



## Recycling Karmic Trash, by Shinzen Young

It's very common for people on a meditative or spiritual path to develop a kind of sensitivity to the poison and pain of others. Sometimes it's formulated with the phrase "I pick up all this negativity." Sometimes it's formulated with the phrase "People drain my energy." A closely related perception runs something like this: "Now that I've developed some spiritual maturity, I find it difficult to relate to old friends/family/ordinary people; they so cluelessly cause themselves unneeded suffering; I no longer have much in common with them."

Regarding such sentiments, there are several things to keep in mind. First: They represent a temporary stage that the practitioner eventually grows out of. Second: When you do grow out of it, it's replaced by its exact opposite: the more clueless and messed up people are, the more you enjoy being around them. You can make the transition from that temporary stage to its opposite by realizing this:

"When we're around other people, we pick up on where they're at.

If they're in a bad place, we pick up on that. One might refer to that as exogenous discomfort. It's discomfort whose origin (genesis) is from the outside (exo), i.e., you're feeling uncomfortable because of what is going on in someone else. The term exogenous contrasts with the term endogenous. Endogenous discomfort is discomfort due to our own stuff. The main point to remember is that the discomfort, endogenous or exogenous, typically comes up as some combination of mental image, mental talk, and emotional body sensation. To the extent that one can experience that sensory arising completely, to that extent it does not cause suffering. It doesn't matter one bit whether the source of suffering is exogenous or endogenous or some combination of both. By experience it completely. I simply mean experience it mindfully, i.e., experience it in a state of concentration, sensory clarity, and equanimity."

When the discomfort is endogenous and you experience it very mindfully, it doesn't cause much suffering, it tastes like you're being purified. When the discomfort is exogenous and you experience it very mindfully, not only does it not cause suffering, but it tastes like you and the other person both are being purified. In other words, how your consciousness processes another's pain subtly teaches that person's consciousness to do the same. The

other person may not be aware thatâ€™s happening, but youâ€™re aware of it. Youâ€™re aware that you are nourishing that person, and that subtly nurtures you. Thatâ€™s why you eventually come to enjoy being around clueless messed up people. Paraphrasing the Blues Brothers, youâ€™re â€œon a secret mission from God.â€• You walk through life like a giant air filter picking up the psychospheric pollution and automatically processing it, extracting from it energy and then radiating that energy as positivity. You know your job and you love it: recycling the karmic trash.

Needless to say, it may take a while to work up to this, but everyone on a path should aspire to this perspective.

This situation contrasts in an interesting way with the goals of psychology. In certain therapeutic approaches, the goal is to get the client to the point where they can distinguish â€œwhatâ€™s meâ€• from â€œwhatâ€™s them.â€• In contemplative-based spirituality, the goal is to get to the point where you no longer care about that distinction!