



Your Power Must Come from Within

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Some time ago I went to meet a few people for lunch who I knew. These people were about 20 years or so older than I was, and we were meeting in a nice restaurant by the water in Long Beach, California. I do not remember what the meeting was about – in fact, I remember only one thing from the meeting:

A woman I did not know came into the meeting wearing a Chanel T-shirt, Chanel sunglasses, with a Chanel purse, a Rolex watch and just about every other “logoed” designer you can imagine all over her. The Chanel logo on her T-shirt was at least a foot long. She had all sorts of plastic surgery as well that was way too obvious. The woman was wearing more large logos on her than anyone I had ever seen in my life. There was nothing tasteful about it. The logos were large and meant to be seen. They were meant to get attention.

I do not remember much about this woman other than the logos. I remember that after she left, someone brought up some stuff about how she had low self-esteem. She did not talk about much of significance at the lunch. The woman’s white skin was pulled very thin by all the surgery she had had. As I looked at her, deep down I felt I understood exactly what was going on with her.

What was going on with this woman is an exaggerated version of what is going on with almost all of us. In fact, this woman suffers from the same thing you suffer from. This woman’s issue is something that we all suffer from in one form or another.

Wherever I travel throughout the United States, I notice churches and various religious buildings all over the place. They are in small towns and large cities. They are everywhere. Each week, people file into these structures and stand and sit there in place for an hour or more.

The best-selling magazines in the United States are magazines like *People*, *The National Enquirer* and *Us Weekly*. They are in drug stores and grocery stores, large and small. They are everywhere you go. These publications are filled with stories about various stars and others that society looks up to. People devour these sorts of magazines like crazy.

Recently, I have been hearing all of these stories about an Indian Guru named Amma. This woman has built a giant empire and university based largely on going around giving people hugs. She is worshiped as a god and people devote their lives to her. I read she is coming to Los Angeles. People wait in line for hours to get a hug from her. She sells items like her used toothbrush, clothes she has worn and dolls of herself at her events for lots of money.

Quite frequently, when I am at various parties and events and meet strangers, they tell me within moments of meeting them how they attended Amherst, Columbia, Yale, or whatever prestigious school they went to when it has almost zero to do with the conversation we are having.

Recently I was discussing the LA Lakers with someone and they managed to tell me that they attended some prestigious college that did not have a good basketball team. I’ve been out of college more than 20 years and many people tell me what college they went to five decades or more after attending there.

When someone works for a large, well-known company or employer, the same sort of need to tell others and so forth arises.

Not too long ago, I had someone over to my beach house in Malibu. I was talking about this beach house and how I enjoyed going there on the weekends now and then to relax. The person then said something along the lines of: “This is a good thing to impress others with. When you get older, you will use something else to impress others like art, or maybe you will start giving more to charity to impress others.”

What does all of this mean?

It means that most people out there are giving away power to people, places and things outside of themselves.

When you are not secure with who you are, you will seek to get value elsewhere. For most of us, our value does not come from within. It comes from an endless stream of titles, achievements, associations, material goods, bank account balances, romantic partners, conquests and more.

For some reason, I have been fascinated with the study of the emergence of religious groups, gurus, cults and so forth – for almost as long as I can remember. I have even studied motivational superstars as well. One of the characteristics of most religious figures, gurus and others is that they are able to convince their followers that this person in some way can make their followers be happier, more secure and better off. Many even profess to have magical powers that can make you happy.

The entire message of these leaders is that they—and they alone—can be the source of your happiness. We give our authority to others outside of ourselves and idolize and make them more important than ourselves.

Christians, Muslims, Scientologists, Mormons—and every religion for the most part—makes its followers subjects. The religions then tell you when you can be happy (following its rules), should feel guilty (not following its rules), and so forth. To most people in the world, their religion is more important than what is inside them. They will allow their religion to govern how they feel about themselves and make that more important than who they are.

The best way to control people is to elevate yourself to a role that is more important than the individual. There are all sorts of ways we have control exercised over us, and it is due to this control that the majority of people are not living up to their full potential, or are as happy as they could be. Organizations, businesses, leaders and others with integrity do not support being idolized and find a way to deflect it.

People also do this with brands. They get their self-worth from the brands they are wearing and feel that if they cover their body with various brands, they will be important. If we feel empty or insecure inside, we may believe that wrapping our iPhone in a Louis Vuitton case that costs \$300 will somehow make us more significant and fill up the hollowness inside of us

—but if this is what we are seeking from doing this, it will not help us. Marketers, salespeople and others are all too happy to give us the impression that whatever they are selling will fill the void we feel—but it never does.

I write articles like this that go out to a lot of people. Each day, I get emails from various people asking me advice about important life decisions:

- Should they get divorced?
- Should they have children?
- Should they quit their job?
- Can they fly across the world and meet with me if I give them 30 minutes of my time?

I appreciate that people seek such counsel from me, but make no mistake about it: I'm not much different than the people seeking my counsel (my wife would certainly agree with that).

Anytime we put someone on a pedestal, we are telling that person that they are more important than us. We are handing them our body and soul on a silver platter to do with as they wish. In most cases, we will be sorely disappointed.

In the business context, if we believe someone is more important to us, that gives them the perfect opportunity to screw us over. I remember the first time I met one of my favorite marketing gurus. This person had just given a speech in front of several thousand people and was standing at a valet line with me, waiting for his car. I told this person how much I admired his work. He thanked me and then proceeded to try and sell me an expensive marketing consulting program. He took my compliment and apparent deference as an invitation to sell me something.

Several years ago I had a problem with a very expensive piece of real estate whose value had fallen dramatically, and I needed to refinance. I found someone I believed to be one of the best attorneys for this sort of thing in Los Angeles and went to seek their counsel. I went in and was very desperate and pleaded for help. They billed me \$50,000 for doing everything other than what I needed done—and then asked for more money to do what needed to be done. I literally got nothing. I was taken advantage of because I was desperate for help and gave them all the power.

I have been on the receiving end of several bad crushes in my time and also on the giving end. The relationships that are most likely to work are not when you have a crush on someone or vice versa. When you have a crush on someone, that person realizes that you have given them all the power. They will either use you (or take advantage of you), or they will simply be turned off by you. People generally want some sort of challenge in their romantic relationships, and the second they spot weakness, they generally go elsewhere.

Because most people are so insecure, they generally will imitate many people around them. This form of imitation means that they are giving people around them the power.

I grew up in a town called Grosse Pointe in Michigan. For whatever reason, the style of dress there among men is downright strange—it still is and has always been. Many men do things like wear green shorts with pink shirts and penny loafers without socks.

A few years ago, I was at a bachelor party in Las Vegas that was particularly wild. When I got to the day party after a drive from Los Angeles, I went into the hotel suite where it was being held and there was blood all over the room. Several people were passed out in the middle of the afternoon, and the groom was rolling around on a couch with a woman he had met in the hotel bar. After a few hours of this, I decided I had to drive home—I've never used drugs, and this party was too far out of control and dangerous.

I walked downstairs and was waiting in another valet line. I heard a few men beside me talking:

"Look at those fags!" one of them said, and a few guys started laughing.

I looked up and along came a group of guys who looked like they were from Grosse Pointe. I had not been back in a decade. One had a pink shirt on and a few were wearing penny loafers (with shorts) and no socks. They were wearing various bright-colored shorts.

"Are you guys from Grosse Pointe?" I asked.

"Yeah, how did you know?!" one asked.

Over 1,000 miles away — and I could spot these guys. They looked positively ridiculous. Why were they all dressed this way? Because they were imitating those around them.

If you do not recognize your own self-worth, you will consistently imitate those around you. If everyone started wearing chicken costumes 24/7, you would too.

Is there anything wrong with imitating a ridiculous style of dress? I do not think so, for the most part. What is wrong, though, is when we give our authority to other people, groups and so forth and base our happiness on this.

The rarest sort of people are the ones who take back the power they have given others over themselves and pave their own way in the world. They base their happiness on how they want to feel—and not on how a power other than themselves says they should feel. Your happiness, sense of achievement and sense of balance needs to come from within and not outside of yourself. When you give power to others, you set yourself up for perpetual unhappiness and disappointment.

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