

Q&A on Arrogance

Q: My question is about arrogance. I've always seen arrogance in myself, and I've seen it a lot lately. I realize it's a form of judgment. If I decide someone is better than me, my self-esteem plummets, and I judge myself harshly. If I see them as less than me, I judge them harshly and feel arrogant. What is the antidote for constantly judging others and myself?

Mark: Arrogance is a psychological defense mechanism, a way of defining and displacing reality. Arrogance serves the I-reflex and, in the hands of the buddhi, becomes the list-making capacity, which chants, "I am this powerful; you are less powerful. I am beautiful; you are less beautiful." You cut yourself off from reality by defining the situation in a way that glosses over its true nature. That way you don't have to deal with the reality of it.

Arrogance is a lack of listening, a lack of sensitivity to a situation. Arrogant people seek to define a situation by placing their template on it, trying to force the world to bend to their wishes. If they have the power, they can—at least for a time. But they only have so much power, and reality will eventually overcome them. Thus the old saying, "Pride goeth before a fall." The person feeling pride is essentially arrogant, and it's only a matter of time before he or she comes to disaster at one level or another.

The immediate antidote to arrogance and one of the great tools of dharma is humility. The essence of humility is emptiness, the complete lack of presupposition in any situation. The whole idea of humility is the great Tai Chi, the true light. In humility you listen to the great light, producing no presupposition and acting without an agenda. At all times, align with the infinite light of creation to the depths that you can, serving it as an act of humility. In that way the lowly drop truly gains the power of the ocean.

One of the fruits of spiritual life is discrimination, a refinement of consciousness and the instruments of awareness. When discrimination occurs, you start seeing the varying fields and qualities of energy within your own egg, your own field of attention. You'll find that there is "X" amount of being vibrating from the innermost Self. You'll also discover that the separate identity of the psychic apparatus is usurping that quality to varying degrees. It is trying to take the energy of the infinite Self and cause it to produce a reality, a dream. If you are doing this in a coarse fashion, then you are involved with the dynamics of arrogance. Arrogance flows from a lack of generosity, compassion, and love, and initially flows towards oneself. Judgment lands most harshly on you. We think: "I should be more beautiful. I should be wealthier. I should be this; I should be that." We forget to value what we are.

The problem with false agendas is that they cut both ways. You can make this agenda work for you for a little while. But because it's neurotic, it eventually blows up in your face and starts working on you in negative ways. If you sit in alignment with the true light, the Tai Chi, then you can allow a situation to be what it is. You begin to align with those subtle vibrations, that subtle light that flows from the deepest Self up through the layers of the body. In the false identity you start to see the balls of darkness that are produced from a lack of generosity, a lack of compassion, and a lack of love--all modes of arrogance. So you begin to apply the opposites of these qualities. You apply generosity, compassion and love. You act from that subtler and more profound place connected to the infinite light. You will feel the uprooting of the coarser energies.

As the light becomes subtler, you uproot the weeds, the negative qualities in the garden of your own consciousness. These negative qualities stop sapping your life force and moving it negatively or what I would call "neurotically." I define neurosis as "misdirected mental energy." That's often exactly what neurosis feels like. Misdirected mental energy enters your being, producing a kind of weight inside your egg. Once present, it's like a weed. You can pull it out but if you don't destroy the roots, it will reproduce itself. Similarly, you have to attack arrogance at its root. You annihilate arrogance completely by applying its opposites--love, compassion, and generosity--as well as calling on emptiness and an attitude of humility,

You'll find that almost all judgments are based on false standards. The law of dharma, that which defines right from wrong, is deep, direct and simple. You can feel what's right and wrong. For example, the class system here in the West and the caste system in the East are forms of oppression. One of the first gifts of liberation that spiritual life grants is freedom from this oppression. You simply stop bowing to a false god within yourself or within others.

When you walk into a room, read the situation. You should be able to tell what everyone is going through within thirty seconds. People are often afraid to learn what's really going on around them, so they see the whole situation as being about themselves. Then they defend this position by entering the arrogant state of mind that's always promoting whatever is on the agenda that day or week.

In truth, does a false impression supported by arrogance change anything? No. It causes you to live in an illusion. Look at all of the energy it takes to produce that false effect. Just imagine all of the energy you'd save by simply dropping the entire load.

Q: I'd like to piggyback on the previous question. What about feelings of shame and humiliation? Not humility but humiliation.

Mark: They are the servants of arrogance. The person who asked about arrogance said she would judge somebody, and if she judged a person above her, then all that energy would turn on her and she would judge herself harshly. If she judged herself above them, she would judge them harshly and feel arrogant. It's the same thing. Both acts are the fruit of neurotic activity. If you're doing something wrong, if you're arrogant, you will override the message of your own heart and your own mind. You'll continue to do it because something in your psychic apparatus is saying, "I've really invested in this as my identity and if I don't do it, I'm not who I think I am." You'll just overpower all these signals rising up inside saying, "This is foolish; this is empty; this has no reality." You'll arrogantly press forward, and you'll feel the pain of it because your mental energy is being misdirected.

If we are arrogant, we don't listen within to hear the truth of a situation. We pick a line of activity and hold to it, come hell or high water. Then as the messages that say, "This is wrong; you're making a mistake," build up, they're arrogantly overridden. Another pool of energy starts to build up; a negative atmosphere is created. If you ignore the messages long enough, that negative atmosphere becomes a toxin inside your system. It goes anywhere there's a weakness in the physical body or the subtle physical body. Now we're getting into the some of the shamanistic aspects of how illness or accidents occur.

Painful psychological states are usually the build-up of misdirected energy. Over the course of the extremely open years of pre-birth to childhood, you're around complex, adult energies. Your system is wide open and people who are going through all kinds of pain imprint you. That kind of imprint produces a subtle pattern that you promulgate unconsciously, and you'll have all kinds of unexamined agendas that are guiding your choices in life. It's not like any one thing is the reason why you feel guilt or other negative emotions. If you have an overabundance of negative energy, a positive event could occur, and that negative energy will attach itself to the positive event and give it a negative cast. You'll miss something that could have been very positive in your life because you turned it away based on a lack of clarity.

Folk wisdom says that to do well in life you have to think positively. A person who expects good things to happen is in a state of mind to see good things when they happen and take advantage of them. The exact same person seeing the exact same opportunities from a negative state of mind will see good fortune as bad fortune and not take advantage of it.

Thus their agenda will be continued and their negative outlook on life will be guaranteed.

The application of the Rising Sun is an essential part of spiritual life. It's so important to maintain the outlook of the Great Eastern Sun, which is a rising light, an ever-increasing light. The sages have affirmed this powerful, well-selected strategy as better for life in general and spiritual life in particular because spiritual life is difficult. For the first half of your spiritual life you are faced with all your shortcomings plus everything you don't know how to do. You can't even define what you don't know. If you have a negative worldview, you're not going to get very far. But if you know that you are as smart as anybody else is, that you can learn anything, if you apply yourself, you will.

The whole idea of spiritual life is humility, and the essence of humility is listening. The essence of listening is the complete lack of presupposition. You have no expectations about a situation. When you see a person wearing three thousand dollars worth of clothes, you make no judgment about that; you see a homeless person pushing a cart down the street; you make no judgment about that. You just see each thing for what it is and you let the message go through you. In this world nothing is as it seems--nothing, not a single thing. Chances are you could stand next to God in the Ralph's checkout line and not know it if you couldn't see inside.