

Traps

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Even experiences of this kind are often mixed with ego, however. The illusory self sets up traps that are hard to avoid. I spent a few summers in Buddhist retreats that always made me feel very peaceful and happy. Although I'm sure a big part of these feelings came from letting go, I now know that another part came from an ego delighted by its identification with a new, peaceful and spiritual person. I was proud to have released my self. Epstein offers a good description of this phenomenon:

'As meditation unfolds, the coarser aspects of the self, as personified by emotional upheaval or by the chattering mind, tend to become quieter, but more subtle attachments or identifications become visible in their stead. In this sense, meditation becomes rather like a labyrinth, with each new opening and each new perception about the self revealing yet another opportunity for attachment and release. What the meditator must keep confronting is her own capacity for conceit or pride, her own instinctive thirst for certainty, her own ability to co-opt the meditative process for narcissistic ends. Meditation is a means of indefatigably exposing this narcissism, of highlighting every permutation of the self-experience so that no aspect remains available for narcissistic recruitment.'