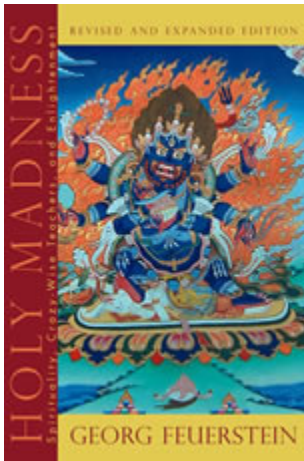


# **HOLY MADNESS: *Spirituality, Crazy-Wise Teachers, and Enlightenment***

by Georg Feuerstein, Ph.D.

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## **AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION**



Twenty years have elapsed since writing the first version of this book, which was entitled *Holy Madness*. In the interim I have delved deeper into the guru function, both theoretically and experientially, and also have deepened my philosophical and practical understanding of Buddhism, specifically the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, which is highly relevant to the discussion of crazy wisdom.

Writing the first version of this book was a considerable personal struggle. I had recently emerged from a deep-cutting guru-disciple relationship and was in the process of integrating my first-hand experience of a crazy-wisdom teaching. In fact, the original edition was the concluding phase in my effort to integrate the many lessons to which I had been exposed. I wanted to be as objective and fair as possible, without sidestepping the critical questions that inevitably present themselves when considering the phenomenon of holy madness, or what I here call “crazy wisdom.” Looking back and judging from the spate of letters I received in response to *Holy Madness*, I believe I succeeded in this goal. I know that some readers would have liked to see me simply condemn crazy wisdom as a teaching method; others expected me to be more critical of certain crazy-wisdom teachers; yet others were upset that I found fault with their own teacher. On a topic that is so highly controversial such diversity of opinion is inevitable. As a writer, I can only endeavor to be responsible in my treatment.

For clarification, it was never my intention to make my book an exhaustive exposé of crazy-wisdom teachers and the scandals surrounding them. My sole interest was in providing enough background and color on individual teachers and traditions to put some flesh on the dry bones of analysis. For a more comprehensive coverage, which is not necessarily analytically significant, readers might consult Andrew Rawlinson's *The Book of Enlightened Masters: Western Teachers in Eastern Traditions* (Open Court Publishing, 1997).

The present edition of *Holy Madness*, newly subtitled *Spirituality, Crazy-Wise Teachers, and Enlightenment*, essentially reaffirms my earlier judgments and conclusions, though it

also amplifies my cautioning observations about crazy wisdom. The changes and additions seemed to me to justify at least a new subtitle. Although the phrase “crazy wisdom” has become more widely known than “holy madness,” largely owing to the Tibetan adept Chögyam Trungpa, who is discussed in this book, I have retained the main title for the sake of continuity.

In the case of Adi Da (see Chapter 4), I have had to adjust my earlier view in light of more recent developments and also because of my improved understanding of the concept of enlightenment within the tradition of Buddhism, which offers what I now deem to be the most sophisticated model of the spiritual path. Another significant adjustment for the better had to be made in regard to Lee Lozowick. In keeping with his holy folly, Lozowick had actually thanked me for my earlier “generous” snapshot of him, which at the time I found amusing but also thought provoking. In rewriting this book, I felt prompted to dig deeper into his life and work, and it turned out that I had not been as generous in my assessment of him as I now feel I should have been. While Lozowick has had a turbulent past as a teacher, over the years he has demonstrated that he can grow as a person and teacher—a fairly rare occurrence in the world of modern gurus. His enormous love for, and discipleship under, the late Yogi Ramsuratkumar are both touching and instructive. Because of my revised perception of him as a person and teacher, I felt no hesitation in approaching Hohm Press, which he operates, about publishing this new edition.

As far as other important changes in the book are concerned, I have thought it imperative to add discussions of two contemporary figures—Sathya Sai Baba (the controversial Hindu *avâtara*) and Shoko Asahara (founder of the infamous terrorist AUM sect in Japan)—who struck me as paradigmatic of what happens when adeptship turns bad. In the case of the former, my treatment focuses on the mechanism of psychological projection and mass hysteria. The latter case of “spiritual” terrorism afforded me an opportunity to consider the always possible psychopathology of leadership and blind faith. I also have added three appendices that should help readers better grasp my position on some of the issues discussed in this book, notably the nature of enlightenment.

Perhaps since the appearance of the first edition of this work, spiritual seekers have become more savvy or cautious about teachers. Be that as it may, they undoubtedly have become more disenchanted. Over the past twenty years, many more “sacred” teachers of spirituality have lost their respective halo, and their students’ projections stand revealed for what they were: just idolizing projections that conceal rather than reveal reality. Among other things, the wildly proliferating Tibetan Buddhism with its sexually active adepts has caused both consternation and upset for two reasons: First, because of Western students’ ignorance of the path of the “Unexcelled Yoga” (*anuttara-yoga*), which is Tantric through and through, and second, because the Tibetan teachers themselves on the whole have done little to dispel the widespread notion that Buddhist monks are inevitably celibate. The fact is that the highest teachings within Tibetan Buddhism call for what in Hinduism is known as “left-hand” Tantric concepts and practices. I hasten to add that the Tibetan adepts do not consider the required sexual activity in Unexcelled Yoga to be just that. On the contrary, when they do speak about this secret level of spiritual engagement at all, they emphasize that the practice of *maithunâ*, or sexual congress, is exclusively a *spiritual* and *psychoenergetic* event, downplaying the fact that an actual live female partner is involved. Their reluctance or

stealth has prompted the Dalai Lama to warn Western seekers to choose their teachers carefully.

In any case, the disappointments experienced by Western seekers with Eastern *gurus* is in my view part of a healthy development of recognizing and withdrawing unhealthy projections and proceeding on the spiritual path with sound realism. We must not idealize and certainly not idolize our teachers but see them as they are—warts and all. Prior to his death, the Buddha advised his disciples to rely on his teaching and nothing else. This good counsel still holds true, for a teacher is only as good as his teaching. Moreover, when a teaching has given rise to a long line of realized teachers, as in the case of Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism, we can reasonably assume that it contains the necessary elements for us to grow on the spiritual path as well.

Teachers unquestionably have an important role to play, especially in the more advanced stages of inner growth. They can catalyze much, but in order to relate to them rightly, we must already be familiar with our idealizations and other projections. In other words, to benefit from our teachers, we have to be able to see beyond them to the teaching itself. The spiritual process is inherently radical—that is, it goes to the root of the problem of our spiritual ignorance: the ego—and hence it is vastly challenging. A good teacher is one who holds us to this process; to put it colloquially: he or she will be in our face. Naturally, this will trigger all kinds of emotions in us that we would do well to fully understand lest they should get out of control. All too often, students become caught in a love-hate relationship with their teacher, or they abruptly convert fervent devotion and adoration into everlasting anger and disappointment.

Of course, as I have myself experienced, some teachers may help a student part of the way but then become detrimental to further growth, because of their own egoic motivations and shortcomings. In this case, it is appropriate and necessary to modify the relationship or, when this is not possible, to end it. When this happens, the disciple would do well to work through any frustrations as quickly as possible and not forget that we must bless all equally.

Experienced teachers will definitely be aware of the games their students play out relative to them. They are not perturbed by this, but many Eastern teachers also do not seem to be particularly interested in, or skillful at, assisting their Western disciples to navigate the treacherous waters of interacting with a traditional teacher. Many *gurus* or *lamas* underestimate their Western students' psychological complexity and unspoken expectations of a teacher; they definitely fail to appreciate the intricacies of transference and the inner conflict most Westerners experience vis-à-vis authority. Were it not for the fact that some Western students have actually attained to higher spiritual realizations, not a few Oriental teachers might by now have given up teaching us.

From a larger perspective, the past century of East-West encounter—reckoned from Swami Vivekananda's celebrated speech at the Parliament of Religions in 1893—has been but a comparatively brief spell in a cultural osmosis that is bound to continue for very much longer. More specifically, it can be viewed as a period of valuable learning for both Western seekers and Eastern teachers. As both psychologist Carl Gustav Jung and historian Arnold Toynbee saw rightly, the westward movement of Eastern teachings is a most decisive event in our time, which has already transformed the West. Perhaps we are now entering a more mature stage in this process, where the enthusiastic but

fumbling beginning steps make room for a more sober, deep-felt, and fruitful integration. I consider the present book to be a contribution to this sweeping cultural development. At the same time, I hope it will continue to prove helpful—as the earlier version apparently has been—to those who are trying to make sense of Eastern spiritual paths and their teachers.

More than ever I believe that a guru is essential in the higher stages of practice, because the psychoenergetic work that is called for in transcending the ego and conventional mind is truly formidable. As we develop on the path, the ego becomes ever more subtle and elusive, and having the brightly polished mirror of an advanced adept available is a great boon. At the same time, as I have repeated emphasized in my published writings and seminars, we must assume full responsibility for our own spiritual process. Childish or adolescent responses to a guru, which make us vacillate between emotions of dependence and independence, will never lead us to enlightenment. Rather we must come to recognize the outer guru as a liberating function within our own mind. But to discover the guru function experientially, we require the psychoenergetic trigger and spiritual guidance of a benign and hopefully realized “outer” guru. The New Age insistence that we can and perhaps even should do without a teacher, in my view, is mere wishful thinking.

Then again, as long as we approach our teachers uncritically, we are bound to harvest disappointment, as indeed has been the case with numerous seekers. Every childish projection we can bring into play in our quest for a guru can undoubtedly be matched by some actual or so-called teacher out there. We can do a lot of work on ourselves prior to entering a discipleship with a qualified adept. In fact, we would be wise to do so, if only to avoid burdening our eventual teacher with our neuroses. Then, when life brings us the opportunity of a guru-disciple relationship, we will be better prepared not only to differentiate between a true teacher (*sad-guru*) and, let us say, a not-so-true teacher but also to respond in a mature way to a true guru.

In this book, I have much to say about crazy-wisdom teachers and gurus in general. But, beyond this, I endeavor to portray the spiritual process itself. It is misunderstood as often as are spiritual teachers. My observations are based partly on my extensive study of Indic spiritual traditions and partly on my own experience with the yogic process and discipleship over many years.

This book, then, is far from being politically correct: First, I am writing sympathetically about spirituality, demarcating it carefully from conventional religion; second, I am doing so as an engaged spiritual practitioner (of Vajrayāna Buddhism); third, I advocate ancient spiritual teachings, notably the Indic Yoga tradition, as important avenues of self-exploration for contemporary spiritual seekers; fourth, I champion the role of the *guru*, or authoritative spiritual guide, on the path of inner growth; fifth, I refuse to outright condemn crazy wisdom, even though I have concerns about the appropriateness in our time of its more extreme manifestations. In other words, I do not shy away from taking a stance on issues that are vitally important to any consideration of what constitutes a viable spirituality for contemporary humanity.

It remains for me to wish the reader a safe and rewarding journey on the spiritual path.

## **C O N T E N T S**

**FOREWORD** by Roger Walsh, M. D.

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**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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