

Practice of Overcoming Exceptionalism

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[**Note:** In this essay, the words *we*, *us*, and *our* to refer to white Americans (U.S. residents) who benefit from colonial privileges derived from the enslavement of Africans, the theft of land from Native peoples, and their ongoing discrimination. Imperium denotes the global corporate-state empire of Western Europe and North America and its continuing colonialism.]

The spiritual path to overcome our complicity with what harms has three main practices. Last time we looked at avoiding complicity with the harmful consequences of living beyond planetary ecological boundaries by reducing consumerism. Now we turn to the second practice: undoing our exceptionalism by overcoming our arrogance. (See the box for examples of arrogant behavior).

Feelings motivate behavior, and our behavior manifests feelings. Deep caring for the Earth Interbeing depends upon feelings of love and gratitude for our interrelationships with the Earth and other beings. However, the Imperial ways of living separate us from the sacred and disconnect us from others, all life, and the Earth through its culturally-embedded beliefs in white exceptionalism and the arrogant and hostile feelings it generates.

The plague of great inequality and divisiveness inflicts the world. Privileged people do not face and resolve critical problems that threaten their privileges, leaving problems to fester and worsen. Once

separation has reached the extreme, the task of reuniting presents itself. (For more on how our privileges advantage us and disadvantage people of color, see here).

The obstructions of arrogance, hostility, and selfishness block our unity with the spirit and Earth Interbeing. Life motivates us to bite through these obstructions by imposing ever greater levels of suffering until we finally exert ourselves to put an end to our problem behaviors and return to the ways of the spirit. If we persistently ignore a life lesson, we suffer increasingly severe consequences for our wrong-doing.

Only those free of arrogance and the willingness to harm others for self-benefit, who persevere in taking care of the sacred Earth Interbeing, can create the conditions necessary to overcome exceptionalism and the corporate-state dynasty of the Imperium. Unexceptional people know

Arrogant Behavior Signs of Exceptionalism

- Looks down on others with lower status.
- Judges others based on superficial information.
- Dominates interactions.
- Unwilling to listen or compromise.
- Feels entitled and expects preferential treatment.
- Thinks they know it all. Avoids seeking the advice of others.
- Disparages others to feel superior to them.
- Stretches the truth or make unsubstantiated statements to belittle others and draw attention to themselves.
- Quickly criticizes others for not meeting their expectations or standards.
- Feels need to win in all situations.
- Feels frustrated easily when things don't go their way. Quick to anger and conflict.
- Feels self-righteous, especially when defending privileges.

how to bring to life the ways of the spirit by constantly yielding to what benefits all and the Earth.

We have the responsibility to care for the Earth Interbeing, which necessitates us to heal ourselves of our exceptionalism and complicity with what harms. We cannot struggle against our exceptionalism and complicity directly as that will entangle us more deeply in them: we cannot solve a problem by using the hostility and arrogance that caused it. Only through the spiritual path of love and Earth Interbeing can we heal ourselves from the disease of exceptionalism.

As soon as we sense within ourselves arrogant beliefs and feelings, we must recover our harmony by reconnecting with the Earth Interbeing and spirit. Healing begins when we know that caring for the Earth Interbeing has a much greater importance to us than our exceptionalism and privileges. Through love, we have the courage to live in harmony with others, with the Earth Interbeing.

Until it becomes a way of life for us, we need to persistently turn away from the ways of the Imperium toward caring for the Earth Interbeing. Whenever we see ourselves feeling and acting like a privileged white person, we can step back and see the dangers of living that way. We can choose a different path and a different way of responding to whatever situation had elicited our arrogant reaction. Our choice depends upon how deeply we know the dangers of living the ways of the Imperium and our courage to change ourselves.

It will take times for our abstract understanding of the interbeing of Earth and all life to deepen into love, into a feeling of family. And so this practice actually begins with our family, however we may define it. We practice living the harmonious ways of kindness, respect, wisdom, humility, and justice within our daily interactions with family. I now have greater awareness of the many ways I have acted out my arrogance in my family. Yet, once I prioritized caring for its harmony and balance, I could apply those behaviors to ever wider circles of relationships. See [here](#) for more on how to do this practice.

It takes a persistent effort to set aside hostility and arrogance. Only through holding a sacred love within our hearts for Earth Interbeing can we find the strength to face and move through exceptionalism and complicity with what harms. Knowing that others share this path, however, encourages us to live this way. Some Aboriginal peoples have never stopped living this way, and we can find support from their wisdom. The reality that we have to start relating to others in humble and caring ways to make it through the omnicidal plague of the Imperium has my full attention.

The practice of overcoming our arrogance and hostility for others eventually opens the door to enacting within our community ways of living that ground themselves in the equality of all beings, the sacred Earth Interbeing. Before we can go through that door, however, we have to first lose our sense of privilege, our arrogance, our exceptionalism.

By resting within the spirit's love, we always have a refuge to which we can retreat when we feel overwhelmed by the burdens of life. We preserve the connection between the mystery and Earth, between interbeing and ourselves, healing our separation through the mystery by connecting lovingly and humbly with everyone.