

Communities, cults and tribe: How to recognize the difference.

There is a transitional revolution occurring in the world today. People are beginning to make significant shifts to move towards the process of living together again as opposed to what has been going on over the last few hundred years with increasingly advanced separation and forming of nuclear-focused families.

However when investigating the playground of forming communities it is very difficult to know what one is looking at. People's motivations for forming community are vast and expansive, most come from various ideological perspectives as well as a sense of feeling that "we need to do something different", others however come from a less heady spectrum. It is important to get an understanding that most communities fail to continue after the first year or two. This is what I want to point out in this article, to look into why communities fail, which are the communities that thrive and why. As a result I'm going to redefine terms and split them into 3 categories of situations you might find.

Communities:

Whereas cults are belief-based, communities are interest-based. A community in the terms I'm using here, is something that forms when a group of people who may have entirely different belief systems all find a common interest and work together to create it. This can be interest in the land or in circus performing, or interest in making music or in healing arts. All these interests incorporate many different approaches, which means the people that get together are drawn by the broad interest that each shares. They also are drawn by the same feeling that "something needs to change" and "I need to be around people more". This is very often how communities in businesses start up or even communities associated with a particular socio-economic status. Groups of people can be brought together due to situations and circumstances beyond their control and so they have a common interest in getting enough food together to eat, it then becomes a community project.

The difficulty is that the community is full of individuals. There does not necessarily need to be a strong bonding that draws people together and forms the kinds of passionate responses you might get in a cult. A community is much more loosely formulated and is also not as strong. They are a group of people that share a goal or a passion but they may not have passion for each other. They are still focused in an external expression and fundamentally this is still about an image in the mind rather than a felt sense in the body. One can very easily create the city in the country with this type of base, with many individuals getting together to live yet still needing their own compartmentalism in order to help themselves gradually adjust to being around people for long periods of time. The point is that a bunch of individuals forming something is unstable as they don't have belief in the same thing, although might be interested in the same goals. Without common interest and common direction towards that goal the community will fall apart. The rules of communities aren't as rigid as those of cults when it comes to who joins as part of the community, but they will require the group to have the same interest and so will organize rota systems of fairness. That is how the community runs itself to make sure everyone gets "their space" and what each individual needs. The concern is for the goal and the main interest of the group but at the same time is still very attached to the individualistic approach to life and individual belief systems are often shared and allowed.

Cults:

Cults are a “self” or ego-based community of people who are brought together by a belief system. All the people within the group believe the same things. They have an extreme and sometimes very powerful bond to each other, which can mean the belief overrides their instinctual process, such as famous cults like Charles Manson, the Moonies and others. Of course cults don't have to be violent, they can be associated with a particular practice or guru, so for example the work of Gandhi or the practice of meditation is a form of cultism if everyone is required to believe that meditation is “good”. Osho's group is and was a cult, as are all the ashrams and various forms of monastic practices and most modern shamanism etc. These are cults in the sense I am using here. Cults also group up around specific ways of engaging with nature like the proponents of “perma-culture” or even being involved with a particular tradition such as Native American rites or expressions. Often they have a leader or charismatic person at their head who is “forming” the group. They can come from a belief that “veganism is good for everyone” or that “spirituality” means x, y or z. These are all the same thing, just with a different name.

They are all fundamentally associated with a strongly held and shared central belief system in the terms I am using here to describe a cult. Without the belief the cult would fall apart, so it is the belief that holds it all together. All religions including those of a scientific-based expression are cultist. All cults will have a basic requirement and you will not be allowed entry if you don't meet it. Cults often draw people in emotionally by feeling they are going to become part of a family if they have the same way of thinking or if they allow the premises and principles of the cult to become their one and only foundation. Rudolph Steiner's approach as well as those of the Macrobiotics and also Scientology and many other expressions with this way of expressing are cults. There is a strong feeling at the root of these expressions but fundamentally they are belief-based. The cult might be said to be a little more instinctive than the community, which generally is a bit more head-only. This is head with a bit more body, there is no focus on the individual or each person's needs, it is all about a one unit approach, while being based in belief.

Tribe:

Tribe is altogether different from the two above. This is based on instinctive relationship. While people use this word willy-nilly and are happy to call themselves “tribal leaders” or even just “tribal”, actually there is such an extreme rarity of tribe in the world today that it would be quite uncommon for people to actually know what this means. It is associated with family, not the nuclear family models we are used to, and not family imbued with all the tensions from which we originate. Instead it is real natural family which again very few people have had connection to. Also it's not just the lip-service-based expression that one can find at any hippy gathering, this is like an instantaneous life or death protection response for each and every member of the tribe. There is an actual bodily feeling, that one needs to protect and nourish each and every member of the tribe with the very essence of the body until the point of death. This sounds extreme but the same kind of expression is felt for the members of a cult except their instincts are dominated by belief which then encourages the “tribal feel”.

It is very easy to form a cult but extremely rare to see tribe forming. Tribe is an innately experiential process that is about non-division of the people within the group from one another. It is about a sharing that is beyond words. This can be seen in many instances within our society but isn't very often seen in actual full expression of society. It is seen in the connection of mother and baby, and in some of our family interactions that are not based in anything but an unconditional connection. It is seen in the connection that friends have for each other and the connection that street gangs have, the brotherhood or sisterhood quality, though these too can very easily slip into cults. The main difference between a tribe and a cult is that with the former there is no belief system, it is based on an innate feeling of being "in-love with" the people in the group, which comes naturally with neither expectation nor prompting nor reason. For want of a better description it is a feeling of being "at home" and being "in love". One important thing with tribe is that it doesn't come from intentional direction. Whereas the cult and community are intentional communities, tribe is unintentional. Originally it came from the blending of families to form tribe, now it comes from situations where friends get together and connect on imperceptible and deep levels where they cannot say why they want to be together other than that they are "in-love" with the feeling of it. This is a very powerful connection, it only disperses at death of the whole tribe. It is the same energy that connected the native peoples of the world together and it is the same energy that is within all the plant and animal kingdom.

These three descriptions are very important for us to look at when seeing where we are in our lives and what it is that we can manage to go towards, and also in being able to differentiate one thing from another. There is abundant advertising for community projects under a myriad of tempting names, drawing people together. But all the while, if there is not a true sense of the attractiveness of the tribe, the innate body sense and feel, then it is bound to rely on a community interest or a cultist belief system. Whatever else humans want they want tribe more than anything, however for most of us tribe is very difficult to go towards and to really be able to engage with, whereas community and even cult is more accessible and seems more possible. These three words I am using without judgment, one is not better than the other it is simply expression of the continuum of the human condition at this stage. While the final direction is tribe it may be very difficult for us to reach to this.

Most situations of cult and community are a direction that is skewed by "self"/ ego from natural course,. The movement to tribe is what is instinctively wanted but from where we currently are it is difficult to get to this. This is why the use of potent "self" antidote herbal medicines such as ayahuasca and psilocybin mushrooms and numerous others are vital as they help us restore the union upon which tribe is founded. These plants help us revive the natural connection. The issues that come up with cult and community will always make them unstable structures if people lose belief in the faith or they lose interest in the community. Tribe is for life, it isn't a commitment of the mind but rather is a realization of "in loveness" which is a feeling that you can't actually be anywhere else, it's not a reasoned judgment. When bonds form in this manner they are extremely strong. Very often when family connect and come together to form bonds this is how strong tribe can form, and also when friends who are wanting to look deeper into the world and at ways to naturally connect to one another for tribe without intention.

This is just to present the options and give a realization of what is out there. These categories, as ever, are a spectrum which attempts to broadly sweep all the possibilities but there will obviously be combinations of feelings involved in communities that form in potentially all 3 areas in some camps. However the nature of the movement from cult and community to tribe is a transition of the human being to acknowledge their roots and stop looking to past or future for inspiration, but to be in this moment in this body with the energy there is to hand. This ends all idealism of whatever kind and is the instinctive way we know how to be together.

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