

Introduction to the Korean edition of

The Guru Papers, Part One

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Having Part One of *The Guru Papers* published for Koreans is both gratifying and interesting for the authors. We are pleased and honored to be one of the first books of our Korean publisher. It is very fitting for Religion and Reason to be our publisher since applying reason to religion is an important aspect of what our book attempts to do. And given *The Guru Papers*' significant focus on Eastern religion and tradition, we are extremely happy that it has finally found its first Asian home. Because Korea has several religious traditions alongside a strong current of secularism, and Koreans are known to be curious and willing to entertain new or different ideas and perspectives, Korea seems the perfect place to see whether the book's insights can speak to the hearts and minds of people from different backgrounds.

We give special thanks to Miran Choo who was so deeply committed to presenting this book to her fellow Koreans that she took all the necessary initiative. She discovered and translated it (a daunting task) and then even found the publisher—as she also did recently with Joel's earlier book *The Passionate Mind*. Thank you, Miran Choo for all your passion, determination and hard work!

The Guru Papers as a whole (Parts One and Two) deals with unmasking the mental authoritarianism hidden in culture, values and daily life. We carefully distinguish between legitimate and authoritarian authority. We define "authoritarian" simply with two components: a person, group or ideology that claims to know what's best for others, while remaining closed to feedback—that is, not open to changing when shown to be wrong, since nothing that differs from its beliefs and point of view can make the smallest dent to change it.

Although much of this volume (Part One) presents the particular dynamics of the guru/disciple relationship, we also intend that "guru" be viewed more generally as a metaphor for authoritarian authority and power based solely on tradition, special hidden knowledge, or special position in the socio-political hierarchy. Though the word guru is now often used popularly to mean any kind of expert (such as business or health guru), traditionally the guru is a role, an archetype that represents absolute, unchallengeable power over minds and lives because he is seen as the ultimate authority that defines "the truth." Any person, group or society that claims a monopoly on truth and is believed, holds enormous power over people's minds, identities, values and behavior.

The papers on gurus and cults depict in concrete terms the mechanisms of control, rewards, disguised collusions, and dangers of surrendering to those who position themselves as knowing what's best for others. Decoding the dynamics of manipulation can help people avoid such traps. We unmask and deconstruct the ways of this power in the hope that it will give people a greater depth of insight into their own beliefs and values and aid them in reexamining whether they are appropriate for these poignant and dangerous times. Keeping one's perspectives current with new discoveries, needs and realities is a prerequisite for one's own and the planet's well-being and survival.

We are especially pleased that our Korean publisher is dedicated to bringing reason into religion, since reexamining traditional beliefs and values is crucial for the modern world. Reason and religion have not usually been coupled—or if so, historically religious revelation and dogma were given priority, including legally—even to the point of killing those accused of “heresy” or breaking taboos. (“Taboo” is an authoritarian concept designed to protect the traditional sacred.) When there were irresolvable contradictions, reason was either trivialized and denigrated (in the East) or demonized (monotheism). Since religion and reason have most often been at odds and deeply polarized, the time has come to bring reason or at least reasonableness to religion as a priority. Humanity can no longer afford blind adherence to ancient “wisdoms” originating in long bygone eras when mythic stories were created to explain the world and the position people found themselves in, while not accidentally justifying and maintaining the power hierarchies within the *status quo*.

This is not to say that science has all the important answers to the meaning of life with its complexities and mysteries. Nor are we implying that religion has lost all relevance. Rather, religion can no longer simply demand unquestioned belief or faith without taking reason into account, for only through reason can religion’s possible blind spots be revealed. On the other hand, science has often used reason in a narrow and rigid way to deny there could be a spiritual aspect within the cosmos. This does not take into account the important aspects of living that are not within the scientific paradigm. Our book-in-progress *Spirituality for Atheists* attempts to collapse this unnecessary and limiting planetary polarization between science and spirituality. Reasonableness is used to challenge and expose some of the blind spots in scientific materialism. We show that the cosmos more likely contains a spiritual aspect than that existence is nothing but the product of material causality and randomness.

Religion, philosophy, art and tradition attempt to address the important arenas of existence that reason alone cannot encompass. Such spheres as values, purpose, meaning, beauty, love, inspiration, hope, and one’s place in the cosmos cannot be captured by reason alone. Religion is one of the arenas within the human drama that is not accessible solely by reason, but this does not mean reason should be negated, ignored or bypassed. Religion may go beyond reason, but should not contradict it. The Dalai Lama with his keen interest in science stated that if Buddhism and science are ever in conflict, science should be given precedence in the arena of “truth.”

If a worldview negates or diminishes the place of reason, the danger is that it fosters authoritarianism and wishful thinking. This has been and is a major obstacle to humanity’s increasingly necessary evolution, particularly in social spheres. The attachment to wishful thinking, which includes constructing and propping up beliefs that are a product of one’s desires and need for certainty, is at the core of many global problems. It squashes the creative problem-solving so essential during these times. So while utilizing reason alone leaves out the possibility of exploring those important aspects of human existence that are beyond the linear confines of reason, not using reason and reasonableness as a check point enables myth and fantasy to dominate, as well as authoritarian manipulations and corruptions of power. Reasonableness combined with a caring heart that can think critically as well as creatively is crucial for the demands of our current historical epoch.

The guru’s “assault on reason” (chapter 5) resembles religion’s traditional assaults demoting and villainizing thought and thinking itself as a spiritual obstacle. “Stilling thought” is the goal of many spiritual practices, especially Eastern and mystical ones, which define “the quiet mind” as the basic spiritual ideal—as opposed to using thought better, thinking more clearly, or creatively addressing worldly and personal needs. While meditation practices can give respite and thus serve as an important antidote to the unhealthy stress of highly competitive modern life, and can be a valuable arrow in one’s quiver, making an empty mind a spiritual necessity negates the part of us that is particularly human—our capacity to think, reason, and communicate knowledge throughout history, which also devalues the social side of life.

Historically, authoritarianism has been and largely still is the glue holding social orders together by demanding conformity and obedience, while offering stability, security, community, and acceptance. This has worked (to the extent that it has) in keeping the continuity of a culture intact. But now shared authoritarian beliefs and identities are a major factor in social disintegration, bringing instability and violence on a global scale. Not only are authoritarian modalities no longer working, they have become a great hindrance to solving the worldwide problems we are all facing. Humanity has moved into a new era, an era of accelerated change that demands new and different solutions that neither history nor the presumed wisdom of the ages can cope with—such is the magnitude, and ever increasing complexity and novelty of current challenges.

The old religious and moral order is unraveling because it cannot deal with the forces it unleashed. Violence and terrorism are rife between religious and ethnic groups. Religious fundamentalists are attacking modern ways and cultures. Our future and our very survival as a species is at stake in these “morality wars,” which hinder protecting and repairing the eco-system. Civilization is being stretched, made taut by the opposing forces of the old and the new. It is in such times that a crack in history can occur, allowing the new to flower. Rooting out authoritarianism in both society and oneself is one creative frontier that offers new grounds for hope. When people take back the authority that has been unknowingly invested in others, this can unleash the intelligence and care needed to meet the challenges of the times.

We believe that the insights within this book can be enlightening to those willing to open their minds to the book’s analysis and critique of authoritarianism. It is you, Korean readers, who will judge the book’s pertinence to your understanding and your lives.