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a zesty life-affirming approach to meditation

WELCOME | DANGERS OF MEDITATION | TWO PATHS |

## A Tale of Two Paths: The Renunciate and the Householder

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In the ancient teachings of India, two distinct paths were set forth: the path of the renunciate, and the path of the householder. There are many variations and sub-paths on each of these two great paths, but essentially, renunciates take vows to irrevocably cut themselves off from the world, and householders live in the world and evolve through working with it. In the ancient cultures of Asia, everyone understands what the paths are about. To the inhabitants of North America, the boundaries are not as clear. It is not obvious to students of meditation, upon encountering renunciate ideals in a basic meditation text, "Oh, that is for monks. It's not for me."

There are many kinds of renunciates - meaning monks, nuns, hermits, and recluses. The monks may be called swamis, lamas, rishis, or gurus. Whatever their name, these renunciates have for thousands of years kept alive the wisdom of meditation, and almost all the teachings on meditation in existence owe a debt of gratitude to them. Also, however, everything we know about meditation is lightly or strongly tainted with attitudes of renunciation that are only appropriate for those who wear robes and live in religious orders. Almost all books on meditation available today are written by people who were inspired in one way or the other by the great monastic traditions of India and other Asian countries. Almost all teachers of meditation are either monks or nuns, were trained by monks or nuns, or were trained by students of monks or nuns. So attitudes of renunciation have come to be synonymous with meditation.

When householders practice meditations designed for renunciates, they inadvertently damage the psychic and energetic structures they need to make their way in the material world. Meditation works, and it works on you on a deep level. If you go into meditation with the idea that you have to detach from the world, you may get more than you bargained for - you may find yourself gradually getting dissociated, removed, alienated, and depersonalized. It is always easier to destroy than to create, and detachment means to cut off or separate. It can take years to rebuild connections that you have severed through mistakenly practicing detachment.

In a nutshell, monks and nuns evolve by living a life of detachment, disconnection, and aloofness. They may be very attached to their robes and their spiritual order, but their practice is about renouncing their desire for "worldly things." For them, spirituality is irrevocably tied up with denial.

Non-monks, on the other hand, evolve through working with the material world. Detachment is not the primary attitude to cultivate. Rather, the opposite of detachment is indicated: being involved, close, committed, and intimate. For some odd reason, this distinction is not being honored, and the wrong techniques are being taught on a wide scale.

TIME magazine did a cover story on meditation in August 2004, and they estimated that over ten million people in the United States practice meditation. There are millions more in Canada, Europe, Central America, and South America. And many of us, myself included, have been strongly influenced by the monks from Asia and have wound up doing techniques that harm us. Since I have devoted my entire adult life, since I was 18 in 1968, to promoting the practice of meditation in the United States, I thought I would mention briefly some of the negative side effects that people have been encountering due to the confusion between renunciate and householder.

As you read the following, keep in mind that I myself have never had a bad experience with a monk or a nun, in my occasional encounters with them the last 35 years. I love them and honor them for what they are doing. Every day, I give thanks to the monks in my meditation [tradition](#) for passing on the teachings. When I speak of these things, I am very much like a doctor talking about the negative side effects of certain medications, and the unexpected complications that can arise from mixing various medications. So I am sorry, but as much as you may not want to hear it, some meditation techniques are like drinking a glass of pure water, or closing your eyes and listening to beautiful music, and other techniques are like taking a low dose of chemotherapy or antibiotics. You can learn to be aware of which is which. If you want to benefit from meditation and not be harmed by it, learn the distinction.

- God
- Camille
- Meditation FAQ
- Writing
- Surfing
- Journeying
- Word of the Day

## Enjoy Yourself

Keep it simple. You don't need to know very much in order to begin meditating. Just come on in.

Keep it *personal*. Do it *your* way. You can't imitate someone else's meditation. You know what you love.

Be brief. A few minutes of meditation is powerful. Do that then call it a day.

Dive in. Ask for help when you need it.

Stay in touch. Use this form to receive a more or less monthly meditation newsletter, with tips, news about *The Radiance Sutras*, workshop announcements.

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There are fun things over at [meditation24-7.com](http://meditation24-7.com)

*Instinctive Meditation*  
[instinctivemeditation.com](http://instinctivemeditation.com)  
is a mirror site, mostly identical to this.

## The Radiation of the Vows

Monks and nuns, by definition, live in the context of religious orders and have taken vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience. These vows are the essential act of renunciation. When renunciates meditate, they meditate within the context of their vows. They need to meditate in a way that tunes them to be obedient to their superiors, and to kill off any rebellious or independent thinking.

Renunciates give their lives to their religious orders, profound spiritual traditions that have continued with great stability for hundreds and often thousands of years. The tradition has their total devotion. As part of that tradition, they have to kill off any creative impulses they have to improve the tradition. A nun is not supposed to get up in the morning and say hey, we need new, more fashionable robes. A monk is not supposed to pray for a new sports utility vehicle with onboard DVD player, global positioning system, and tinted windows. Extraneous desires must be snuffed out. They have sworn to be celibate, so they have to kill off any sexual desires they have. And they have taken an oath of poverty, so they have to kill off the natural impulse to accumulate stuff. When done properly, all these impulses are deconstructed, taken apart, and their energy is recycled and dedicated to the spiritual life.

This process of deconstructing one's impulses is a bit like what goes on in a nuclear reactor, where the atoms are torn apart, liberating great energy. Inside the reactor of a monk or nun's energy centers or chakras, the basic energies of life are broken apart, and they become radioactive and glow. The vows, the life of meditation and prayer, and the lineage, all function as a containment field for the radiation, holding it in place so it can serve a useful function. In some people, the process is self-perpetuating, because the radioactivity released by taking apart the desire for food, for example, then sprays out and helps kill off the desire for sex and power, and even individuality.

One of the impulses behind meditation is the desire to turn one's body into light, and then disappear, to merge with the Great Void. So, in spite of the rigors of the vows, the renunciate life has incredible allure. They get to be nuclear engineers, supervising the process of turning their individual existence into emptiness.

And to protect this process, recluses are insulated from so much of the difficulty and uncertainty of life. They live in some ways as people did a thousand years ago in the feudal systems of Asia. And the feudal system, with its intricate rituals of submission, humiliation, and domination, has a magical attraction. Think of Star Wars - it takes place in a feudal universe, with Knights and Slaves and Masters and Merchants and Princesses. Even Darth Vader bowed down and humbled himself before his Master, the Emperor. Lord of the Rings is a feudal world. The Dalai Lama is an emissary of the feudal world of Tibet. He is a reincarnating god-king, who comes again and again to rule. And he couldn't be more charming. He is releasing tremendous energies across America and advocating the practice of meditation.

So monks and nuns, when their inner practices work, are glowing with The Force, emitting radiation that in the right doses can illumine and purify. If overdosed, it can lead to radiation sickness.

## Reasons for Taking the Vows

We householders do not know a lot about why a certain person may wish to take religious vows and renounce sex, money, and independent will. Personally, I do not begrudge anyone this decision - it is an important sacrifice that some people make, that has benefitted humanity immeasurably over the millennia.

This is certainly a grave decision, like having a sex-change operation. Ordinarily we wouldn't want to comment or speculate about why a given monk would take vows. Let that be his secret. However, these monks basically set the tone for the teaching of meditation the world over. What they think of when they sit in their rooms staring at the wall becomes sacred text. So when these monks, who consider themselves enlightened, go on and on at great length about how degraded we all are, we have to stop and inquire, just who is this that's talking? If something gets into the record, into the tradition of meditation literature, does that mean that it is holy? What if the writer is a really sick person, who was so tortured that he took vows to never have sex again, because his desires were so degraded and abnormal? What if a given saint is gifted in some ways and also, a deeply disturbed human being?

Not everyone who shuts himself away all day, year after year, cutting off all the parts of himself that do not seem monk-like, and leaving only the parts that hate life, gets enlightened. We householders need to understand that some of the people whose writings make up the "tradition" are perhaps partly brilliant, partly demented, from the extremes of denial they have subjected themselves to. What Nagarjuna, in the example below, is a master of is deconstructing the self - showing how there is no

"there" there in the self. You are made up of parts that have no real existence. In other words, Nagarjuna has convinced generations of monks that they don't exist anyway.

## The Precious Garland of Nagarjuna

When renunciates find themselves teaching householders about meditation, odd juxtapositions sometimes occur. When the Dalai Lama was touring the United States in 1997, a book, The Precious Garland was handed out at some of the lectures. A Note To the Reader at the front of the book states, "This book was produced for the special occasion of His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama's teaching in Los Angeles in June, 1997 . . . The book consists primarily of a new translation of the Precious Garland of Nagarjuna, which was undertaken by the translators especially for this auspicious occasion. It is this text which will form the basis of His Holiness's teachings each day on June 5th, 6th, and 7th."

On June 5, 6, and 7, the Dalai Lama gave a commentary on The Precious Garland, and on June 8 he gave an "Empowerment for the Meditational Practice of Sakyamuni Buddha."

The Translator's Preface to the book states, "Nagarjuna was an Indian Buddhist philosopher, probably of the second century (C.E.) who was renowned for his astute articulation of the Centrist, or Madhyamaka, philosophical view. His presentation of this view, which consists of a thorough-going critique of all forms of essentialism, became a touchstone for the entire Centrist tradition in India and Tibet. His importance for the development not only of the Centrist tradition but of Mahayana Buddhism in general can scarcely be exaggerated. His existence traditionally is said to have been predicted by the Buddha Sakyamuni in the 5th century B.C.E., and he has not infrequently been hailed as a 'second Buddha' himself." The context of The Precious Garland is that it was "An Epistle to a King," in which Nagarjuna is setting forth advice on how to rule in accord with the Dharma.

The following quotation from The Precious Garland starts from the top of page 32 and goes to near the bottom of page 33:

"Gambling causes attachment, dislike, and anger,  
deception, trickery and an occasion for wildness,  
lying, pointless chatter, and harsh speech.  
Therefore, always refrain from gambling.  
Most attachment to women comes from  
the belief that women's bodies are pure.  
But in actuality there is no purity  
in a woman's body at all.

Her mouth is a vessel of impurity,  
with putrid saliva and gunk between her teeth;  
Her nose is a pot of snot, phlegm and mucous,  
and her eyes contain eye-slime and tears.

Her torso is a container of excrement,  
holding urine, the lungs, liver and such.  
The confused do not see that a woman is such;  
thus, they lust after her body.

Like unknowing persons, who have become attached  
to an ornamented vessel filled with filth,  
Unknowing and worldly beings  
are attached to women.  
If the world is greatly attached  
to the noxious objects that are bodies,  
which should cause non-attachment,  
how then can it be led to non-attachment?

Just as filth-loving pigs are greatly attached  
to heaps of feces and urine,  
so too the filth-loving pigs that are desirous people  
are greatly attached to heaps of feces and urine.  
Foolish persons imagine  
that this city (of bugs) that is the body,  
with cavities that are sources of filth,  
is something conducive to pleasure.

When you yourself see the impurities  
of excrement, urine, and such,  
how can the body, being composed of them,  
be something pleasant for you?

It is produced by a seed of impure essence,  
an admixture of ovum and semen.  
How can the lustful be attached to it  
when they know its nature to be impure?

One who lies with this filthy mass,  
covered with skin moistened by these fluids,  
is doing nothing more than lying  
on top of a woman's bladder.  
Whether it be beautiful or ugly,  
whether it be young or old,  
the body of any woman is filthy,  
so to what special quality could you be attached?

It is not right to yearn for a pile of excrement, even if it has a nice color  
or is very fresh or nicely shaped;  
likewise, one should not yearn for a woman's body."

- The Precious Garland, translated by John Dunne and Sara McClintock, Wisdom Publications, Boston, Massachusetts, 1997. P 32-33. Cited with the permission of the translators.

The text continues in a similar vein for several more pages. The English translation of the text runs from page 9 to page 88. So out of about 80 pages of teachings, 4 are devoted to a description of how disgusting women are. That's about 5 percent of the text. If you didn't know that this is a sacred text, you might think that it is just hate speech. Perhaps a transcription of a psychiatrist's interview with a man who has a terrible eating disorder. Or maybe the script from a Beavis and Butt-head cartoon.

For the translators, part of what is thrilling is that they worked with an incomplete Sanskrit text, and compared it to a complete Tibetan text, and found a great deal of agreement. The Precious Garland is one of the many Sanskrit texts that was carried on foot or on the backs of pack animals up the mountain trails from India to Tibet more than a thousand years ago, for safe keeping. Some Buddhist scholars sensed that a dark time was coming for Buddhism in India, and they emigrated to Tibet, and set it up as a refuge for the Dharma.

One of these scholars was Padmasambhava, who around 750 A.D. traveled from India or perhaps what is now Afghanistan to Tibet and set up the first monastery there, Samye, which still stands. The scholars were right - Buddhism basically died out in India by around 1200 A.D., having lasted about 1700 years. But the Dharma carried on in Tibet, Nepal, China, Korea, Japan, Siam, Burma, and Mongolia, being carried there by many fabulous Buddhist personalities. The exploits of these Buddhist missionaries, the wild extremes they manifested in their lives, the tales of their magical powers and battles with sorcerers, are vastly entertaining and read like Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone. To put things in proper order, we could say that the Harry Potter series reads as if it is based on the life of Milapa and other Buddhist saints. Part of the stunning allure of Buddhism for modern Americans is that when they meditate, they are entering the mind field of all these rich, epic story lines.

The translators are rightfully proud of the whole tradition for keeping this teaching alive. The existence of a complete version of this text, and many thousands of other teachings, is the result of centuries of devoted preservation by monks. This is part of what they do when they maintain a tradition. There are tens of thousands of pages of such texts, some of them detailing what the meditators thought, felt, what techniques they practiced, and the results.

The Precious Garland is not at all unique in conveying disgust for bodies and in particular, disgust for women's bodies. What is remarkable and valuable is how boldly the body hatred is stated. About five percent of the text goes on in a similar manner, but the imagery is indelible. To a lesser extent, these same ideas permeate meditation teachings originating in Asia. How to Meditate: A Practical Guide, by Kathleen McDonald, (Wisdom Publications, Boston, 1984) recommends similar visualizations, as does The Meditation Handbook, by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso (Tharpa Publications, London, 1995).

It is remarkable, to a non-recluse, how reverently presented are these techniques of cultivating disgust for the body and detachment from desire. The last page of How to Meditate has a paragraph entitled, Care of Dharma Books: "Dharma books contain the teachings of the Buddha; they have the power to protect against lower rebirth and to point the way to liberation. Therefore, they should be treated with

respect - kept off the floor and places where people sit or walk - and not stepped over. They should be covered or protected for transporting and kept in a high, clean place separate from more 'mundane' materials. Other objects should not be placed on top of Dharma books and materials. Licking the fingers to turn pages is considered bad form (and negative karma)." You can see in this paragraph the immense honor, loyalty, devotion, and reverence the Dharma keepers have brought to the task of preserving the ancient texts over the centuries and millennia. They do not edit out, pick and choose, and "water down" the teaching for popular consumption: they want to preserve it as much as they can in its entirety and purity.

This way of thinking that Nagarjuna describes may be fairly common among the type of people who want to become renunciates. Since the early 70's, I have heard young men who are thinking of joining monasteries talk in a way reminiscent of The Precious. If you listen to them long enough, they will chat about a whole field of related, emotionally-charged ideas: the problem of picking the right master and monastery to surrender to, masturbation, fear of sex, feeling defiled by sex, fear of attachments, obsession with eating only "pure" foods, fasting, colonics, and a concern about finding the right rules to follow to be saved. There are certain people who just have very mixed feelings about being in a human body, and they want to get out as soon as they can. And teachings such as those presented by Nagarjuna spell out the process of systematically disconnecting yourself from all the "attachments" that connect you to other people, to your body, to your instincts, to your desires, to your identity, and even to the will to live. What needs to be investigated is the extent to which this way of thinking, this practice of detachment, is just the natural mode for certain people. Whether they make a special technique out of it or not, this is just their approach to life. When they practice it in a systematic manner, it can be redemptive. But clearly, it has a dangerous, self-destructive side as well.

A woman psychotherapist who attended the Dalai Lama's talk opened The Precious Garland and exclaimed, "Why, this is exactly how bulimic women think of their bodies, that is why they are always bingeing and purging." Perhaps in the future, psychoanalysts will take a look at the origins of this attitude, how it arises in a person.

Someone in the audience asked about the anti-female teachings in the book. The Dalai Lama laughed and said, "That's because it is for monks." There, in sentence of six words, the Dalai Lama summed up the whole gist of what I am discussing in this little essay.

So universal is the love for the Dalai Lama that there was no public discussion of how bizarre some of the ideas in The Precious Garland are. Thousands of people were in the auditorium, including many famous actors and actresses, some of whom have been declared to be tulkus, reincarnated Tibetan lamas. Newspapers and television stations covered the talk, and everyone was given a copy of the book, but there was no mention of the fact that the teaching was partly about how women's bodies are vessels of yucky fluids.

## The Path of Detachment

The recluse path that nuns and monks take is as magical in its way as that of Knights, Princes and Elves. So what if it necessitates maintaining some anti-life or antibiotic attitudes. It is as if recluses continually take antibiotics to cure them of the disease of having desires and individuality. This is the sacrifice, a sublimated blood sacrifice. Any desire other than the desire to bow down and obey has to be suppressed. The only good nun is a docile, compliant nun. All this murder of impulses is healthy for recluses, part of their way of being. They call it detachment, and it is a primary attitude of the recluse. Detachment is necessary and healthy for recluses. When it works, we get these radiant, loving, fearless people who are great servants of humanity. By giving up their personal life, they become universal.

I hope that in the future there are more of these radiant monks and nuns living in the Americas - North, Central and South America. They bless us all. And if a monk or nun type of person came to me, I would teach them recluse techniques involving detachment, because that is part of their path. Renunciates may make up less than one percent of the population in the West, but they are an important minority.

## The Path of Attachment and Involvement

People who have families, jobs, pay rent or mortgages, and live in the real world, have very different needs in meditation. Recluses call us householders. Householders do not need to constantly kill off their natural impulses. As a matter of fact, the last thing they need is to weaken their desires, instincts and intuition. The path of the householder involves working with attachment. It is very daring to be attached. Tolerating the experience of attachment takes courage. Personal bonds are attachments.

Loving someone is an attachment. Householders, when they meditate, should savor every sexual impulse, cherish every desire, honor and listen to all their instincts, and cultivate their general enthusiasm for life.

## When The Paths Become Confused

When householders practice meditation in the style of a recluse, and practice detaching from their desires, they often find that over time their instincts become weaker, their intuition becomes flawed, they become confused about their desires, and they start looking for an external authority to dominate them and tell them what to do. This is what happens when you practice detachment. When you internalize toxic attitudes (such as advocated in *The Precious Garland*) toward your desires, attachments and your identity, you will indeed find over time that your individuality is weakened and you start longing for some dominant male to tell you what to do. You will long for shelter in a religious organization, spiritual collective, or cult. As you separate yourself from your personal desires, you become magnetically attracted to people who have strong, dynamic egos. In other words, the center of life is moved from being inside your body to being out there, somewhere. This process of depersonalization usually takes several years, and people are generally surprised at how deep it goes. It is not unusual for it to take ten or fifteen years to recover from several years practicing meditation in a mood of renunciation.

It is not the meditation per se that is harming you, it is the attitude of detachment that you are practicing. In other words, taking on reclusive attitudes is like taking the treatment for a disease you don't have. If you are healthy and strong, but your doctor thinks that your strength is a sign of a rebellious spirit that needs to be broken, and gives you chemotherapy and radiation, you will get sick. When householders become weak from meditating, monks and nuns think this is great, that you are stepping onto the spiritual path. But it is one thing for a monk or nun to have no money, be celibate and obedient. When a householder is influenced by monastic thinking, she just becomes broke, lonely and submissive. This is not evolution, this is just damage, unless it really is your destiny to leave everything and everyone and go join a religious order.

A lot more research needs to be done in this area. For example, some people can breeze through years of Nagarjuna-type teachings and then just slough it off when they are done. It was no weirder than their family of origin, and maybe it helped them to expunge something. Others are deeply affected in a negative way by the practice of detachment. They sincerely detach from their friends, family, desires, ambitions, money, and all other trappings of "ego" and devote themselves to the guru or lineage. When, after five or ten years they leave, they are in grief for multiple losses. It is as if they have been eviscerated by their contact with meditation teachings, or as if they have been preyed upon by a vampire for all those years.

What happens to people in ashrams and spiritual groups often recapitulates the best and worst aspects of early childhood. The best aspects include the fantasy of being around an all-knowing, all-loving, all-wise father figure/guru. The worst aspects are scapegoating and sexual abuse. In many spiritual groups, anyone who dares to criticize the teachings or the teacher in any way is demonized and cast out. It is a big part of how groups maintain their cohesion, and a big lesson to those who stay: keep in line, keep subservient, or you will be next - you will be thrown out and none of us will ever speak to you again. It is not unusual for meditation groups to have a belief among members, encouraged by cryptic utterances from the head teacher, that if you criticize the teacher, you will curse yourself and automatically sentence yourself to a horrible death. You will also have a horrible life in your next life, and only after several hundred lifetimes of wandering lost will you have a chance to meet the guru again and make amends.

It is truly strange that meditation schools tend to turn out this way. You would think that meditation schools would be like the best colleges ever in history, an atmosphere of great freedom and inquiry. You would think that they would celebrate people who graduate and go out into the world. They would pray for your success. Go forth and shine the light wherever you go. Come back whenever you want. We are honored to have known you. But the opposite is often the case.

Over the past 36 years, I have met innumerable meditators who have been drained and devitalized by the anti-life attitudes they have internalized and practiced. Since 1975, when I started teaching meditation independently, a part of my private practice has been made up of meditators and ex-meditators who feel they were harmed by doing the wrong techniques. They discover this years later, when they want to get on with their lives, having left a teacher or meditation school or ashram. It comes as an unpleasant surprise to discover that all those attitudes of renunciation, denying desire, redirecting all devotion to the guru, blocking out natural impulses, has rewired their brains in such a way that makes it very difficult to adapt to everyday life. There are people all across the United States who

were involved with meditation in the past, and now find that their training is interfering with their ability to bond with a mate, stay in love, find their life's work, make money, and express their individuality.

If you want to explore this further, type words such as renounce desire meditation or detachment desire ego chastity into a search engine and look at the language on the sites you are led to. Again and again you will see a set of ideas presented as received wisdom that the path of meditation means the path of renunciation.

What is so odd here is that both the teachers and the students are totally sincere. It is as if there is a doctor, who wants to help people, but lacks the knowledge of which medication to give which ailment. He has just one meditation he gives everyone, because it was the one that worked for him. The patients come, and they want to get better, and so they take the medication. And when they have negative side effects, the doctor just says, that is just purification.

The problem we have in the West, currently, as of 2004, is that almost all meditation teachers active in the field have been trained by recluses or have been deeply influenced by them. The language everyone uses is polluted by recluse terminology. For example, over the last 20 years, the word detachment has become closely identified with meditation and spirituality, and attachment is talked about as a negative thing. The distinction is not being made between the two paths, of the recluse and the householder. Monks and nuns make up less than one percent of the population in North America, and I do not know about Great Britain and Europe, but at most it would be several percent. And yet these recluses are setting the tone for the way the other 95 percent should meditate.

This is not anyone's fault. A huge historical switcheroo has just happened. In the last 40 years, all of a sudden, Westerners who are not recluses have taken up the practice of meditation by the tens of millions. There is no record of this happening ever, anywhere in history. Historically, for the past several thousand years, most of the people who practiced meditation were renunciates. They wrote all the books on meditation and the books were aimed at other renunciates. They are the ones who have kept the wisdom traditions alive, they are the ones who preserved the ancient meditation texts and teachings. It is probably safe to say that of all the books on meditation written in the past 2000 years, almost all are by monks, and a couple of nuns. What has happened in the last 40 years is that suddenly, 99 percent of the people meditating in the Americas are householders. Who would have thought?

And the spiritual traditions are just that - traditional. They are what they are because they do not adapt quickly. Virtually all meditative texts advocate killing desire, killing the ego, killing individuality, and submitting to the Master. In other words, spirituality means you become servile and compliant, a slave. Then after umpteen years, if you are lucky, you get to become a Master and have many slaves doting on you. That's the feudal system, folks.

There is not much attention being paid to the damage that recluse techniques are producing in the lives of householders. For a monk, taking a mental knife and hacking away at his attachments and desires is a discipline, and it is adaptive because a monk is just supposed to live according to the rules of the order. It is OK for a monk to weaken his ego and become more and more dependent upon external authorities, because that is what religious orders are about - perfect obedience. When a householder practices meditation in the style of a recluse, and weakens the instincts and desires, then they just become lost. This usually takes years to manifest, and it takes more years to get over.

Out of the ten million or so people in the United States who are practicing meditation, an unknown percentage of them are internalizing negative attitudes and damaging their ego structure and instincts. Some of these people become prey for dominating, authoritarian personalities who pretend to be enlightened and demand to be worshipped. We don't really know what the relevant typologies are with regard to how a given individual in the Western world responds to any single meditation technique or combination of the thousands of techniques that Buddhism has evolved. It is a bit like a massive, random drug trial, where millions of people are taking medications with unknown side effects, having been told, "This will be good for you." Out of the millions of Americans being exposed to teachings on meditation, some are taking vows and becoming monks and nuns, and this is probably a great thing.

Do not think for a moment that you can be around recluse thinking without the ideas getting into your system. You can't flirt with them safely. You may think you are not vulnerable to renunciate thinking and to their toxic attitudes toward desires and sexuality, but if you ever have a weak moment in which you doubt yourself, the renunciate ideas can enter in like viruses entering your body through a wound. And when viruses enter your body, they take over your immune system and use your body to multiply themselves. If you never meditate, then you may keep a boundary against renunciate thinking, but if you meditate and carry these anti-life attitudes in with you, then you may find later that you have internalized them on a very deep level.

For a householder, practicing detachment is indistinguishable from practicing depression. The symptoms



defining depression include: loss of interest in most or all activities, significant change in weight or appetite, sleep disturbance, slowed behavior, loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness, and suicidal thoughts. Read the original teachings of Buddha, how he lived, and what he advocated. Read the teachings of Hindu gurus. Permeated throughout the whole field is an attitude that you really should detach, disconnect from everything you love. There is a whole set of attitudes that is being propagated as part and parcel of meditation and is really not - it's just stuff that Hindu or Buddhist monks do or think they should do. Vegetarianism, disgust for the body, bitterness toward the material world, sitting cross-legged, obeying gurus, the idea of surrender, reincarnation, the idea that all wisdom comes from India, the idea that in the past there was a Golden Age, the idea that every time you have sex you degrade your spiritual life in a hideous way, all these ideas actually have nothing at all to do with meditation. They are mixed in as part of the "transmission of wisdom" from East to West.

There is an old saying, any gift is a curse until you know what to do with it. So we have a mixed blessing in the wealth of spiritual information we have been importing from India, Tibet, Burma, Nepal, Cambodia, Japan, China, and other Asian countries that have rich recluse traditions. The teachers are so beautiful, their presence so loving, and their teachings so profound that we overlook that they do not realize who they are talking to. They do not really know the difference between a monk and a householder. They do not know what the path of the householder is, and they mistakenly poison householders with their toxic attitudes toward sensuality, ambition, desire, and individuality. I think it will take a hundred more years to adapt Hindu and Buddhist meditation teachings to the West, and to evolve meditation practices that are nontoxic to women, married couples, industrious business people, and artists.

You can be compassionate toward the monks, lamas, gurus, swamis, senseis, masters, and other assorted teachers who are talking about meditation. They did not think this stuff up - it is traditional. Historically, almost all meditation teachings have been designed by and for recluses. And no one is training monks how to teach householders. So they do not know what they are doing.

Until about 150 years ago, doctors did not know that they needed to wash their hands carefully when going from one patient to the next, otherwise they would spread diseases. Doctors in hospitals would go from examining cadavers to delivering babies, and never think twice about the fact that so many of the mothers died. They just never put it together. Ignaz Semmelweis, a doctor working in Vienna in the 1840's, did put it together and started washing his hands, and ordered his students to do the same. The death rate among birthing women dropped dramatically, but he was fired from the hospital and his theories were ridiculed. What he was saying went against tradition. It took about 50 years for hand-washing to become standard practice among physicians.

Monks and nuns are oriented toward preserving their traditions, and it is not in their job description to think up new and better ways of teaching. They are not aware of being disease carriers of bad attitudes toward life. So realize, they are just preserving their traditions. They are being true to their path.

## In the Time When the Iron Bird Flies

Padmasambhava, the eighth-century Indian guru who [helped](#) bring Buddhism to Tibet, is recorded as having said, "In the time when the iron bird flies, and chariots go without horses, the Tibetan people will be scattered like ants across the world, and the Dharma will come to the land of the red man." [Link](#).







I haven't read his teachings since the early 80's, but I don't recall Padmasambhava saying anywhere, "And oh, by the way, all you monks of the future, 99 percent of the people you will be teaching are going to be householders. You will have to invent a new way of teaching to deal with them. Don't poison them with your anti-life attitudes. Theirs is the way of love and sex and working and following their desires. Their dharma is different from yours. Respect that."

In the meantime, what you can do is run your own filters. You can be aware that there is actually a distinction between the householder path and the recluse path. Whenever you hear the words ego, desire, sex, materialism, attachment, oneness, and lineage, you can be aware that someone is trying to feed you antibiotics and maybe some radiation treatment. They are probably totally sincere in so doing. Realize that virtually all books on meditation were intended for someone very different than you, and it is your job to find those techniques that strengthen you in your life and on your path, and cultivate those. Do not take random teachings into your heart, any more than you would go to a pharmacy and take random medications for diseases you do not have. And there is not just one householder path. What you have to find is your path, and often we only do that by walking along following our hunches. We only discover the path by walking it and making mistakes and then making course corrections.

One thing to notice and watch out for is that your path will probably seem inferior to that of others. For example, householders need in general to just be natural and playful when they meditate. If you leave yourself alone and do not try to impose theories on yourself, you will tend to follow your instincts and be healthy in meditation. Householders, because they work and have jobs, need to not hassle themselves with rules and regulations while they are meditating. But this seems much less spiritual than to be cutting things off, denying, suppressing, and intellectualizing.

Keeping it simple, and having an easy, natural attitude, really does not seem very spiritual. It's not spiritually correct. So if you feel spiritually incorrect, explore the feeling. For example, spirituality in Asia is often expressed by bowing down. Type bowing down to the guru into a search engine and see what you get. But what if you do not want to bow down? What if you think that the guru is just a man? What if you do not believe that the guru is greater than God? What if your way of expressing your relationship with spirit is to stand tall with your feet on the ground?

One of the things that distinguishes Instinctive Meditation from other approaches is that we do not teach detachment techniques, which are intrinsically toxic, to people who are not renunciates, which is the other 99 percent of the population. We offer dozens, hundreds of different techniques along with suggestions on how to develop a meditation practice that strengthens your individuality. We love and honor the monks and nuns who are diligently practicing their disciplines and doing their best to spread the Dharma as they understand it. We just present the idea that there are many different types of people in the world, and nowadays, to everyone's astonishment, all different kinds of people want to meditate and are coming for instruction. Therefore it is an obligation of meditation teachers everywhere to use what the Buddha called "skillful means" and teach the kind of technique to each person that works the best for them.

The answer is, it depends on what kind of meditation you do and the interaction effects: how many minutes or hours a day you practice over a period of months and years, the way the technique impacts and interacts with your body type, personality and the nature of your daily activity. Some meditations are intended to help you adapt to your current life and bring forth your creativity and joy in living. Other meditations are intended to reshape you for the life of a devotee, acolyte, or slave. The idea is that you only want to serve the needs of a guru, lama and lineage. And in order to bring that about, parts of your individuality may have to be suppressed. So yes, if you undertake meditation as a way of killing off parts of yourself, you will gradually lose intelligence and adaptability. But, the theory goes, you don't need it anyway. These changes take years to occur and the negative effects tend to happen so slowly that you don't notice until it is too late.

Meditation is not one thing, like the color blue or a carrot. Meditation is a huge variety of phenomena, more like all colors, including ultra-violet radiation (the kind that makes your skin tan and burns you), and infra-red (heat) radiation. Meditation is like all foods and all kinds of cooking.

The word "meditation" refers to 84,000 different techniques, at least, according to the Buddhists. So you have to be discerning when you select a technique to practice and a teacher and group to practice with.

Almost all the meditation traditions have been run by and for monks, for several thousand years, and so their whole orientation when people come to learn to meditate is to turn them into imitation Hindu or Buddhist monks. Your highest destiny, from the point of view of many Hindu gurus, is to become their

slave and exist only to serve them. The best part is that you will do the psychic surgery on yourself, to make yourself a good slave. You will do this by internalizing monastic attitudes, and over a period of years, crippling yourself.

There are usually several clues that the meditation teaching is one that is out to weaken you:

A MASTER. Where there is a Master, there must be SLAVES. Ask yourself, "Do I want to be a slave?" If not, walk away.

The language of DETACHMENT. If people are talking about detachment, that means you are supposed to cut yourself off from your inner nature, so that you become disoriented and therefore crave to be dominated by an Alpha Male or maybe Female. Detachment means to cut off, to separate. What do you detach from? Your personal desires and intimate relationships. Why do you detach? So that you can become a slave to a Master, and serve His or Her desires. To serve is a wonderful thing. I know many beautiful people who exist only to serve their master, and this is a valid path. Only you can decide if this is your path. If it is not, then beware.

The language of CELIBACY. Monks and nuns badmouth sex, endlessly, and tend to have the most poisonous attitudes imaginable towards sexuality. You really do not want to know what they think of sex. So if a monk or nun ever says one word about sex, it's usually a sign of trouble. If they start emphasizing that others should be celibate, it means that they themselves have been oogling one of their followers, or are having sex with one of their disciples. Monks and nuns do have sex, they just feel guilty and disgusted by it, and they transfer this shame to whoever they are having sex with, and it is extremely toxic and damaging.

The language of EGO. The ego is your sense of "I," the sense of self. The function of the ego is to serve as the linkage, the connective tissue between the senses, the body, the different talents you have. The ego's task also is to be aware of your boundaries, what is "me" and "not-me." Whenever a "spiritual" teaching talks about the ego in a derogatory way, it means that there can be only ONE ego in the room - that of the guru, who has a HUGE ego, bigger than any rock star, bigger than a king in olden days. So Ego-language means, "Your ego should be crushed so that I can walk all over you." The function of ego denigration language is to enroll you in a Master/Slave relationship.

If you are a pure devotional type, and your path is to find a Master and serve him or her, bless you. May your love, service and devotion make the world a better place. If you are not a devotional type, if your destiny is to live as a free individual, ask questions, find your own individual path, live creatively, explore, then do not expect any meditation teacher to understand you. They are just not trained to recognize individuality or respond to it, except to try to undermine it. Do not expect meditation teachers to be like a doctor, who will try to figure out exactly what treatment, what medication, you need, if any. No, oddly enough, in spite of thousands of years of "tradition," meditation teachers are actually abysmal at knowing which technique to give to which person. So be very, very discerning before imposing any technique on yourself. Question everything. And when you have checked things out, and tested them in your own life, then go forward and enjoy meditation.

If you are doing the wrong kind of meditation for your individuality, you will be able to tell in several ways: it will feel like an imposition; you will have the sense that you are going against your own grain; there will be a sense of forcing; you will sense that the little bit of inner peace you are getting is at the expense of cutting yourself off from parts of yourself that you do not like; and you will find yourself becoming dependent on external authorities. What the guru says, or what some guru in the past said, will seem very important. More important than your own still small voice. There are actually a lot of signals saying, "You are on the wrong path." Learning to interpret these signals is an essential part of learning to meditate in a way that is healthy for you.

It seems counterintuitive that insightful people, such as monks seem to be, can be so clueless when teaching what they call "householders," or "laypeople." How could they not know the difference between the paths?