

## Individuation

[From: **(Duka) Upaññāta Sutta** (A 2.5), SD 51.5 (5.1.4).]

In the **(Duka) Upaññāta Sutta** (A 2.5), the Buddha declares that we should discover the truth and see true reality “for ourself” (*upaññāta*). This may mean making some sacrifice, but we are only letting go of what holds us back from personal and spiritual growth. In the Buddha’s case, his sacrifice is really great: he is willing to leave his family, power and wealth all behind. The **(Duka) Upaññāta Sutta** records that he is even ready to give up his own life to gain awakening.

That is why we respectfully and admirably call it the “great renunciation.” It is difficult to emulate the Buddha, but he is a great example reminding us that self-awakening is possible and necessary. The Buddha is saying, “What I have done, you can do, too.” Actually, it is easier for us, since the most difficult trials have been faced and overcome by the Buddha himself. He is like a trail-blazer who cuts out a clear path for us through the strange and dangerous jungle so that we can safely journey to our spiritual goal.<sup>1</sup> This is the path out of the worldly crowd through the life-transforming path to the city of true individuals. It is the process of **spiritual individuation**, that of personal development and spiritual liberation.

If we apply the **(Duka) Upaññāta Sutta** (A 2.5) teaching of **the 2 kinds of quest** to our contemporary situation, we can usefully speak of the quest of the crowd and the quest of the individual. Politics and religion (especially organized religion) are characterized by **the quest of the crowd**. Just as politics works best with the crowd empowering an individual as its leader or the few as the government, religion, too, works to condition and control the crowd to be docile to it—that is, to the religious leader or the religious elite—and to serve its needs and wants. In such systems, dissidents and mavericks are unlikely to have any freedom or even allowed to exist.

In a spiritual system like early Buddhism—which teaches the process of spiritual individuation and awakening of the individual—the crowd and tribalism are seen as being un conducive to spiritual development and as the stage and source for suffering and cyclic life. In such a crowd or tribal system, its members must learn —not from a common or timeless truth—but from their predecessors and peers for social and intellectual development.

In a tribe, the individual or isolated person is either unable or not fully able to develop any social or intellectual knowledge, much less, spiritual growth. The one is expected to follow and lose himself in the many. The nail that sticks out must be hammered in for a smooth and cosmic surface. The individual must be absorbed into the tribe, and must absorb the tribe into himself. Such a tribal member may discover some new learning or technique, but this must always be seen as the fruit, even reward, of the whole tribe rather than the effort or genius of an individual—whatever that is good is for the greater glory of the tribe, or perhaps of God as the tribe personified.

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<sup>1</sup> These journey and goal are beautifully epitomized in the parable of the ancient city: see **Nagara Sutta** (S 12.65), [SD 14.2](#).

Humans may be a social species, but this is not our foremost quality. We are quick at learning from one another and for working together to effect the greatest benefits of the common good. What sets humans apart from other worldly species is our propensity for the individual genius of initiative and creativity, and the propensity for the love and expression of truth and beauty.

The human species allows, indeed, thrives on individual evolution, spiritual growth. The human species, while still evolving, can and does direct man away from the species, from crowd control, and up the spiral path of individuation and spiritual transformation. This capacity for appreciating the individual in the crowd is unique to humans—it is called **humanity**—earmarked by love and compassion. On deeper and higher levels, when the individual understands himself as being no different from any other in the species, this selflessness evolves into **divinity**—earmarked by gladness and equanimity. These are the qualities of the true individual.

**The true individual** is exemplified by the Buddha, the fully self-awakened, especially symbolised by his lone radiant figure meditating under the Bodhi tree. Without this individuating capacity, humans will always be merely an animal species, a subhuman crowd, a religious tribe in quest of power and plenty.

We may learn from giants amongst us, we may emulate them, even stand on their shoulders, but we have to make that stand ourself. More than a "stand," it is our vision that makes us rise above even the giants. We will be giants in our own time, and then others may stand on our shoulders. The Buddha, on the other hand, is a giant who teaches us to bare our own shoulder in readiness for the spiritual task of individuation.

The task of individuation is **the quest of the individual**—the search for the self. This is the understanding of our mind and personality, how not to be fettered by them, but rather working to free ourself from what our senses and mind limit, and what our personality conjures up. When the mind is free to really see, it sees truth. When our personality is free from self-fetters, it blossoms into true creativity—the creation of beauty and the joy of appreciating beauty. This is the spiritual life of truth and beauty.

It is in this spirit that we should understand what the Buddha means when teaches **the group of 30 fortunate youths** (*bhadda, vaggiya sahāya*), when they are driven in the search for a woman who has stolen their property. When they meet the Buddha and asks him if he has seen that woman passing his way, the Buddha, in turn, asks them if, rather than seeking a woman, it is better for them to seek the self (*attānaṃ gaveseyyātha*). Being wise despite their youth, they answer that self-quest is indeed the better quest. The Buddha teaches them, they listen, understand and become arhats, those worthy ones on account of their self-awakening and full liberation.<sup>2</sup>

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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<sup>2</sup> *Bhadda, vaggiya Sahāyaka Vatthu* (Mv 1.4,3 @ V 1:22) @ [SD 48.3 \(2\)](#).