

## **Have you experienced spiritual abuse within The New Kadampa Tradition?**

Spiritual abuse can be difficult to recognise whilst it is happening. Any attempt to control or manipulate a person using religious or spiritual teachings could be considered an act of spiritual abuse. People report that even if they did not recognise it as abuse at the time, repeated acts of spiritual abuse over time 'broke their spirit' or 'soul'.

Survivors of the NKT have frequently reported many different types of spiritual abuse:

- The misuse of the teachings on gaining spiritual merit to suggest you should work longer hours or harder to assist you in the achievement of enlightenment
- The suggestion that you should devote more of your time or energy to the NKT or to Kelsang Gyatso
- The misuse of the teachings on faith to suggest you should work harder to develop blind faith rather than ask questions
- The suggestion that your 'self-cherishing mind' is to blame for your emotional pain and therefore the conditions of the centre or the way people treat you doesn't matter
- The suggestion that you should not have basic needs for safety, security, boundaries, physical and emotional warmth, friendship, intimacy as these are a result of self-cherishing
- The suggestion that nothing matters and therefore your emotions, or abuse, does not matter
- Receiving dharma 'teachings' from people when you have not requested them, or have made it clear that you do not wish to receive them
- The suggestion that there is no need for boundaries between people because we are all somehow 'one', or that you cannot say no because this is somehow saying no to love
- The suggestion that you should have compassion for your abuser prior to acknowledging any of your own emotional pain (spiritual bypassing, enabling)
- The misuse of the Atisha's cook story to suggest you should appreciate or be grateful towards your abuser immediately or during an act of abuse (enabling, masochism)
- The suggestion that abuse is all in your mind or 'empty' (gaslighting), the result of your actions in the past (victim blaming, enabling) or teaching you (sadism)
- The suggestion that your abuser is in the right place (in the NKT) to deal with their abusive behaviour and to help all living beings achieve enlightenment, therefore safeguarding is not required
- The suggestion that abuse is ok because we can't expect your abuser to be enlightened yet and they still have 'delusions' (enabling)

- The suggestion that as people are 'empty of inherent existence' that they do not have stable personality difficulties and therefore they cannot be held accountable for their actions (nihilism, enabling)
- The suggestion that leaving the NKT or your teacher will result in negative karma or an unfortunate rebirth
- The suggestion that you shouldn't leave because changing your external conditions or situation is 'worldly' or self-cherishing
- The suggestion that you are only suffering because you are unable to overcome your 'delusions' (bullying, suggesting you are inadequate)
- The suggestion that leaving would make you inferior in some way to those who stay
- The suggestion that if you decide not to practice kadam dharma for any reason that you would not be a good Buddhist or a good person, would be on an inferior 'path', or would become more 'deluded'
- The suggestion that having sex with your teacher is somehow more spiritually advanced or 'tantric' than regular sex

## **This is not Buddhism. This is spiritual manipulation.**

Many people report that due to their indoctrination they did not recognise these as acts of abuse until they had been separated from the group or abusive person for a length of time. If you are unsure whether you are being spiritually abused, one question to ask yourself is whether you feel spiritually inadequate. If you do, the likelihood is that you are experiencing shame as a result of spiritual abuse.

If you think you might be experiencing spiritual abuse, know that you are not alone. Spiritual abuse is not often discussed which can make it difficult to talk about. Find a safe person (someone outside of the NKT who cannot gaslight you using the teachings) to talk to. This could be a counsellor/therapist, family member, or old friend. If you are isolated and no longer have contact with anyone outside of the NKT, you could call a helpline to speak to a trained counsellor confidentially. If you are fearful about the potential of homelessness following leaving the NKT, please contact social services or ask someone to do this on your behalf. Survivors frequently report suicidality shortly before leaving an NKT centre. If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts or urges, please call your local crisis team or visit A&E. If you are fearful about your safety after leaving the NKT following threats of harm or harassment, please contact the police. Record any harassment and report it to the police and The Charity Commission.

## **It is not all in your mind, and you are not alone.**