



See Your Connection with Others and Not the Differences

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When I was in first grade, an older woman with glasses came down to our classroom and gathered a few students including myself. She proceeded to sit all of us on a bench and ask us questions covering a variety of topics. She told us that we were the three smartest kids in first grade and "gifted" and would be meeting with her weekly until we finished elementary school. I remember thinking the entire thing was funny and proceeded to give her smart ass answers to various questions. For example, she asked us what kind of food birds ate and I told her "baked potatoes" and other statements along those lines.

She didn't seem amused. Around 20 minutes later, she sent me back to the classroom but kept the other two students she was chatting with there. For the next year, she would come down every week or so and grab these two students out of my class of thirty or so and chat with them independently for around an hour. One of those kids was a friend of mine. I ended up feeling really left out by not being able to leave class and go with these gifted students anymore. I felt as if I'd failed.

Every year in each class that I was in until I finished elementary school, that same woman would come down and grab these two students and take them upstairs to her office where she would talk to them about whatever topics gifted students were supposed to be talking about. They had apparently been judged "gifted" in a short conversation that we had when we were six years old and I'd been kicked out of the "gifted club" by my smart ass answers. I remember quite well that these students seemed to feel a tremendous sense of accomplishment in having been judged gifted by this woman when they were younger. For what it was worth, I felt like somewhat of a failure for having been kicked out of the gifted club at this age.

When I got into junior high school, this sort of separation continued. People began to be sorted into different math classes based on their ability. The sorting continued and as school progressed, it became more and more pronounced. This is something I saw started to separate people. The smart kids typically wouldn't spend time with the average kids. The athletes wouldn't spend time with the non athletes. The popular girls separated into different groups than the unpopular girls. All around, there was a tremendous amount of separation going on.

An interesting thing about school is that our current education system is focused on success and becoming someone different from who we currently are. The emphasis of education is on what we lack and how we are different from others. We are tested in a variety of subjects and classified and separated based on our ability to do different subjects. There is a continual separation of us going on from other people almost from the moment we enter school. This separation is imposed on us from the outside and is something that we are quite unaware of. At some point, however, in addition to the educational system separating us into various groups, we also start separating ourselves from others.

As time goes on, there becomes the rich and the poor. We separate ourselves based on religion. We separate ourselves based on where we live. Kids start separating themselves based on social class. We separate ourselves based on race. This separation that's first imposed on us by the outside continues to become more and more pronounced as we separate ourselves based on factors we start to learn from others. Schools separate us, our parents and others also teach us how to be separate from others. Pretty soon, we are in a place where we are perfectly isolated and quite alone.

I'm sure that you can remember when you first entered school how easy it was to make friends with various people. I remember this well. In fact, back when I was in kindergarten I think everyone was friends and learned to be friends with each other. Everything was new. Kids play together and are able to celebrate and learn from each other.

I'm not sure what the point was. It may have been in first grade, or second grade, but there comes a point when our separateness from others just takes over and is like a landslide and appears to never end. It just starts going. As we move up the ladder and get older it becomes harder and harder for us to make friends with other people. We walk up and try and happily speak to strangers and are viewed with suspicion. By the time most of our education is over, we need to make massive efforts to relate to others.

Connection and contribution are not valued by only our educational system but by much of society. We are trained from an early age by the social and educational system to be alone and independent. We are taught to break up in small groups based on our strengths more so than we are taught to get along as groups of people. Our ability to live as a group in society is dying in so many ways and this is making us quite lonely. Most of us are taught that to be happy and fulfilled we need to be better than others.

When we are small children, we don't have self consciousness. At some point, however, we learn to become very self conscious. We become self conscious about how we are different from others and how others view us. When we become self conscious, this starts draining energy. Energy we could be putting into connecting with others, for example, starts going into comparing what's different about us from others. We become more and more concerned about what others think and this becomes more of a priority in many respects than what we even think. For young children, it's quite normal not to be self-conscious and care about what others think. Young children can connect with everyone. They smile and say hello to the beggar on the street and look at everyone as their friend. Children are so *totally themselves*.

It's incredibly unique to know and see people who are able to totally be themselves. They are so rare and people who are totally themselves know no other way to be. They are taught the beauty of being themselves. When you think about the rare people you know in your life who are themselves, I'm sure you are also thinking about some of the happier people that you know. The happiest people out there are able to simply be themselves. They are totally able to be themselves and unconcerned about the differences that may exist between themselves and others. They are themselves.

We all have a need to be happy. The only way to truly be happy is to simply be yourself. This means not fighting with who you are and who others think you should be. This means not resisting who you are. It means just being who you are. It's absolutely magical to just be yourself. Be yourself and love every aspect of yourself and who you are. When you're

comfortable with who you are, you can be comfortable with others.

Your relationship with yourself is something that determines your relationship with others. For progress in your life, the most important thing is awareness of who you are and not an obsession with where you believe you should be. Your mind, like most minds, is likely conditioned with an "ideal" of the sort of person you should be. This ideal is the result of numerous judgments and separations between you and others that have likely been occurring throughout your own life. Every time you see someone out there who's better at something, who is promoted over you, who is richer or more attractive than you, who is more well known than you, the concept of this ideal is activated within you.

There is a constant effort within most of us to become this ideal person we believe we should be. There's a conflict between what we are and what we believe we should be. Every thought and emotion that we have is being interpreted and we have a constant discomfort with ourselves. In order to be happy, you need to embrace the person you are. If you aren't yourself, you're constantly trying to be someone and are never going to be happy. When you learn to accept who you are, you begin to find freedom. To accept who you are is to be free.

One of the best ways I believe to be happy and fulfilled is to help others grow. The reason this leads to so much happiness and fulfillment is due to the fact that by helping others, we learn to connect and be less self conscious and see fewer differences between ourselves and others. This connection is a huge missing component in the way most of us are taught to think in society. The more you help others, the more you connect and can grow. Unlike many things in the world, we all have an equal opportunity to grow and to serve. It doesn't matter what our social or physical condition is: We all have an equal opportunity to help others. To truly experience growth and happiness you need the desire for growth and contribution.

THE LESSON

Be yourself and strive to recapture the free self-confidence of your childhood. Embrace the person you are and avoid being overly concerned with what others think. If you cannot embrace yourself, you will never find true happiness as you will always be trying to be someone else.

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