

## **Path without numbers**

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We are attracted to religion (or whatever we call it) more often for reasons other than what that religion upholds as its highest ideal. Even after affirming ourselves as devout (or not so devout) faithful followers, we still do not always uphold, or even know, what the true ideals of our faith are.

The reason for this is probably our Scriptures are so large and complicated that it depends on who interprets or is allowed to interpret them. Even then, whether the followers actually listen to them or understand them or how they understand them is another matter.

## **Living dead**

Many of us are attracted to a religion as a crowd phenomenon or as a lifestyle. We tend to follow the flow of trend. Most local Buddhists, for example, are not intellectually inclined nor love to read (the excuse nowadays is that they prefer PDF copies than hard ones).

The reality is that they are more concerned with looking for clients for profit, and for proper rituals, especially for the dead. We are like the dead among the living; then, we are the dead burying the dead.

## **Don't smile first**

Unlike in Thailand or the Philippines, local Chinese are often still insular. We dare not smile at others unless they smile first, maybe. However, those who are English-schooled are more easily converted to Christianity, mainly for the advantage of social dominance they still exert here.

The local Council of Churches last week complained that our public Christmas decorations were not Christian enough. But it's Christmas!

## **Interfaith joy**

On the other hand, Buddhists never complained about how Vesak is celebrated. Very few Buddhists even know it is an uposatha day, and few even know what the word means. In Singapore, many Buddhists tend to be more excited with Christmas than with Vesak. Partly, I think, they see Vesak as a sacred day and Christmas as a time to enjoy themselves.

Anyway, the real measure of a true religion is not in its numbers or how we celebrate Christmas. The largest piece of the global religious pie comprises the Catholics. The scandals of child molestation by their Priests and Princes of the Church is of biblical proportions, too.

A growing number of Christians, especially their priests and pastors, do meditate (breath meditation and lovingkindness), more often than Buddhists, I suspect.

## **Not all can be Buddhist**

If we consider religion in terms of worldly success, wealth and power, then **numbers** do count (they always do). But then, this can be illogical. Take, for example, not everyone can be doctors or lawyers, and not everyone needs to. Or, that not everyone needs to be fathers or mothers: I don't have the statistics for this.

My point is that to be a Buddhist is quite the opposite of what other people do with religion. Early Buddhism rejects the notion of worshipping any God-figure or Buddha-figure. Heaven or Paradise, if it were to exist, can only be temporary. The ladder to heaven may be rung (sic) with merits, but the snakes' mouths open and wait behind the heavenly gates and gardens. We all have heard of Snakes and Ladders.

## **Uncounted Buddhists**

The real idea of being a good Buddhist is **not** to be counted or labelled or marketed. We refuse to be bullied or bushed by the crowd. (From the saying, "a good bush needs no wine," or something).

The crowd never thinks: it only heads for the blazing light of Guru wisdom. In some way, I suspect the Buddha must have considered bearded and long-haired laughing Guru figures ominous and infectious.

It's a good idea then that true monastics are clean-shaven of head and face, and wear simple monastic cloth, not messy shirts and pants.

## **Path without numbers**

Buddhists, then, are the only people of faith and wisdom who walk the path without numbers. To be a Buddhist is not to be a statistic, but to be:

*compassionately firm like the earth,  
flow along like water,  
be warm and radiant like fire, and  
breathe wind and life into themselves and others.*

We often love being alone to sit joyfully in the cool shade of ancient trees, to close our eyes and see what eyes fail to see.

## **Waking from a dream**

To most religious people, life is dream and so they sleep on so that they don't lose their dream. Buddhists wake from their sweet dreams and work to realize those beautiful dreams of happiness here and now. The Buddhist life is spacious and unconditional: we welcome anyone who seeks peace, love and light.

Buddhists have nothing to prove to anyone. When we ask a Buddhist to prove how **karma** or **rebirth** is true, he would probably calmly, humbly, say: You have to find out for yourself. If you can't or won't, then you will never be able to be Buddhist. We can't join a Buddhist club or tribe. We can only **become** Buddhist, a becoming Buddhist.

### **I think**

To be caught in samsara is to love counting and be counted, to measure people and things, to acquire, to accumulate. Those who walk the true path are uncountable, with only a backpack of bare necessities.

Buddhism is not about being A Buddhist; it is simply about **being** Buddhist -- I think. I mean it's harder to think if you are not a Buddhist.

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

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