

Considering attending a New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) centre for the first time?

Understanding how The New Kadampa Tradition operates can be very challenging and confusing for newcomers. This brief document highlights the main points of concern.

It is a recruitment drive

The notes for NKT teachers states that whilst being friendly to newcomers and giving them a job makes it more likely they will come back, the aim of the NKT teacher is to *'try to drive the meaning of the text into the hearts of the disciples'*. This guide also states regarding free public talks *'Be careful not to give the impression that it is a recruitment drive'*. The NKT often hides the fact that they are the NKT on their advertising.

It's not mainstream Buddhism

The NKT state that they teach Modern Buddhism, however mainstream Buddhists consider the NKT to be a personality cult. Followers have demonstrated against the Dalai Lama. Followers are encouraged to memorise Kelsang Gyatso's books word for word, and critical thinking skills are considered a sign of lack of faith. Current members believe that Kelsang Gyatso is the third living Buddha, and therefore an enlightened being. Kelsang Gyatso has not been seen since 2013 and many ex-members believe that senior NKT have lied about his health status to current members.

The NKT do not understand mental health

The NKT believe that anger and sadness should be completely eradicated, and as a result they practice spiritual bypassing of emotional pain. This can feel good in the short term but in the long term has caused former members serious psychological and physical harm. The NKT advertise their classes as solutions for anxiety, stress, and depression, but have no understanding of the fight and flight response, mood or trauma. Instead they believe in a 'mental continuum' that passes between rebirths, and that holding positive or 'virtuous' thoughts in your concentration at all times would ensure a more fortunate rebirth. Many former members have gone on to develop PTSD.

It's not mindfulness meditation

The contemplation meditation practices could be described as guided self-hypnosis, which leads to thought reform in line with the doctrine. The only mindfulness of the breath they teach is in order to settle the mind and relax you prior to focusing on doctrine. The NKT practice dissociation from the body and sense of 'I' which is oppositional to Western mindfulness practices.

The NKT has a history of institutional abuse

There are a growing number of testimonies online which detail serious psychological, spiritual, financial abuse and alleged sexual assault from senior NKT management and teachers. Abuse has been enabled and minimised through the teachings on karma and equanimity. The NKT has no safeguarding policies and procedures and has allowed alleged sexual abusers to continue holding senior positions.

Senior NKT members attack former members and critics

Senior members of The New Kadampa Tradition have stalked, harassed and threatened testimony writers, sent legal threats, and written defamation propaganda online. These attempts to silence critics serve as information control so that newcomers find it more difficult to access information about the abuse.

Dr Michelle Haslam

Clinical Psychologist, former resident of an NKT centre and advocate for NKT survivors