



Psychological Materialism, by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche

Even if you are against the materialism of society and you do not want to support it, refusing to work is still grasping at the wrong end of the stick. Not taking part in work and practical activity is not going to achieve anything. More than anything else, it will simply magnify your own negativity. By not doing anything to help, you will merely feel the sense of being useless in society. If you really take this kind of nonparticipation to its logical conclusion, it means that you shouldn't eat, you shouldn't even breathe, because the air you breathe also belongs to the world and society. This approach could become quite extreme. If you take it all the way, it means you shouldn't exist at all.

There's a great deal of confusion about materialism and society. Just taking care of one's business or even running a business doesn't amount to materialism. There's nothing wrong with that at all. What really produces the materialistic outlook towards society is psychological materialism. Materialism has a pervasive kind of philosophy connected with it that is passed from one person to another orally and taught to everyone through examples. One person catches it from another. However, trying to reject that contagion by purely not doing anything, not caring for anything at all, simply doesn't work.

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Not doing anything takes the form of laziness, and in order to be lazy we have to develop a certain kind of intelligence. Laziness has tremendous intelligence in it, in fact. When you are lazy, as soon as you have the urge to do anything, immediately a kind of answer comes to you that you can present about why you don't have to do it. Later you can say: "I didn't do it because I didn't have time. Thus and such happened and I didn't have a chance to do it. It was because of that." This automatic answer that comes to you is very convenient. One has to be very intelligent to find these kinds of excuses. There is tremendous intelligence in laziness, but it is misused intelligence.

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The best way to use our intelligence is to learn to feel what the skillful action in a situation is. To do that, we have to relate to the earth as directly as possible. Interestingly, we call this being "grounded." In this approach, we do not regard work as just a job but as a way of expressing our ourselves. It could be work in the garden or work around the house—cooking food, washing the dishes—whatever. These are not really jobs, but they are what has to be done because nature demands attention. It is very interesting that if you leave something undone or do not relate to even a small matter like, for instance, cooking with full and proper attention and clear thinking, then some kind of chaos is going to come up. This will happen because you are not relating properly; you are not expressing

your love properly toward the earth. Either you are going to break a dish or you're going to spill something, or the food you're cooking is going to turn out badly, or something else will go wrong. Nature tends to react very sensitively this way. If you don't feel the relationship between the work and yourself, then chaos is going to arise.

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A balanced state of mind depends on the way you do things, the way you

pour a cup of tea and the way you put sugar and milk in it. It may seem like a really insignificant thing, but it means everything. You can always tell whether a person feels the activity she is engaged in as dealing with the earth or whether she feels it as just some casual thing or something she is doing because she has to. If the person is not relating to the earth, then you can always feel a certain clumsiness, even if the person's action appears to be smooth. This is very evident and easy to sense.

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--Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche