



Spiritual Materialism, by Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche

What first comes to mind to speak about is my own spiritual materialism. I find that as I'm reading or reflecting upon the teachings and something becomes clear to me, I immediately want to rush out and teach it to others. Why is this? The answer disturbs me, because although I believe there is a certain amount of good motivation, looking deeply, I discover that actually there is very little intention to help others. Instead, it's all about making an impression, and there is much of my own ego involved. I have become so proficient at disseminating knowledge, particularly the teachings of dharma, that I do it almost automatically. Unconsciously, though, I want to make a good impression on others. In one sense, because these are dharma teachings, the activity still bears fruit, but in another sense it is quite sad to realize that one is not truly taking the teachings to heart. This is where the impression must be made - on your own heart. If this is not the case, although you might be able to contemplate the dharma, achieve some insight and expound it to others, you will not experience any dramatic change in yourself. So naturally, you cannot instigate significant change in the minds of others, except perhaps in some intellectual capacity.

That, then, is the confession I would like to make. I aspire to be truly free from the entrapment of spiritual materialism. To rid myself of this tendency would bring such long sought freedom and peace. May I one day practice the dharma without trying to make an impression on others, and instead may I truly make the needed impression on my own heart. [...]

I can speak to you about my own knowledge of spiritual materialism, although others might explain it differently. According to my understanding, spiritual materialism is present when the spiritual path is tainted by selfish thoughts or selfish emotions, and we use spiritual practice to indulge our own ego -- to make ourselves look good or to achieve some sort of recognition. You see, because we live closely with others, our paths intermingle. We are so persistently concerned with how our companions will perceive us that we don't know how to be genuine and authentic -- to actually be truly ourselves. Such sensitivity to the opinions of others pervades our dharma activity as well. [...] For example, before we even learn the dharma ourselves, we want to enlighten others. Doubtless, there is a certain amount of good intention behind our actions, but again, this often has more to do with the fact that we want to impress others with our breadth of knowledge, our level of realization. In truth, our focus is on the self. The function of self to promote itself, so if we aren't careful, we can actually turn all of our dharma activity into self-promotion. [...]

