will unravel the gaslighting.
- (4) Recognize and understand that the mental manipulations and distortions are **not about us** at all. They are all fabrications by the Gaslighter for his own benefit.
- (5) Lastly and most significantly, we do not have to "win" to find **peace**. There is no need for us to have the Gaslighter accept our views of things. He will be caught in his own web of deceit when the truth is out.

Look out for next week's Revisioning Buddhism: PART 2: "Gaslighting: How to recognize it."

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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