‘A compelling account of what can go wrong in religious groups.’
Barbara Scott Emmett, author.
Author Tahlia Newland has published seven metaphysical-fiction novels—four of which have won a BRAG Medallion and an Awesome Indies Book Awards Seal of Excellence for outstanding fiction—one book of short stories, and a non-fiction book on writing. She works as an editor and publisher for AIA Publishing and makes masks in her spare time.

Before her love of literature turned into a profession, Tahlia spent twenty years scripting and performing in visual theatre and theatre in education. She is also a trained teacher and taught high school creative and performing arts for several years.

Tahlia devoted twenty-years of her life to the study and practice of Tibetan Buddhism, twelve of those years in partial home retreat. She lives in the Australian bush with a husband, a daughter and a couple of Burmese cats.
Fallout is the memoir of one woman’s journey from ignorance of the reports of physical, emotional and sexual abuse by Sogyal Rinpoche, spiritual teacher of the Rigpa Tibetan Buddhist community, to the realisation of the depth of the trauma suffered by survivors, and how certain beliefs and assumptions enables such abuse. It’s also a tribute to the compassion, wisdom, and resilience of members of the online What Now? Support group.

Fallout is a personal record of psychological processing, showing the consequences of spiritual abuse for an ordinary member of an abusive, high-demand religious group, and is a cautionary tale for students and potential students of any guru-centred spiritual group.

Tahlia shares some of the insights and knowledge she gained during her role as one of the facilitators of the group, the challenges she and others faced, and the realisations she came to in light of her discoveries.
TESTIMONIALS

'Tahlia dispels the myth of enlightenment by abuse with compassion, penetrating wisdom and a clear-headed vision.' - Dr Jack Wicks

‘Fallout is a very personal, emotionally literate, and thoroughly researched and documented account of Newland’s journey in regards to leaving a religious group. Down to earth yet passionately heartfelt, Newland's book is ultimately full of hope. It’s a sensible guide to any person who is thinking to become involved, is currently involved in, or who is leaving or has left a religious group or spiritual teacher.’ - Geoffrey Beatson, psychotherapist

‘Though she pulls no punches, Newland writes with compassion for the victims and makes an attempt at understanding the flawed human beings behind the guru masks.’ - Barbara Scott Emmett, author

‘Tahlia Newland explores the dynamics behind the painful issue of abuse of students by their spiritual teachers. Her report lays bare the harm and anguish left behind in the wake of such appalling behaviour and the subsequent efforts, by those who seek to maintain their power and control, to denigrate the victims and condone the abusive conduct by invoking the excuse of Tantra. This attitude is a complete distortion of the impeccable Vajrayana path and creates much confusion, disenchantment and pain. So we are grateful to Ms Newland for bravely looking into this controversial issue with such compassion and insight.’ - Jetsumna Tenzin Palmo
Target Audience

WHO SHOULD READ

- Survivors of Spiritual Abuse
- Tibetan Buddhist students
- Buddhist Teachers
- Members of cult support groups
- Psychotherapists
- People considering following a guru
- Families and friends of survivors of spiritual abuse

BOOK BENEFITS

- Recognise cult warning signs
- Learn how Buddhist beliefs can be misunderstood & misused
- Learn methods of manipulation and control commonly used by gurus and their cults
- Recognize the traumatising effects of spiritual abuse
- Learn psychological perspectives on the dynamics of abuse in a spiritual group
Chapter one: Discovery

I looked at the Facebook post and frowned. My ex-monk friend had written a post insinuating that my spiritual teacher, my lama Sogyal Rinpoche, had abused him. My friend’s recent posts had made it clear that he’d had major problems with Rigpa, the Buddhist organisation of Sogyal Rinpoche’s students I’d been part of for twenty years, but this latest post took it a step further. Was he really saying what I thought he was saying?

I had to know the truth.

I typed a comment on the post: Are you saying he actually hit you?

Another comment appeared in reply to mine, from a Facebook friend I’d never met but friended because of our shared guru. We’d started interacting recently because she’d made a lot of supportive, caring, and sensible comments on my ex-monk friend’s recent posts. I’d come to trust her because she seemed like an honest and honourable person. She wrote: He did a lot of things you’d be surprised about.

Like what?

I waited for a moment, but no more words appeared. Clearly, she knew something more, but it appeared that she wasn’t going to say it publicly.

I contacted my ex-monk friend through Messenger: Did our lama hit you?

The answer came back immediately: Yes

I blinked, shocked, then typed the vital question: Was it only once?

Again the reply came without a moment’s delay: No, he hit me many times.

Many times? I shook my head, staring at those words in disbelief. Why would a spiritual teacher, a Tibetan lama who was supposed to be a model of wisdom and compassion, hit someone, not once but many times? Maybe it was a playful thing misinterpreted.

Hard? I typed.

Yes. It hurt. A lot. Left bruises.


My friend added three more shocking words: Every day one or more of us was getting hit.

My world shattered. A veil fell from my eyes. The ground fell away beneath me.

Almost everyone who worked in Rigpa with him got hit at some point, my friend added.

In one instant I was liberated from dependency on my lama, my guru. I realised that the central focus of my spiritual path was based on a lie—my lama was not who I’d thought him to be.

The traditional stories of students of great masters attaining realisation when their master slapped them with a sandal or threw stones at them flashed through my mind. I could see that if such a thing happened once, or at least rarely, it could be a powerful way to make someone pay attention, and this was the idea behind the term ‘crazy wisdom’ which referred to a realised master using ‘unconventional’ actions to awaken a student. Such actions were supposed to be only for the rare student who was so spiritually advanced that they would respond positively to such behaviour, not regularly and for every student close to the master. And the actions resulted in awakening, not injury. Injuries caused by a genuine crazy wisdom master’s actions supposedly healed spontaneously and immediately, yet my monk friend said he was left with bruises.
Cult Awareness:
1. Are you in a cult?
2. What makes a Buddhist/spiritual organization a cult?
3. Why are cults dangerous?
4. How do cults manipulate their members?
5. Would you know if you were in a cult?
6. Why do people join cults?
7. How can a group that seems benign be dangerous?
8. Cult recovery – the challenges, the stages.

Freedom of Religion and Freedom from Religious Abuse:
The challenge to society of religious groups that holds beliefs that condone harm. Could reference this paper - https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/religious-freedom-submissions/6649.doc

Buddhist issues:
1. Is Tibetan Buddhism really Buddhism? Where Tibetan Buddhism diverges from the rest of Buddhism.
2. Is the basic tenant of ‘Do no harm’ negotiable in Buddhism?
3. Are teachers always right? Forging a new student teacher relationship.
4. Are Buddhist lineages as pure as we like to believe?
5. What beliefs in Buddhism can be used to enable abuse?
6. Choosing a teacher in the modern world.

Abuse in Society:
1. Different kinds of abuse – domestic, organizational, religious etc and how to recognize it.
2. Is the law adequate for stamping out abuse?

Trauma and Recovery: Recognising the trauma abuse causes, the results of abuse for individuals and groups, and understanding what is needed for recovery. Complex post-traumatic stress disorder from abuse by a guru.

Cultural issues: Where Tibetan culture and Western cultural values differ – feudalism and democracy – and how this is reflected in the religion.
### Interview Questions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<td>What has Sogyal Rinpoche been accused of?</td>
<td>Why hasn’t anyone taken Sogyal Rinpoche to court?</td>
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<td>What is the main thing you learned from your experience in Rigpa?</td>
<td>The Dalai Lama is the public face of Tibetan Buddhism; what does he think of all this?</td>
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<td>What elements turn a Buddhist group into a cult?</td>
<td>What do other Tibetan Buddhist teachers say about the abuse?</td>
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<td>How widespread is this kind of abuse in Tibetan Buddhism?</td>
<td>Should news of abuse by gurus keep people away from Tibetan Buddhism?</td>
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<td>What’s the difference between abuse and genuine crazy wisdom?</td>
<td>Do you think Tibetan Buddhism still has something to offer the modern world? If so, what?</td>
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<td>What beliefs in Tibetan Buddhism allow such abuse to occur?</td>
<td>How has social media contributed to the fall of Sogyal Rinpoche and others?</td>
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<td>Why did you write this book?</td>
<td>What cultural differences contribute to the issue of guru abuse in Tibetan Buddhism?</td>
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<td>What has to change to stop this kind of abuse from happening again?</td>
<td>Is this the end of the West’s fascination with Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism?</td>
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<td>What are the secrets of running a successful online support group?</td>
<td>What happens to those who have left abusive Buddhist masters in terms of their spiritual path?</td>
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<td>Why did some of the abuse victims remain in Rigpa for decades?</td>
<td>What’s the difference between trance and dissociative states and genuine spiritual experience?</td>
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