

Pride, Good & Bad

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The Thais have borrowed the word *mana* from Pali. In Pali it means conceit, particularly the conceit that *I am*, where you establish a sense that you have an identity.

But in Thai it's developed other meanings, positive and negative. It basically means pride in Thai. The negative meaning in Thai corresponds to the English word conceit, where you think you're better than other people. A positive meaning has to do with being determined. You're facing a difficult task, it's going to require a lot out of you, and you stick with it all the way through to the end. There's a kind of pride that goes with that, that enables you to do that.

It's good to think about these two meanings of pride, because they play a role in the practice. In the positive sense, you want to be proud about the fact that you're practicing, you're doing something noble, you're following the customs of the noble ones. You're looking for your happiness in a way that's totally harmless, and it's going to require a lot out of you. At the same time, you're trying to maintain the customs of the noble ones. In other words, you don't simply practice them yourself, but you're also passing them on to others through your example.

Ajaan Fuang tells the story of when he was with Ajaan Mun: Ajaan Mun would make his spittoons out of coconut shells, and he would carve them himself. If they broke, he'd carve a new one. Someone came one time with a nice glazed ceramic spittoon, and Ajaan Mun refused to accept it. He said, "I already have a spittoon." The donor said, "But this one is of higher quality." And Ajaan Mun said, "What do you mean, higher? Where does ceramic come from? It comes from dirt. Whereas coconut shells come from high up in the tree. They're much higher."

He was speaking in a manner that the Thais call half in jest, half in earnest. But he was making a point: that as a monk, as a practitioner, your values are different from those of society at large. And in order to maintain those values, you have to have a certain amount of pride in what you're doing. Otherwise, it's all too easy to give in to people's requests to accept their gifts, make allowances, do things in a more modern or efficient way. And once the god of efficiency comes in and begins to have some power in the practice, things begin to fall apart.

Ajaan Fuang would sometimes speak with scorn of the people who want to make the Dhamma more modern, more up to date. As he said, the Dhamma and

the Vinaya are timeless, and we have to have pride in our timeless tradition in order to maintain it.

Now, you do have to be careful about that pride. You notice in the sutta on the customs of the noble ones, the Buddha said that you're careful to be frugal and content with little, but at the same time, you watch out so that you don't exalt yourself and disparage others over the fact that you're content and they're not content. We're not here to compare ourselves with others. So it's a fine line, being proud of your tradition but not making it a reason to look down on others.

Ajaan Maha Boowa tells of when he was with Ajaan Mun. During the rains retreat he would take on the dhutanga practice of not accepting food from people who brought food after the almsround. As the rains retreat wore on, he noticed that other monks who had taken the same vow would one by one by one fall prey to the desire to take some of the food that came afterwards. He was very proud of the fact that even though they fell down, he wouldn't fall down.

But he also said that every once in a while Ajaan Mun would come over and bring some food that had been brought afterwards. He'd slip it into Ajaan Maha Boowa's bowl in such a way that that it was in the bowl before Ajaan Maha Boowa knew what had happened. Ajaan Mun would say, "Have some pity on these donors. They came late." And as Ajaan Maha Boowa said, he did it just enough to warn him of the danger in pride, but not so often as to discourage him—because, after all, it is a good thing, if you realize that you have some defilements around food, that you try to be extra strict with yourself about them.

This tradition is a good tradition to maintain, a good tradition to keep alive, not only for its own sake, but also for the sake of reflection. As you're learning how to have some pride in your tradition as a practitioner in areas like food, clothing, and shelter, it makes you think about other areas where you're proud, where you've picked up some pride from the culture from which you came. And the question is: *Is this an appropriate pride here in the practice?*

For example, with our speech: It's very easy to see that there are people out in the world who are afraid to say the truth, are afraid to express their feelings, and so there's a certain amount of pride that comes with the idea, "Well, I'm not afraid. I'll say whatever I see is true, or whatever I have come through my mind." There's a certain kind of courage or bravery about that, but is it always appropriate? After all, we live in a culture of restraint here. Just as Ajaan Fuang was scornful of people who were eager to bring the Dhamma up to date, Ajaan Suwat was scornful of people who, as soon as something pops in their head, let it pop right out of their mouth. They don't have any filter. You have to think: What you say is a type of

karma. You're creating the world around you through your speech. And is your speech a gift to others? Or is it simply an expression of what you feel like saying?

Because, again, think back to the act of maintaining some of the dhutanga practices, maintaining some of the old ways of doing things: We do it not because it makes us better than other people, but because it's a gift. As the traditions are maintained, they can be passed on. Other people can benefit from them.

So you should have the same attitude toward your speech, toward your actions: *Are they a gift to others?* This is why it's good to have a filter. When something comes into your head, before it's fallen into the channel going out your mouth, you should set up some checkpoints. First checkpoint: *Is this true?* The second checkpoint: *Is this beneficial?* Does it really help other people that this particular thought or this particular idea is getting out into the world? And then checkpoint number three: *Is this the right time and place?*

Even though this is less efficient than the fast lane, it does mean that your speech takes on more value, and it's speech you can be proud of—not because you're unafraid to say what you think, but because you've tested it, you've considered it and decided that this is a good thought to go out in the world. You treat your speech as if it has value.

So ask yourself, "When I open my mouth to speak, is it a gift? Or is it simply opening a valve of a pipe and who knows what is going to come out the pipe?" As you decide to be more careful in how you speak, more judicious in how you speak, you'll discover that your speech becomes something of which you can genuinely be proud in the positive sense of the word.