

Gaslighting: how to recognize it

Not letting other manipulate us

Part 2 of 2

[Previously published as fb200512 Piya Tan]

1. They tell blatant LIES

They tell us an outright lie or something false or wrong. Yet they do so with a straight face. Why are they so blatant? Because they're making a precedent for us. We believe them because they are a famous Monastic, a popular Guru, a titled Professional or someone powerful. So we accept their words on such authority (we have forgotten the Kālāma Sutta).

Suppose a powerful High Priest lifts an Integrated Dhamma Syllabus written by us for our Sunday Dhamma School. He removes the author's name and puts his own name on it. When confronted, he claims he wrote it himself, even when we show him our original copy.

2. When confronted, they DENY having ever said it, even though we have proof

Yet we know that they have said it, but plainly deny it. It makes us start questioning ourself: maybe they never said after all, "After all, he is a Venerable!". The more they do this, the more we question our reality and start accepting theirs.

We expected perhaps an apology and acknowledgement, but there was nothing we can do about it. Our respect for monastic authority prevents us to pursuing more. Perhaps we could take him to court, but our lawyer might advise us, "You want to shame your own High Priest in public?" Then, we are told by by-standers: Buddhism teaches you to let go, you know.

3. They use those NEAR AND DEAR to us as their tool and weapon

They know how important our elders, relatives, family members and friends are to us. They know how important our identity, reputation or faith is to us. They may be one of the first things they would attack. They will claim how much better "they" are than us. They claim that we are not "worthy" of them. They will give a long list of negative traits and claim that we would be better without them. They attack the very foundation of our being.

4. They WEAR US DOWN over time

Gaslighting is insidious: it hurts gradually by attrition, over time. A lie here, a lie there, a snide comment at the right time. They gear up their offensive. Even the best of our elders and leaders can be sucked into gaslighting, and they only enhance the Gaslighter's influence—it is that effective.

It's the "frog in boiling water": when a frog is in a pot of water and the heat is turned up slowly, the frog does not seem to sense the danger because its own body temperature adjusts accordingly! In the end, the frog is boiled dead.

5. Their ACTIONS do not match their WORDS

When dealing with a Gaslighter, look at what they are actually DOING rather than what they are saying. Their words really mean nothing. Their words are like the darkness that overwhelms us. What they are really doing is the flame burning in the dark, and the insects flying into it just burn themselves up. The Gaslighter's goal is that burning fire that will burn us.

6. They throw in POSITIVE STROKES to confuse us.

The Gaslighter keeps cutting us down. Before, he declares that we have no value, but now he praises us for something we did. This makes us feel even more uneasy. You think, "Well, he doesn't seem too bad, after all." Yes, indeed, they are! This is a carefully crafted strategy to keep us off-balance: again, we are made to question our integrity, even sanity.

Here, we should examine what we were praised for; it is probably something that profited the Gaslighter.

7. They know CONFUSION weakens us

Gaslighters know that people like having a sense of stability and normalcy; that we accept and obey authority and power. Their goal is to use this faith or belief we have and make us question ourself. This works even better when we look up to Gaslighter as our "Chief," or Leader, or Teacher, or Guru—those who are supposed to give us meaning and stability in our lives. But he happens to be a Gaslighter!

8. They PROJECT

Suppose the Gaslighter is a drug-user or a con-man; but he actually and constantly accuses us of just that. In psychology, this is called PROJECTION. The interesting point is that this may be an unconscious tendency; hence, we are being nose-led by someone who does not know his own weaknesses. In our ignorance--falsely seeing that the Gaslighter, the person we respect or fear, is actually a good or holy person. We are also distracted from all the good we have learned, and the good that we are. The Gaslighter is insidious.

The Gaslighter is so good at PROJECTING, that they tell us that everyone else is a LIAR (other than "us," which is the Gaslighter himself). By telling us that everyone else (our family, our friends, the media, etc) are liars or ignorant, it again makes us question ourself. We have never known someone with the audacity to say this, SO he must be telling the truth, right? Not at all! It's a manipulation tactic. Our faith, belief or fear makes us turn to the Gaslighter for the "correct" information—which isn't correct at all.

9. They try to rally people AGAINST US

Gaslighters are masters at using others they know will stand by them no matter what: they will use these people against us. Once when I spoke up against the Chief High Priest regarding a wrong action of his, he was annoyed. He told his local elder volunteers: "Piya is

scolding me, you know!” The elders then chastised me for being disrespectful, despite the fact that they were all laymen and I was a monk then!

A gaslighter is a hard-core liar. Perhaps he is so used to its benefits that he does not even know that he is lying: this is the work of his unconscious tendency (*anusaya*). When the Gaslighter uses this tactic, it makes us feel as if we don't know who to trust or turn to anymore, which leads us right back to the Gaslighter! That's exactly what he wants: ISOLATION gives him control over us.

10. They tell us and others that we are CRAZY

This is one of the most effective tools of the Gaslighter, because it's dismissive. The Gaslighter knows if they question our maturity, intelligence, even sanity, people will not believe us when we tell them the Gaslighter is abusive or out-of-control. This is their master strategy.

Source: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/sg/blog/here-there-and-everywhere/201701/11-warning-signs-gaslighting>.

R747 Revisioning Buddhism 313

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

Copyright by Piya Tan ©2022