

HOLDING BACK

by Serge Kahili King

All over the world there are teachers of various kinds who have claimed—and still do claim—that it is necessary for them to hold some knowledge back. This can be found very often in the martial arts as well as in esoteric teachings. There are a lot of stories in China about that, and even in the swordsmanship traditions of Europe.

In other kinds of teaching this commonly happens in certain areas of knowledge, like healing, for instance, where something would be held back, because it would not be seen as being helpful to the student. The teacher may think that the student is not able to handle it, doesn't understand something about it, and yet teach that same thing to another student, but hold back something from that student, because he's not ready or wouldn't know how to use it. These kinds of things can happen, too, so it's not always a bad thing to keep something a secret.

I'll tell you a secret, though. There really aren't any secrets. It's all been given out, especially today, it's been given out in more forms than ever. When someone tells you that they have secret knowledge that they're not allowed to share or cannot reveal to you, go ahead and laugh, because the secret is that they don't have any secret. That's what they're hiding, because the knowledge is there. It's readily available. It's often not that recognized, and what a good teacher will do is help you recognize it, or put it in words that you might understand, but this old idea of secret knowledge is so strong all over the world, and it's a farce, it's a fallacy. It's a way some people maintain a position of prestige, because they're considered to have these big secrets, and only they are the ones who can have them.

Sometimes, for practical purposes, secrets are kept. Fishermen have secret fishing places, because they don't want them fished out. This was common in Hawaii, and it's still common in Europe, and in Asia. There are other kinds of things that were proprietary, because they were the ways that people made their living. The secrets of certain skills and crafts were held within a particular group so that they could maintain their income. That was also common in many places, like Hawaii, Europe and Asia. These kinds of things were done for practical economical purposes, not because they had something that was not to be revealed.

Along the same lines, sometimes the master of an area of knowledge does hold back on a certain item or a skill or something, because the student is supposed to discover it on his or her own. That happened to me a lot, starting with my father. What happens is, they teach you something and you're expected to use what

they've taught to learn this new thing. But what often happens is, people just want to be taught. They don't want to work at it. It becomes “Teach me, teach me, teach me!” The downside for such a student is that he or she becomes helpless without the teacher.

One example is “workshop junkies.” These are people who keep going to workshops, hoping that in some magical way they'll be transformed by the workshop, but it doesn't work that way. People read books by the tens and by the hundreds, hoping that somehow the same kind of thing will happen. One person wrote me a very poignant email. He actually said, “I read your book and I read it several times and after about a year I finally got the idea that you have to use it.”

If someone really has secret knowledge and they don't let you know it to protect themselves, their group or even you, they don't *tell* you they have secret knowledge. That's a dead giveaway for a scam.

The most popular way for an individual or a group to develop and maintain a position of prestige and power and influence is to claim clearly and loudly that they have secrets—often termed “sacred” secrets—so powerful and (often) mysterious that they can't reveal them to you unless, in some cases, you are willing to go through a lengthy and sometimes costly training and remain under their rule.

Some such people surround themselves with arcane (mysterious) ritual which makes it seem even more mysterious. They may speak a special language that no one else understands, wear special clothing, handle mysterious artifacts.... All to hide the fact that they don't have anything that's really a secret.

There is another kind of “holding back” which is different. It's really not held as a secret, but I'll give you an example in our modern society that's very common.

If you go to school and you're learning about science for the first time, and you begin learning about electricity, it's very common to be told that electricity is like water running through a hose. As the water rubs on the hose, that's resistance. And at the spigot, that's voltage, because that's the pressure that pushes the electricity through. A lot of people stop there. That's all they know about electricity. But if you go further into science, you discover at some point that it's not exactly like that. Then you start learning some other ways to think of electricity. You start learning about positive and negative poles and attraction and repulsion and other things. Fine. If you go on further, you'll find that it's not exactly like that, either.

To start with learning something complicated, we often have to be given a metaphor that we can understand with the knowledge we have. As we gain more knowledge, the metaphor changes to something which is closer to the actuality. But the actuality may still not be in any framework that we can really relate to. So we have to get a different metaphor that gets us closer. That's not really holding back. That's giving knowledge in a way that we can relate to. And then changing that relationship as we gain more knowledge.