

Equality

The Buddha said that there is no escape from the stresses and strains of position and status merely by considering ourselves equal in some way. Is this true?

Egalitarian values seem to be becoming stronger and stronger in modern Western society. This certainly has many positive aspects, but it can go too far with the wish to try to make everybody the same. In some ways I think we do actually spot this hazard ourselves and then keep celebrating obvious diversities; but in yet other ways I think we are blind to this whole situation.

I can see a growing tendency for this attitude to enter into our everyday interactions with each other. An example of the good side of it all is that if someone falls behind in a group there is the effort to help them along; an example of the bad side of it however is that if someone rises up above a group in some way, even when this is due to greater ability or experience, then sometimes the group tries to bring them down, rather than using it as an inspiration to raise themselves up. This is the bad side of it.

These two reactions help to keep everyone on a similar level and thereby their egos comfortable; but this enterprise is not free of stress. What is actually happening here is merely that we exchange the stress of hierarchy for the stress of conformity. This can lead to an oppressive, closed-minded and rather mediocre society or group.

I would guess this tendency has its roots in the principle of fair allocation of material resources within a group, and therefore I would likewise expect that it is most prevalent in societies that have had very limited resources in the past. So we can know the wholesome side of it and hence excuse ourselves. But in modern society there are other safeguards regarding material welfare and survival which make these reactions quite redundant on the level of individual interaction.

What we see happening in good spiritual communities is the allocation of resources according to need. Also we see different people taking the lead in different circumstances – hence people's *abilities* are taking the lead rather than their *personalities*. With this in mind it is my view that if we sacrifice this kind of benevolent leadership for the sake of equality we are throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

I offer this for your reflection.

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