



### Answering The Call

The information referenced in these articles regarding the events of the Sedona Sweat Lodge tragedy facilitated by James Arthur Ray on October 8th is based on what I've gleaned from print and radio sources and personal interviews. I leave it to homicide investigators to discover more of the full truth and levy appropriate consequences and to civil attorneys to obtain fair compensation for damages. I am taking this opportunity to address important issues that resonate for me personally and are, in my opinion, "online" for us as members of the human family. In this pivotal and auspicious time, we are presented with repeated opportunities for rapid spiritual awakening. Part of that awakening includes having hearts to feel and the courage to speak up about disturbing and objectionable things appearing on the societal stage. My intent is to apply the inquires and lessons arising from the events surrounding Mr. Ray to the larger arena of the entire spiritual movement. Consequently, it would be irresponsible of me not to acknowledge Mr. Ray as a catalyst for the concerns and inquiries addressed in this part of the opinion article series.

I believe that our philosophy of life is or ought to be synonymous with our way of life, and that it includes our viewpoints, standards, ethical practices and beliefs about inherent decency. Part one of this three-part opinion article series is an invitation to Mr. Ray to reflect upon his own standards, ethical practices and sense of decency and measure them against his motives and behavior so that he might come to a deeper understanding and ownership of the fuel and flint of what has transpired in his practices in the past, and in particular, as part of his Spiritual Warrior Retreat in Sedona on October 8<sup>th</sup>.

As someone in the same service field as Mr. Ray, I am distressed by how many sources are issuing edicts that label New Age spiritual facilitators as irresponsible imposters and greedy swindlers as well as edicts that imply that most participants in new age spiritual practices warrant being categorized as foolish lemmings. I am equally disturbed by how the October 8<sup>th</sup> incident taints the prayerful, purifying, restorative sacred purpose of appropriately facilitated sweat lodge ceremonies and related rituals as well as the pure heart of spiritual warrior

practices. Like many colleagues in my field of service, I am also concerned about those who are, as Stephen J. Johnson, PhD, Executive Director of the Men's Center of Los Angeles and [Sacred Path Productions](#)

, put it, “

*unable to discern the difference between those that are truly committed to an honorable path with integrity from those that are essentially self-servicing narcissists taking advantage of trusting souls.*

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My concern about James Arthur Ray's teachings and practices are fourfold. Firstly, I cannot comprehend the logic of designing the “*hottest sweat lodge*” on the planet and then ushering sleep deprived participants, who had been strongly encouraged to engage in self-introspective exercises late into the night for at least two nights at the retreat's beginning and who had recently broken a 36-hour fast, into a sauna-like enclosed environment. How could someone seemingly as knowledgeable as Mr. Ray not fathom that the sweat lodge activity would not only further drain the body of fluids and compromise oxygen availability, but also possibly put people at risk of heat stroke, scorched lungs, heart, liver and kidney damage, unconsciousness and death? I cannot fathom why temperature-monitoring devices weren't installed inside the sweat lodge? Why wasn't hired medical staff available

### **in case**

? The bottom line is that there seems to be a disturbing incongruence between the lavish fees charged for this event and the care extended to the participants. Secondly, I understand that in some spiritual systems, physical endurance exercises are associated with self-expansion, self-esteem, self-empowerment, and maybe even purification. However, it must be remembered that our physical body is an extremely reliable feedback system as well as the temple housing our soul. We violate the sanctity of it when we override its feedback or make dangerous demands upon it in the name of adages such as “you are not your body”. Furthermore, if a person has been sleep, water and nutrition deprived, their faculties may not be sufficiently intact for them to discern between challenge and hazard. The reason for a facilitator's putting participants in a state in which an important feedback system may have been overridden haunts me. I understand that Mr. Ray values activities that engendered altered states of consciousness as an avenue to dissolving self-limitations. However, an altered state of consciousness can also seriously inhibit one's ability to discern the difference between what is beneficially challenging and what is detrimentally harmful. Thirdly, according to what I've heard and read as well as my intuitive assessment of both the overt and subliminal messages on Mr. Ray's website (describing his services and products) it seems that a thread running through many of his processes and programs entail an ideology primed not only to motivate and challenge, but to confront, push, and goad. One could argue that I'm splitting semantic hairs by even mentioning this. However, I cannot ignore that, tragically, Mr. Ray's “playing full on” axiom seemed to have blinded him to the point where he either did not empower, or possibly much worse, did not allow participants experiencing discomfort to leave the sweat lodge. Lastly, and most regrettably, it seems quite clear that the loss of life and the injuries sustained were completely preventable.

Deceit and propaganda is being perpetuated in many secular and spiritual systems, and this clearly includes the New Age spiritual movement. I'm not pronouncing that the work of James Arthur Ray falls hook, line and sinker into the category of deceit and propaganda. I am simply stating that because deceit and propaganda exists and because it is possible that there are elements of both underlying at least some of Mr. Ray's programs and services, it is vital that all of us, and particularly those pursuing a spiritual path, embrace this tragedy as a call for greater awareness and discernment. In alignment with taking the inquiries and lessons arising from the events surrounding Mr. Ray' into the larger spiritual arena, what follows are suggestions about the questions to ask and guidelines to consult when selecting a spiritual system and/or individual spiritual facilitator:

1. Does the organization and/or facilitator's programs, practices and products promote personal freedom and authenticity?
2. As a participant, why might you need to be pushed, challenged or goaded in order to become more spiritual?
3. Why might you need to engage in "spiritual" activities that require more from you than is reasonable and safe?
4. As a participant, are you empowered to think for yourself, to trust your own intuitive knowing/inner guidance?
5. How would you define the facilitator's charisma? *Charisma, from the Greek 'charis or grace, means gift and has to do with divine influence on the heart of the one who receives the blessing of charis. Charis is a spiritual power gifted to an individual who genuinely admires and empowers those they serve.*  
If misused, it can become a trait whereby a person relishes having influence and/or control over others. There's a difference between an individual who uses their charisma to interface with others in an authentic, effective and empowering way and one who uses their magnetism and/or attractiveness to persuade or dominate others.
6. Do the activities and practices of the organization or individual facilitator suggest that deprivation is beneficial?
7. Is the facilitator dismissive of or light hearted about vomiting, dizziness, disorientation, intense fear and/or loss of consciousness as a reaction to certain activities and practices?
8. Has the organization or facilitator demonstrated neglect?
9. Does the facilitator function as a parental figurehead? As a participant, do you ever feel inferior, even infantilized?
10. Does the facilitator project the image that he/she knows best? Do you sense an underlying lure of co-dependence with the facilitator for a certain connection to spirit, energy, or power?
11. Does the facilitator or organization's principles state or imply that by being involved you will be getting the "real thing", that which you can't get anywhere else?

12. Does the facilitator or organization state or imply that your spiritual progress is dependent upon repeated attendance at events or remaining connected with him/her/it?

13. Does the facilitator or organization's principles state or imply that you need to live in close proximity to a Center or be regularly involved in certain activities in order to advance to the next level?

14. Do you feel pressured to sign up for events or purchase products?

15. Do you have a sense of having betrayed or disappointed him/her/them if you don't sign up for certain events or purchase products?

16. Does the facilitator or organization's principles state or imply that if you **don't** enroll you must not be committed to whatever spiritual advancement is being offered? It is vital that all participants partaking of any service, program or product feel not only comfortable **not**

participating or purchasing, but also honored for making a decision that is congruent with their intuitive knowing/inner guidance.

17. Are the organization or facilitator's fees excessive?

18. Does your involvement require ongoing fees (investments) that either uncomfortably diminish and/or deplete your resources?

19. Does the organization target mostly upper middle to high-income individuals?

20. Does the organization have scholarships that afford a certain number of participants the ability to participate at a reduced fee?

21. Does the organization authentically outreach to those in need?

22. Are those assisting the facilitator compensated for their services?

There are trustworthy spiritual organizations available and many facilitators are sincere and responsible custodians of their gifts and abilities, and genuinely respect, admire and empower those they serve. Therefore, I prayerfully intend that regardless of the edicts being issued and deceit being perpetuated, individuals will continue seeking and finding - participating in spiritual programs, partaking of spiritual services and acquiring products that promote personal authenticity, self-trust, freedom of expression, self-empowerment and co-creative collaboration.

Participants and facilitators alike seek spiritual development because we genuinely yearn - to uncover and reclaim hidden truths about our authentic selves; to explore uncommon knowledge about the mystical aspects of our origins; to re-examine reality as we know it; to become liberated broadcasters of empowering truth, and conduits for infusions of energy that illuminate and transform. And that is something to be honored and proud of.

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