



Power, Pride and Spirituality

Alova

Abstract: Humans have adopted the “law of the jungle” in economics and government: power and profit above all. Fear of the powerful still rules the human psyche, despite the fact that brute force wins only in the short term. Acquiring power entails sacrifice. Some people conclude that power is bad, while others conclude that power is good. Power can be used for good or ill, and has no ability in itself to cause immorality, a human choice. Abilities result in confidence and progress. Over-confidence underlies pride, which causes falls. Spirituality is often confused with psychic ability. Spiritual progress does not require physical, mental, or paranormal powers of any kind. Spirituality is inner and individual and has to do with our inner motives and also our actions—how we utilize our powers.

1. The Jungle

At first glance, power and fear appear to rule in Nature. We call the lion, “king of the jungle,” because it can kill other big animals quickly, including us.

Humans are ruled by fear of the lion. The adrenalin produced by awareness of a dangerous creature nearby prompts us to urgently flee or fight. Frightful stories about danger have dominated human conditioning, and even dominate our entertainment.





However, the rabbit has far surpassed the lion in the quest for survival. This fact has not been generally integrated into our psyches, except for those who have studied populations and the r-k gene, and leaders like Louis Farrakhan who advised gang rape as a strategy for world domination.¹ Our limbic brain area still responds strongly to fear—of lions, snakes, spiders, and trains speeding toward us.



This fear reaction is good—it has helped us to survive.

However, is all of life and the universe just like the jungle?

Do power and fear rule everywhere, in all matters?

Do compassion, beauty, or justice ever prevail?

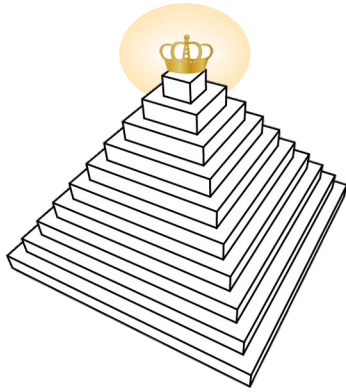
People have taken the model of the jungle and applied it to human arenas, especially economy and politics—the tools of power in present human societies. As a result, the “rule of the jungle” has gained traction in human experience and memory. Fear of the lion, of anything that can and might devour us, remains the primary motivating factor in human awareness—despite our enormous advances in technology and actual survival.

The philosophy in economic and political structures has thus become to gain power at any cost, control at any cost, profit at any cost. “Bigger is better.” The vast majority of positions in economic, legal and political powerhouses are occupied by people who are predatory. These people are attracted to powerful positions and many have little or no empathy. Entrepreneurs experience that ninety-five percent of people able to fund large projects take what is valuable from inventors and companies, and use it to gain without duly compensating the creators or allowing the developers to work toward their visions.



Because the power structures of the world operate on this model, anyone who wants to survive is prompted, tempted, or forced to adopt these strategies. Wealth and power are called “success.” People who are neither wealthy nor powerful usually have less self-confidence and lower status in society.

¹ According to a first-hand account.



People who are wealthy or powerful make the rules and pull the ropes to obtain more wealth and power. Those without wealth or power struggle, unless they have a particular skill or ability that the powerful want to use. The system is hopelessly rigged, run by the powerful who are not inclined to relinquish their power, and have a vested interest in keeping the current system going.

The “divine right of kings” and Chinese “mandate of heaven” claim that monarchs rule because God or gods directly gave or willed them the right to do so. Gods and goddesses have “supernatural” powers, by definition.

Throughout the ages, people have turned to the unseen to get what they want or need. Various genies and deities bring rain, a good harvest, victory in war, hailstorms on one’s enemies, riches, knowledge, wisdom, or even liberation from the ups and downs of it all. People propitiate and are loyal to whichever one they believe is more powerful for their purposes. These beings are sometimes called “spirits” because most of us do not see them.

People often associate spirituality with paranormal powers—the ability to see spirits, to foresee the future, to know what someone is thinking or what is happening at a distance, to move objects with one’s mind alone, to appear instantly in another location, or to cause someone to become ill or die without any physical means. Such powers are obviously not always used for good purposes, so although they’re unseen, they aren’t “spiritual” in the sense of approaching Goodness or Divinity or God.

When spirits or paranormal powers are used to bring about physical results, the system itself doesn’t change at all. The power game is still in operation, modeling our idea of the jungle where we imagine that brute force and power rule all.

However, brute force and power only rule in the short term. Lions can kill humans, but humans are more intelligent and creative. In Nature, each creature takes what it needs. Animals kill to eat and attack when threatened. ***The system of power-rules-all is not natural. It does not accurately reflect the jungle.***

Humanity is naturally compassionate. Neanderthals cared for their sick and handicapped. Humans have a natural instinct to take care of their families and tribe members. They even care for animals, including those who are injured or orphaned. The vast majority of people are compassionate. People help one another by nature, especially in emergencies when it’s most needed. Thousands have started grass-roots organizations with a pure intent to help others. Millions sacrifice their time or donate to charities.

The present power-rules-all system is not naturally human. It did not arise through a natural process of development.

2. Power: Good or Bad?

Some people feel that, unquestionably, power is good, because with it we accomplish great and wonderful things. Other people feel that, unquestionably, power is bad, because people in power are cruel, oppressive and corrupt.

As worldly power increases, morality often decreases: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men."²

However, it is not power itself that corrupts. What corrupts is a system of rewards and punishments in which immorality is rewarded and morality is punished. Such a system has been in place for thousands of years. Somehow, immorality got control at the top and has propagated itself.

Because of our jungle mentality, when people think of power they usually think of physical strength, weapons, wealth, or political power. Some think also of paranormal powers acquired by shamans, magicians, or saints, who are feared and held in awe.

However, any skill, ability, or outstanding quality is actually a type of power. The ability to influence other people accompanies beauty, charm, a quick wit, oratorship, leadership, social status, who one knows, or expert knowledge. Mechanical ability allows us to build bridges and repair vehicles. Intellectual acuity helps us learn quickly and remember what we learn and observe. Artistic and musical ability allow us



to stir people's hearts. "Emotional intelligence" and psychic abilities allow us to understand people and their motives, and, hopefully, to navigate situations in life more easily.



Great feats require great will power and persistence.

To acquire any type of power, we must sacrifice something. In fact, we must sacrifice time, money, or something—to acquire anything. For good health, we sacrifice culinary indulgences and brush our teeth. For strength, we sacrifice being a couch potato for lifting weights. For a degree, we sacrifice party time for study time. For a regular paycheck, we sacrifice our time and schedule. For a stable, lifelong marriage we sacrifice our freedom to mate with others; for a child, we sacrifice much of our lives for the next thirty years. For fame or stardom, people often sacrifice relationships, conscience, or integrity. For paranormal powers, people sacrifice many years to engage in strict discipline.

- 2 Lord Acton, letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, 1887. Others, including Alphonse de Lamartine "Absolute power corrupts the best natures;" (1848 essay) and William Pitt (1770) also voiced this idea.

Like champion athletes, violinist Itzhak Perlman practices nine hours per day. An enthusiast once exclaimed, "I would give my whole life to be able to play the violin like you!" He replied simply, "I have."³



All abilities we can acquire have certain benefits and are rightly regarded as powers of various kinds.

Any power can be used in service of Goodness, or in service of evil. Knives are used by surgeons and by murderers. Power can be used toward spiritual progress, or toward spiritual regression. Any ability can be used for a good purpose one day, and a bad purpose the next. One person can use an ability for a good purpose, while another person can use that same ability for a nefarious purpose.



Power in itself is neither good nor bad, neither moral nor immoral, neither spiritual and holy, nor wicked and base.

How someone uses a particular ability can be good or bad, spiritual and holy, or wicked and base.



Power itself has no ability to make a person moral or immoral.

Only human beings can be moral or immoral, by choice.

Unmitigated awe of power is unwise. Disdain for power is also unwise. All power is good when used for a good purpose at an appropriate time and place, yet any power can be used to harm. We need to examine each and every person and situation to determine whether an ability is used for good or ill, or both.

Power of any kind comes with responsibility: the greater the power, the greater the responsibility. We all bear responsibility for how we use our powers, great or small.

We also bear responsibility for neglecting to use our powers.

3. Confidence and Pride

Self-confidence accompanies any ability. It gives us strength and courage to strive for even greater accomplishments. As long as confidence is truthful, based on fact, it is good. It contributes to even greater proficiency and attainment. Confidence provides a foundation for innovation and invention, improvement and progress.

If someone were to see Itzhak Perlman with his violin and ask if he plays well, he could respond honestly, "I'm one of the best in the world." Such an admission would not be arrogant. It would be truthful.



3 As an aside, Perlman plays for God and prays for his concert-goers.

However, if Jimmy **thinks** he is the best in the world, but the world doesn't think so, the same response would be inaccurate and at least a little arrogant. If Jimmy stated, "**I think** I'm one of the best in the world," it would be an honest statement. He could say it humbly or arrogantly.

Humility is a lack of pride or arrogance. It does not entail self-deprecation, or a refusal to acknowledge that one is outstanding if one really is. Stating the truth about one's abilities is not necessarily arrogant.

Arrogance starts with **over**-confidence. The difference between confidence and over-confidence is the difference between fact and imagination.

Pride is always built upon a defective perspective. It rests upon an exaggerated belief in the specialness and superiority of one's abilities, worth or accomplishments. Pride can result from ignorance—from being a big fish in a small pond, or from ignoring the existence of bigger fish and bigger ponds.



Pride is not evidenced by words alone, but by the color and music of one's statements as well. It resides in an inner attitude and lack of truthfulness.

Boasting and showing off can be arrogant, but are not necessarily so. They are commonly used to vie for dominance in a hierarchical social order. Sometimes they are used as strategy to induce a competitor to retreat.

In examining our own or someone else's claims of superiority in a particular arena, we need to decide whether we think, and whether others think, the claims are true or not. Often we don't know for certain, but we can research and make an educated guess.



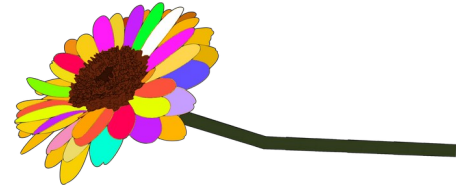
Public opinion, authority or salary is not a reliable measure of whether a claim is true. How many now-recognized great scientists, musical composers, and other geniuses died poor and unknown! How many unsung heroes and heroines have walked the Earth!⁴ How many popular theories and philosophies have been proven completely wrong! The greatest bomb-dropper in history, who shall not be named here, was awarded a peace prize! One may be great even if the world doesn't recognize it. If the world thinks one is great, one might be way off base.



4 For example, Galileo was sentenced for heresy, Socrates was sentenced to death, Mozart struggled for income and died a pauper, Nikola Tesla's work was stolen and laboratory burned.

Pride inhibits spirituality and spiritual progress. Power doesn't, but pride does. Power has a tendency to nurture pride, but does not automatically do so.

Pride is always dangerous because one has untruthfully lifted oneself up, exaggerated one's importance or abilities. When the truth reveals itself, as it always does, one's claims evaporate. Pride inevitably causes falls.

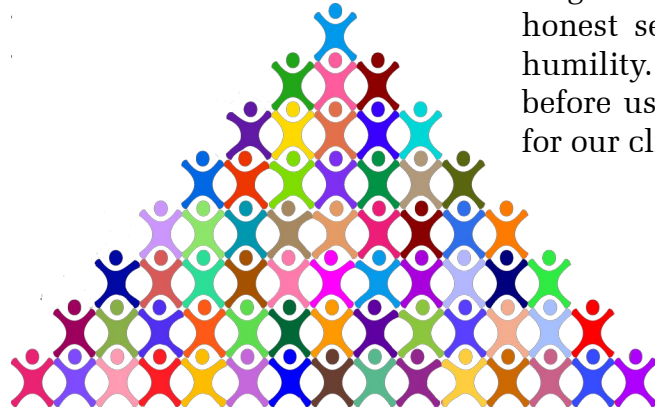


Pride can easily cause one to slip into putting other people down. This is usually cruel, more or less, even if it is not conscious.

Pride also inclines a person to demand to dominate or control. In a power-rules-all system, people who think they are superior believe they have a right to dominate others. They tend to rise in hierarchical organizations. We are spiritually accountable for how we use any power we have; people in positions of power have more ability to do harm—for which they are responsible.

For all these reasons, pride is the number-one pitfall on our spiritual journey. Confidence is not only good but necessary; pride is baggage we simply cannot take with us. It doesn't fit. When we are carrying it, we are too heavy and unbalanced, and we fall down.

If one aspires to spiritual progress, it is wise to guard very carefully one's humility. Not dishonest self-disparagement or denial, but truthful humility. We must remember everyone who came before us, everyone who provided a step we used for our climb, everyone who pointed the way.



In fact, it is not possible for us to remember or even know everyone who helped us! A smile from a stranger at a crucial moment, a phrase overheard, a word of wisdom in a long-forgotten book ... Let us be gracious with one another.

4. Spiritual Progress

It is easy to get caught up with our power and with using our abilities to accomplish things. It is easy to get caught up with increasing our powers and abilities. This is especially the case given our power-rules-all system.

We are driven by the top of the pyramid to keep focused on the power game—and not on anything that is truly spiritual. We are told everywhere we look that power and money are success and happiness. We are pushed from all directions to get caught up and stay caught up in the power game.

For spirituality, to be close to God or Divinity, athletic ability is not required. Mechanical ability is not required. Intellectual ability is not required. Musical and artistic abilities are not required. Beauty is not required. Leadership is not required. Paranormal powers are not required. Wealth is not required. Status is not required. These are all intrinsically good because they can be used for good, but are not necessary for our ultimate journey.

However, if one gets caught up, distracted, or arrogant as a result of having any of these abilities, one's spiritual growth is delayed. Having powers of any kind is not wrong or detrimental, but it does have pitfalls.

If one has not thoroughly cleaned out one's deep desires, both conscious and subconscious, one's power will be used to satisfy those desires—whether appropriate or moral or not. We bear responsibility for what we do, even if our motive was subconscious. People seeking special powers are thus advised to study under a wise teacher—and to thoroughly investigate the teacher first.

Since power is associated with God or deities, some people think that having paranormal abilities is a sign of being **spiritually** advanced. However, there exist evil magicians with great psychic powers who are not spiritual at all. Miracles can be worked by God, by deities, by magicians, by good or evil spirits. Psychic ability is not **intrinsically** spiritual. Spiritual progress can confer paranormal abilities, but does not necessarily do so. Showing off or misusing psychic powers is not a sign of being spiritually advanced.

Spiritual progress involves advancing in morality and wisdom to **use** our powers for Goodness and to refrain from doing harm—not in having power of any sort. Acquiring abilities is optional in life. No ability or accomplishment is required for union with our Creator.

Intelligence is a sign of human progress ...
but **not** of spiritual progress.

Technological advancement is a sign of human progress ...
but **not** of spiritual progress.

Psychic ability is a sign of human progress ...
but **not** of spiritual progress.

Paranormal powers are often a spiritual trap. It is easy to become enamored of oneself and imagine that one is spiritually superior, when one only has a superior psychic ability. Some people idolize those with psychic powers and even bow to touch their feet, hoping for a “spiritual” boon.

People are fascinated with knowing the future, and invariably ask psychics unending questions. Unusual abilities also attract those who wish to use people with such abilities, including people with nefarious motives, corporations and governments.

If one knows things about other people through paranormal means, one must develop para-normal discretion and wisdom to match. Skill regarding when to say what to whom, and when to keep silent, is essential.

Any psychic person who perceives information does not perceive **all** information. It is normal, not a personal fault, that someone doesn't see the whole picture. Yet people with paranormal ability, in their surety that what they do see is correct, often forget that there could be other things they don't see.

Special knowledge is very attractive! It might be gleaned through clairvoyance, clairsentience, precognition, prophecy, telepathy, psychometry (obtaining information from an object), divination, dowsing, automatic writing. Naturally, one focuses on the perceptions in detail, and attempts to interpret them and understand their significance.

However interesting or valuable, all information—from sensory or parasensory sources—is a long way from the absolute, ineffable beauty and wonder of God!

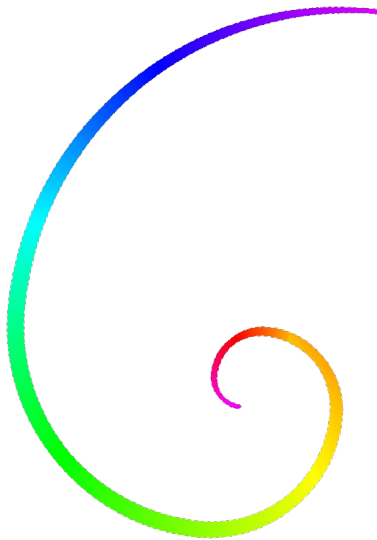


“Spiritual” communications can be direct messages from the Divine; but they can also arise from one's own subconscious, one's “higher” or “lower” self, beings or interlopers on the mental plane such as genies, nature spirits, or magicians, collective thought forms, electromagnetic and chemical signals to the brain, or combinations of these. Hundreds of people “channel” archangels, ascended masters, and aliens, without verifying the content or the source—and usually without having any way to verify either one.

Other paranormal abilities such as psychokinesis (moving things without physical means), materializing and de-materializing objects, and bilocation (being in two or more places at once) are even more likely to inspire fear, disbelief, or worship, and require even more para-normal discretion and wisdom.

Some people think any paranormal ability is fraud, hysteria, or evil, and that anyone who has such experiences is of unsound mind or character. This presents a dilemma to someone with psychic abilities. It is natural to attempt to justify one's sanity and credibility, which is impossible since the sensations are para-normal: beyond normal. Arguing is not usually fruitful, and rejection can be difficult to bear.

Paranormal abilities are not bad or wrong in any way, but they are not intrinsically spiritual. Caution, vigilance and discretion are advisable.

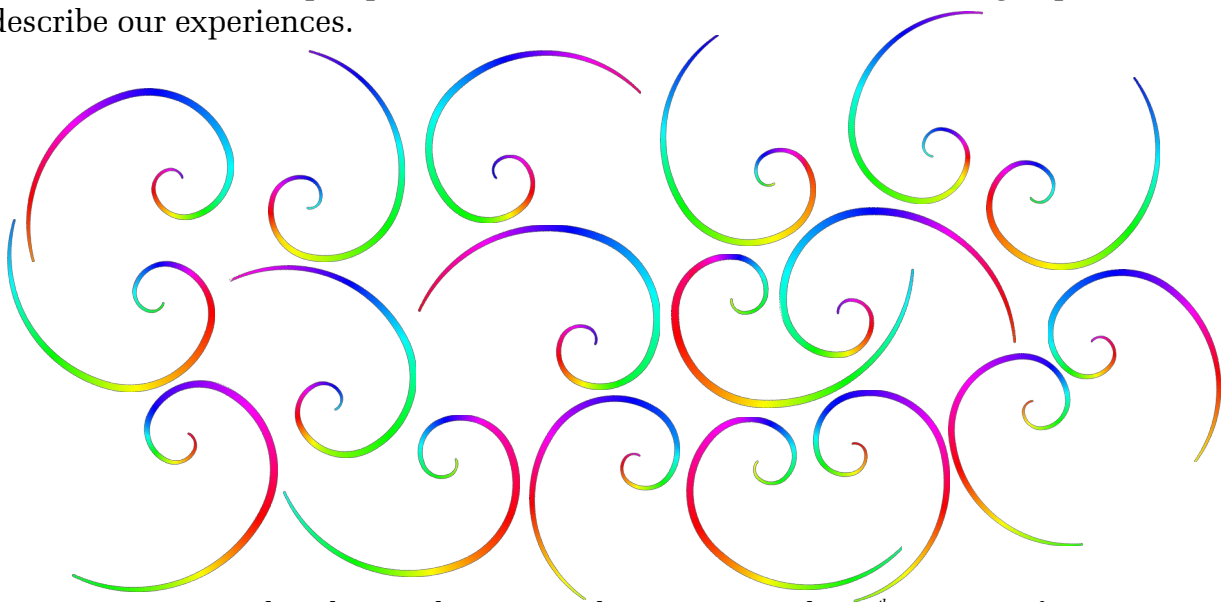


Spirituality has to do with our actions, our choices, our thoughts and motives, our integrity, the purity of our heart. It is shown by how earnestly and effectively we express our goodness. It has to do with how we use any ability we have, how we utilize our powers.

Spirituality means following our conscience. Our conscience is in our soul, not in our head. It is not a set of rules. St. Augustine even said that a well-trained conscience is superior to the dictates of the Church. No one else knows or has the authority to judge our path or our conscience. It is inherently personal and private. Others in society have a right to judge whether our actions were harmful and to punish according to social norms, but they do not have access to our conscience.

Spirituality is individual. For one person, a spiritual life means making money and employing thousands of people during an economic crisis. For another person, being spiritual means living a quiet, humble life caring for a handicapped family member. For another person, a spiritual life means treating a spouse kindly, or inventing a useful device, or defending one's community from danger, or creating beautiful, inspiring artwork, or even focusing inward and not doing anything in particular outwardly. There are no external criteria for being spiritual. There is no standard for how one looks, how one dresses, how one acts or how one speaks.

Increasing in spirituality is usually called “the” spiritual path because it really is one—with **infinite variations!** We grow in different ways, in different orders, with different flavors and perspectives. We use different terms and thought processes to describe our experiences.



Spirituality has nothing to do with our belief system. Beliefs change naturally as we grow in awareness. The more truthful our beliefs, the clearer and more straightforward our path.

Spiritually, both effort and action count; both intent and result count. A good result does not nullify an ill motive. Innocent intent does not guarantee a benign result. One's integrity is shown by how one responds to the results, by whether one takes responsibility and changes if the results were harmful.

There are no short-cuts on the spiritual path. It is impossible to hide anything from our Creator. Whatever is inside comes to light. No specific abilities or powers are required. There is no checklist, no set of goals to meet or deeds to accomplish.

Pure and harmless intent is required. Sincerely **doing one's best** to act according to that intent is required. Doing one's best to follow one's conscience is required. When and whether we do our best is known only to ourselves and to one who is united with the One that created our souls.

When we use any power with good motives and good results, it can help the spiritual progress of ourselves and many others as well. It also brings inner peace, and ultimately, lasting joy.

Artist acknowledgements: Martin Capek (lightning), Jiang Hongyan (rabbits), Sergey Novidov (predator businessman) @ dreamstime.com; Hewahatage Nalin (crown), Eric Issalee (lion), EWA Studio (kitten), Hanna Zasimova (spiral) @ 123rf.com; Francesco Rollandin (tiger), Auric Threshold (bridge), Machovka (sunflower), GDJ (people) and unknown artists (spider, snake, train, pyramid, magician, sorcerer, spectrum) @ openclipart.org; Shealah Craighead (Itzhak Perlman, 2007), JoJan (Galileo), Sting (Socrates) @ commons.wikimedia.org; and unknown artist (medal) @ vectorportal.com.