

We got class?

We mostly live in a crowd whether we call it a family or community or society. These crowds are like little circles in a big lake when leaves and tiny (or big) objects drop into them. These circles then merge, overlap or touch one another. The general idea is that we live in growing groups of people depending on what we have.

In terms of what we “have,” we can divide ourselves into four groups or classes. The first group “has” or collects power, that is, a supporting crowd around itself: these are the politicians. Then there those that collect titles (PhD, Dato, etc), that is, the schooled class. The third class collects wealth: this is the business class. The fourth is the workers, those who support the other three classes with essential services like our daily meals and clothing. They build our houses, and keep our spaces clean, functional and liveable.

Although class mobility is possible, we must generally play by the rules, if we want to move up, so to speak. We must “have” those tokens, totems or fetishes – the crowd, the titles, the wealth, or at least the works (physical and personal effort), to start with. Such a system is necessarily stressful, as there seems to be only one way to progress: upwards.

Every crowd member has been conditioned since birth to be like a balloon to ascend the crowded skies. While doing this, these balloons try to keep their strings tied to their starting-point or the ground, that fills them with air in the first place. This is not always easy, as the strings easily break, or get tangled along the way. Or, the balloons just deflate and drop, or worst of all, they burst.

In such a crowd of crowds, circles within circles, each defined by things and titles, we often feel a need to belong somewhere, or so we are often told. These are the voices from the crowds who want us for themselves, like balloons that need more air.

Since the fourth class is at the bottom -- and balloons naturally need to rise -- the higher classes seem to be the only crowds we can rise into. The sure effect of this class struggle is called “stress.” (This statement alone may change, even save, lives, but that depends if we read this deeply enough.)

Our general unhappiness, clearly, is a result of the belief that there is only one way to go, that is, up (as we have seen above). Even religions that model themselves in this direction must be stressful, happily or painfully. If our primitive urge to climb “up” to heaven, to be a member of someone’s God, or be rewarded with a guru’s smile of approval, then it is subtly or violently demanded of us that we must forget everything else we are really capable of. There is no salvation outside the crowd, we are reminded.

Despite having such a perfect upward moving scheme of things, we seem to be hardwired with a natural propensity to be. We all begin life with this very idea: when we are born, bring nothing with us: we *have* nothing, we merely are. And this is most precious to us: our lives. Most other things, as it were, are what we “have,” that is, they should serve to give our lives the fullest expression of beauty and truth (the only two things that really matter in life in the end).

In other words, we need not be swept upwards by this tsunami of “haves.” It is possible for us to stand aside and let this deluge sweep by, safely leaving us on the high ground of our own goodness and wisdom. It is not an easy choice, but certainly the best. Indeed, such choices are the defining moments of what are really good and true in our lives. Indeed, this is what differentiates us from a species: we begin to be a true individual.

An individual can never be a member of a crowd. He must stand above, even away, from the crowd. Politicians learn this too late. The schooled elite never stop learning this. The business class think they can buy anything, even crowd membership. And the working class must keep working at it. If we got class, this might be all we *have*. We might never *be* other vital things that really enrich or fulfill our lives.

The greatest moments in civilization are when individuals free themselves from the crowd. Someone wanders along a new uncertain path, or finds a way of stopping the floods, or tames the land to good use; above all, we must seek truth and teach beauty. The individual must stand away and above the crowd to bring forth more individuals, or, at least, so that the crowd can live happily and wholesomely.

For, the crowd does not think. It is incapable of seeking truth or beauty. It is incapable of liberating itself. A crowd is a prison, walled by greed, by hate, by delusion, by fear.

The Buddha is always alone, radiant under the Bodhi tree. He represents the best and highest that any being, human, divine or otherwise, can be. Buddhahood, or full awakening to the true individual 's potential for good, is a choice we must make. It is the most important choice we can ever make. It is a decision to cut off our umbilical cord from the crowd. Only then we really breathe on our own; we truly live, we become free individuals.

To be true individuals, we must begin by looking within with calm and clarity. Looking deep, we see everything else within ourselves. If we really look with the same eye all around us, above, below, front, left, back, right, in between and everywhere, we see but ourselves.

Where have all the crowds come from? Where have they all gone? If we look really deep enough, there are no crowds at all, just people seeking themselves, not knowing where to go. A crowd must keep moving. It must keep moving in every direction until each of us can find the direction that frees us best. “Up” is not always the best direction.

The best direct we must go is *in*, that is, within ourselves. For, only by looking in, we can see all the true directions, all around us, above, below, front, left, back, right, in between and everywhere. Then we are truly prepared to choose the right direction.

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