



#### Sidebar H: **Boomeritis Buddhism**

[Boomeritis Buddhism is as serious—and disturbing—a topic as one can imagine. But, in my opinion, if you are interested in understanding this topic, about the only way to do so is to first read the novel *Boomeritis*, or else the central issue will not really come alive. For those who have done so, the following sidebar represents a few reflections on what I believe is the single greatest threat to Buddhadharma in the West.

One of the two or three most popular American Buddhist teachers, after reading *Boomeritis*, emailed me and said: “Um, I think I have this disease.” I believe that the great flexibility and nonattachment that Buddhist training instills in people will be strong enough to allow it to overcome boomeritis, but whether or not that happens is yet to be seen.—kw]

Joan Hazelton gave a long sidebar on boomeritis spirituality in general, and boomeritis Buddhism in particular, much of it too technical to make sense to me. But I made comments on her delivery, then copied Kim’s notes:

“The existence of boomeritis Buddhism demands a particularly sophisticated psychospiritual model in order to account for its contours. It demands, at the very least, what we call a phase-4 model, which includes all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, all types—that’s a mouthful, yes? As many of you know, in this introductory seminar on boomeritis we are using only a phase-2 model—or a ladder-type developmental Spiral, because it is the simplest model that can get the points across; but when it comes to the subtleties of spiritual development, these types of ladder models don’t work very well.

“The model we use at IC is more complex, but as far as we can tell, it fits the relevant data (and when it doesn’t, we change it, or certainly try to). Right now it includes the four quadrants—intentional, behavioral, social, and cultural—as well as the extremely important phenomena of *levels and lines* (or waves and streams)—the idea that different developmental lines (e.g., cognitive, moral, interpersonal, spiritual, emotional, artistic, kinesthetic, etc.) proceed in a relatively independent fashion through the various levels/waves/stages of consciousness (e.g., preconventional, conventional, postconventional), so that a person can be at a fairly high level of development in some lines, medium in others, and low in still others—thus, there is little that is linear about overall development.

“This integral model also includes the important phenomena of *states and stages*—namely, a person can have a peak experience or altered *state* of consciousness at virtually any *stage/level/wave* of consciousness. Altered states are of (at least) four major varieties, representing four widely present, natural states of consciousness—waking (gross), dreaming (subtle), sleeping (causal), and nondual (giving us spiritual states such as, respectively: nature mysticism, deity mysticism, formless mysticism, and nondual mysticism. See **Sidebar G:** ‘States and Stages’).

“What this means, to give a very quick example, is that somebody at, say, the blue *stage* of development can have an altered state or peak experience of a subtle *state*—say, an experience of a divine Light or interior Luminosity—but the person will tend to *interpret* that experience through the mental apparatus that has actually developed in his or her own case. In this example, the person will interpret the spiritual experience in terms of the blue meme, in which case we would see something like the fundamentalist’s ‘reborn’ experience: this person feels, with utter certainty, that Jesus has come to him personally, and that nobody can be saved unless they accept Christ as their personal savior. The experience of the subtle state is very real and authentic, but it is interpreted through the mythic-membership, concrete operational, blue-meme mental level.

“Essentially the same thing happens with the other major levels or stages or waves of development. A person at virtually any *stage* of consciousness can have an altered *state* of consciousness (gross, subtle, causal, or nondual), but they will interpret that experience through the lens of the general stage they are at—that is, interpret it through the mental structures that they possess or that have already emerged in their development. A person can have a profound satori-like experience of pure Emptiness (the formless realm), but that person will generally interpret that spiritual experience in the terms of his or her average stage of development (e.g., a person whose center of gravity is blue will interpret altered states mostly in blue or mythic terms; a person at green will interpret them in pluralistic terms, and so on).

“There are, of course, a wide variety of altered states of consciousness that are available to men and women under different circumstances, but, as indicated, there are at least three major states available to virtually everybody: waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, and those states can give rise, as we also suggested, to spiritual experiences such as nature mysticism (or oneness with the gross realm), deity mysticism (or oneness with the subtle realm), and formless mysticism (or oneness with the causal realm). We also add nondual awareness, which many traditions maintain is the ever-present ordinary mind. The point is simply that many profound altered *states* are available to individuals at virtually any *stage* of development, simply because everybody wakes, dreams, and sleeps.

“Incidentally, it is important to understand why the great wisdom traditions—including Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Taoism, shamanism, and indigenous traditions—do not have any stage models like those of Spiral Dynamics. We have covered this idea extensively in other seminars [see **Sidebar G**, subheading, “Two Types of Stages, and Why the Contemplative Traditions Only Have One of Them”; and especially **Sidebar I** and **Sidebar J**, soon to be posted.] But the general idea is simple enough: the waves of consciousness unfolding discovered by people like Clare Graves, Abe Maslow, Jane Loevinger, Robert Kegan, Susann Cook-Greuter, et al., are intersubjective/interobjective stages, *not*

*merely subjective stages*, and therefore they cannot be spotted by things like meditation, contemplation, introspection, and so on. They are grounded mostly in the lower quadrants, not the upper quadrants, and thus they largely escape phenomenology and hermeneutics (and the attention of the wisdom traditions). This, needless to say, is a grave deficiency, one that can be remedied with a more integral psychology. The great traditions are not wrong, just very partial in this regard, but that's easy enough to fix!

“Okay, so let's look at the phenomena of states and stages using Spiral Dynamics as an example. As we were saying, a person at red can have an altered state of gross, subtle, or causal experience (e.g., a person at red can have a peak experience of nature mysticism, deity mysticism, or formless mysticism). A person at blue can also have an altered state of gross, subtle, or causal experience. And so can orange, green, yellow, and so on. In other words, using this simple model as an example, each of the 8 stages can experience the 3 major states. This gives us a grid of 24 different types of spiritual experiences. Our researchers here at IC have found credible examples of all 24 (except at the extreme limits, where things fade out). [See **Sidebar G**, subheading: ‘A Lattice of Altered States’; *Integral Psychology*; and Combs, *The Radiance of Being*, second revised edition.]

“It is my opinion that every one of those spiritual experiences is, or can be, a real and authentic experience. However, those experiences become more adequately interpreted the higher the stage that experiences them. A turquoise experience of the Sacred, for example, would include the fact that the Divine is given freely to all sentient beings, whereas a blue experience of the Sacred maintains that God is given only to a chosen people, or only to a few who embrace this version of God, or only to this nation, and so on—in other words, blue is ethnocentric Spirit, turquoise is worldcentric Spirit. Although both of those individuals might have had an authentic spiritual experience (in this case, an experience of a very real, very authentic subtle state), the turquoise interpretation is more adequate to Spirit than blue because turquoise has more *developmental depth* and is thus *more inclusive* and *more integral*.

“This approach can help us make sense of many apparently conflicting experiences. Shamanism, for example, is a profound technique of inducing altered states of a psychic and subtle nature. For this reason it is rightly honored by many contemporaries looking for a way out of flatland. At the same time, shamanism originally emerged in tribal structures that were purple and red, and thus the *interpretations* that surround some of these shamanic states are, by today’s standards, somewhat problematic, outmoded, restrictive, or even regressive. The trick is to be able to take the altered-states technology but fit them into much more adequate interpretations (e.g., turquoise and higher). But shamanism itself—the original shamanism—was, to put it mildly, a mixed bag. It arose in cultures that were deeply ethnocentric, that often practiced slash-and-burn foraging techniques, that found infanticide a necessity, that aggressively divided the world into ‘us’ versus ‘them,’ and whose tribal structure firmly locked them out of a worldcentric compassion. So let us be careful just what we eulogize, yes? We are not denying that shamanic states are higher STATES—but just what STAGES are you going to plug them into?

“In other words, the existence of states and stages is very important because it helps us to understand the phenomenon of boomeritis Buddhism—or boomeritis spirituality in general, whether it affects shamanism, nature mysticism, ecofeminism, deity mysticism, descending spirituality, contemplative Christianity, Neo-Vedanta, Kabbalah, deep ecology, and so on.

“In a nutshell, it appears that boomeritis Buddhism—and boomeritis spirituality in general—occurs when a person’s center of gravity is at the green meme, but then that person has a very real, very authentic experience of some of the transpersonal, transrational states of consciousness. Especially during *meditative states* of consciousness, a person can experience a broad range of transrational events, including subtle states of visionary experiences (deity mysticism, savikalpa samadhi, Sambhogakaya), causal states of formless consciousness (unmanifest Emptiness, nirvikalpa samadhi, Dharmakaya), and even nondual consciousness (sahaj samadhi, Svabhavikakaya, nondual One Taste).

“But as authentic as those states truly are—and nobody is denying that!—they are immediately snapped up and *interpreted by the green meme*. Consequently, the person then interprets Buddhism—or simply his or her own spiritual experiences—to mean that authentic spirituality must be anti-hierarchical, relativistic, primarily a matter of participatory sharing, focused on caring dialogue, a democratic jettisoning of any ranking between teacher and student (‘the sangha is the buddha’), denying any grading and judging, encouraging a multiplicity and diversity of equally valid truths, asserting a plurality of spiritual ultimates, de-emphasizing enlightenment since any ‘higher’ states might marginalize somebody, seeing the spiritual teacher as merely an egalitarian friend with whom we walk the nonhierarchical spiritual path, hand in hand as equals, dispensing with intense discipline and denying that awakening is anything other than doing the laundry with some sort of awareness....”

Joan Hazelton looked up and smiled. “Again, it is not that those items are wrong, or bad, or incorrect. Rather, it is that they belong essentially to the green-meme value system, and as such, they do not partake of the even more encompassing values of integral second tier. Those green values are therefore not simply included in even deeper and higher and wider interpretations, but merely become an end in themselves, at which point those green values wind up marginalizing and rejecting the many other value systems.

“As we have seen, green claims to be inclusive and nonmarginalizing, but in fact it will not let red be red, or blue be blue, or orange be orange, or yellow be yellow—in many cases, it despises those values and will tell you so in no uncertain terms! (The green meme is uncomfortable with red drives, it has a hard time with blue Republican values, it often reviles orange capitalism, it abhors yellow hierarchies, it recoils at turquoise universals, and so on.) The Prime Directive of second-tier consciousness, on the other hand, realizes that healthy red must be allowed to be red in its own way, healthy blue must be allowed to be blue, orange must be orange, green must be green, and so on—and in this way alone can there emerge an integral awareness that spans the entire spectrum of consciousness and does not unduly privilege the values of only one meme, in this case, green.”

Hazelton walked slowly to the front of the stage, took a breath, and continued. “Run the numbers here, dear souls. With 25% of the American population at green (the ‘cultural creatives’), and less than 2% at second tier, the likelihood of Buddhism being captured by the green meme is very high indeed. That is, most American Buddhists are green-meme Buddhists, by simple demographics.

“Again, this is not good or bad, it simply is. But it does bring certain repercussions that I believe anybody concerned with Buddhism—or spirituality in general—ought to be aware of.

“First and foremost, a green-meme Buddhism is certainly not a turquoise or integral Buddhism, which the greatest of the Mahayana and Vajrayana texts most certainly are. Think of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, for example, which is about as turquoise as turquoise can get; the *Lankavatara Sutra*, a second-tier work of genius that elucidates a nested hierarchy of consciousness evolution extending all the way to third tier; the *anuttara tantras* of the Vajrayana, which consist of turquoise instructions on the subtle holistic Kosmic energies leading to third-tier consciousness and the great Enlightenment; the Dzogchen *upadesha*, spiritual treatises that describe consciousness as it unfolds from first to second to third tier and a realization of ever-present Presence; and even the *abidharma* psychology of the Theravada, profound expositions of third-tier consciousness. *None of those are green-meme treatises*; they are all second- and third-tier treatises—and, my friends, that is truly important.

“Recall that the *first-tier* waves are beige, purple, red, blue, orange, and green; what defines each of them is that they believe that their value system and worldview is the only worldview that is fundamentally correct. On the other hand, *second-tier* waves of consciousness—yellow and turquoise—are truly integral waves, in that they include an intuitive awareness of all of the first-tier memes and thus can realize the importance of each, since each is a necessary ingredient in the overall Spiral of growth, but a realization that is also holarchical through and through (recall that Beck and Cowan found that the acceptance

of holarchy, or nested hierarchy, is one of *the* defining characteristics of second tier). And finally, *third tier* is a general term for all states and stages that are trans-turquoise or truly transpersonal, transrational, and supramental.

“What we want, in other words, are second-tier models of consciousness that include first-, second-, and third-tier consciousness. That is, we want to try to use the mind in its highest capacity of integral thinking (yellow and turquoise) in order to give an overview of the entire spectrum of consciousness, and this would include at least pointing to those states that are trans-turquoise and supramental and transpersonal. Of course, there aren’t any third-tier mental models of third-tier states because those states themselves are transmental: when you are directly experiencing third tier—such as nirvikalpa samadhi or pure formlessness—there is no conceptual mind to be making models! But when we come out of those *transmental* states, then of course we can make *mental* maps and models of them, with the understanding that *you must directly experience those third-tier states and stages and not merely talk about them!*” Hazelton laughed and looked out at the crowd.

“So that’s what we mean when we say that we want second-tier models of the entire spectrum (of first and second and third tier). Good examples of these include James Mark Baldwin, William James, Michael Murphy, Roger Walsh, Jenny Wade, Charles Tart, Joel Funk, Michael Washburn, Skip Alexander, Francisco Varela, Susann Cook-Greuter, Frances Vaughan, and so on. Hopefully, of course, we will not merely offer mental models but also include spiritual practices that will allow us to directly experience the higher, supramental, third-tier states and stages, but *at the very least* we want to include a recognition of those states in our mental, second-tier, integral models.

“As we said, much of the third tier, and especially the causal, is supramental and nonrepresentational (and therefore when you are in those third-tier states you cannot be creating mental models); however, once the person ‘comes out’ of those realms, he or she interprets them in the terms of their mental organization. And *turquoise*, being the most integral of the mental realms yet evolved, is the best equipped, at this point in time, to

*mentally* represent most fully the overall spectrum of consciousness. So, again, we want turquoise maps of first, second, and third tier waves (or the full spectrum to the extent it can be represented in maps—which is not very much, by the way, but that doesn't mean maps have no use at all).

“The problems begin when you interpret these third-tier events in merely first-tier terms, which is just what happens with green-meme Buddhism. Or green-meme shamanism, or green-meme Kabbalah, or green-meme pluralism, and so on. Again, this is not necessarily bad, but it can have certain very unfortunate consequences.” Hazelton paced back and forth, paused, breathed in slowly, continued. “Because wherever green goes, boomeritis follows. And just as boomeritis has overtaken so much of green in this country, so boomeritis Buddhism is one of the most prevalent forms of Buddhism now vying for attention. Its tenets are all those that we have seen that are characteristic of boomeritis in general, but now hooked to the experience of authentic meditative states of consciousness, which are then interpreted to support the green-meme value system.”

Joan shook her head. “The result is a Buddhism that claims to be egalitarian, pluralistic, non-marginalizing, anti-stage, and especially anti-hierarchy. And, alas, all of the moves of the mean green meme then swing into play: it claims to be egalitarian, but it actually condemns all those views that disagree with it (but how could it, if all views are truly equal?) It rejects the teacher-student model, since we are all equal spiritual friends on the same path together (but why are people paying these teachers money if we're all equals here?) It rejects hierarchy in any fashion (but why does it rank its view as better than all the alternatives?) It claims that pluralism is the true voice of the Mystery of the Divine (but why does it reject all of the numerous other voices that disagree with it?) And sometimes it goes so far that it denies the importance of *enlightenment* altogether, because all spiritual experiences are to be viewed equally without any judging or ranking, and saying that there is a thing called ‘enlightenment’ implies that those who are not enlightened are somehow inferior, and that's not a nice thing to say, so we won't say it. The very *raison d'etre* of

Buddhism—namely, release from suffering in the Great Liberation of the awakened mind, which allows the compassionate salvation of all sentient beings—is tossed out the window because it is politically incorrect.”

Joan continued pacing the stage. “Well, the list of the MGM’s tactics are as legendary as they are lengthy. That boomeritis Buddhism displays all those traits is no surprise, but the real travesty here is that a truly integral Buddhism will probably never take root in the West if boomeritis Buddhism gets the upper hand, which it certainly has at this time.

“The point is fairly simple: if you have attended the seminar series on boomeritis that we gave here at IC, then you will have a fairly decent understanding of boomeritis—what it is, what it means, how it got started. If you simply look at many of the forms of spirituality now available, including Buddhism, you will, I am afraid, find them laced with boomeritis. My colleagues here at IC are of one mind: boomeritis Buddhism is probably the greatest internal threat to Dharma in the West.”