

The Zen of Spiritual Materialism: Pride is the Rub

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Meditators and non-meditators alike have a pronounced egoic resistance to the growth changes induced through meditation. However, once the practice begins and stabilizes under the guidance of a master, the profound relief and release from the stresses and confusion of everyday conditional existence can, at more "advanced" stages, lead to a counter-productive attachment or clinging to the peaceful practice of mindfulness (*shamatha*) that results in a kind of "comfort zone." This "zone" is not difficult to understand. Volumes of research have proven the benefits of meditation in increased health, well being and fuller functioning in the lifeworld of the meditator. As one learns the tranquility or equanimity that "tames the wild horse of the mind," or even before, one naturally moves through, and relaxes and releases psycho-emotional obstructions and obscurations to clear seeing presented by one's conscious and unconscious egoic attachments and defenses. This leads to ever subtler and more profound emotional-spiritual growth as well as "personal power." Indeed, one begins to acquire certain "spiritual" capital and status. Thus the clinging or attachment to the egoic "spiritual" comfort zone. Chogyam Trungpa has called this subtle egoic trap "spiritual materialism". It is an "evolved" state of dualism (life stages 1 through 6, Appendix A) and may be a very seductive and destructive prison. Its cause is pride. Egoic pride is the most subtle, most insidious of the obscurations to realization that arise on the path.

It is the inherent responsibility of such an individual and his/her teacher and/or master to move through or beyond, or to transcend this plateau so that growth may continue. The process, by its nature, evolves or ascends to ever subtler or "higher," or more interior levels (mansions or dimensions). All of this is well and good. Yet, if the aspirant/student, or the teacher, misses the point that "higher" spiritual growth (not necessarily conventional, psychological emotional growth) is retarded by any "gaining idea" or egoic motive—even a great or noble motive—great developmental harm may result. One of the perennial truths regarding spiritual growth is *wu-wei*, surrender of the seeking motive, effortless, non-goal directed action that is non-action. "Be here now." Spiritual striving and seeking betray the destination. The goal is the path, today, now. "Make the goal the path." Thus seeking and clinging attachment to the positive results of meditation, deep prayer or zazen paradoxically retards growth. The pride that is the "spiritualized" ego is one of the most subtle and dangerous non-entities on the path of growth to wholeness and liberation-enlightenment. The ego desires its goal of liberation from the suffering of ego. "Desire is the creator and destroyer of worlds." The great paradox of "spiritual" growth is that it requires an intense desire - motivation to proceed. Yet this very desire yields the egoic intention, the "gaining idea" which inhibits further growth. Due to the subtlety of the ego's defenses, the student needs a qualified master. The ego—spiritual pride—is always a false guru. In Buddhism it is told that egoic pride—spiritual or otherwise—is the cause of the suffering of cyclic existence.