

Where Did We Come From?

Understanding The Communitarian Movement:

History, Vision, Process, Leadership, and Lifeways

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Introduction:

The word *community* is used in a variety of ways, sometimes referring to people and other times to a place, and still more often as a spiritual glue that holds people together around ideas and causes. We offer this definition of the human word *community*:

- 1. It is a human collective, truly a family of families.***
- 2. The emphasis within the collective is on passing forward in time the relationship, culture, and organization that has evolved and that has been received and improved throughout history.***
- 3. The collective regulates its life through the relationships or connections among its members. A community is an organized social response to authentic life.***
- 4. The resulting community or tribe has a reality and an identity that it offers to its members and partners the gift of self-knowledge, membership, and agency.***

The reality of community is grounded in nature. From the introduction to the book, *America's Communal Utopias*ⁱ, Donald Pitzer writes, "Communal sharing is as old as the earliest known fossils of living things on earth and as new as electronic communities in cyberspace. More than three billion years ago, stromatolite bacteria formed colonies to protect all but those on their exteriors from deadly ultraviolet sunlight." Carl Sagan, in *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*,ⁱⁱ referring to this earliest illustration of community-in-nature, wrote, "This may have been an early impetus for a communal way of life. Some died that others may live ... we glimpsed the earliest life forms on earth and the first message conveyed is not of nature red in tooth and claw but of a Nature of cooperation and harmony." Sagan states that human community is necessary for human evolution adding, "In the dim recesses of the past as human beings began to develop, they also discovered the security, solidarity, and survival offered by cooperative and communal organization."

Dieter Duhm, sociologist, historian, and psychoanalyst, in an essay titled, “Community as a Universal Way of Living,” in *Beyond You and Me*,ⁱⁱⁱ a Gaia Education book on the ecovillage movement, writes of this:

“The original community of humans is not the family but the tribe. The original community is the human vessel into which human life, including the family, is embedded. It is part of what I call the sacred matrix, inherent to life. In it, the cosmic order connects with the social order. It is not bound to certain times or cultures, rather it is an integral part of our human social existence that lies beyond history. It could only be destroyed through violence, and it is only when we have found a full equivalent to it that is aligned with our times, that we again can enter into full and wholesome relationships with each other.”

Robert Kegan, in *The Evolving Self*^{iv}, describes how a human life—your life too—goes from one envelopment to another, from one holding environment to the next, the first being the womb, the second the family, the third the neighborhood and school system, etc. Kegan points out that the individual becomes too large to confine and the holding environment becomes too stressed to contain, and this forces an emergence into a next stage of development and the next holding envelope: society.

Our society receives the individual person into its care under the assumption that youth 18 to 21 years of age should be able to handle their own affairs. The belief is that by this age children have become mature enough to ask for the information, assistance, and special help they need to make a living and engage the institutions of society. However, this assumption is proving to be questionable because colleges, employers, spouses, and friends are complaining that development has not been adequate and that many individuals cannot keep necessary agreements for living and working together.

Regarding raising and educating children, most parents confess their own inadequacy yet are quick to point out the faults of schools and institutions designed to help them. In the worst of their stories parents and families are isolated, alienated, and act out their frustration against society. And with regard to society’s challenge of offering each individual a place, a role, a job, a community that resources them, there is much evidence that as a *public* we are not doing well enough. Of course, *all* parents will never do a *perfect* job of parenting, and the policies, laws, and regulations of government will be incapable of being adequately individualized and personalized to provide a satisfactory social environment for children. **Hence, the communitarian movement through all time and in all cultures is based on the recognition that a human community is required to train and support parents and guide other institutions to create positive relationships and human community.** The communitarian movement encourages compassionate relationships. Thus, communitarians value the commitment in their relationships, the shared vision that sustains their efforts, and the good people and their methods for building a vital society.

The communitarian vision is a humble one. It recognizes that human beings truly need to be protected, corrected, guided, motivated, and inspired in order to do their best. In fact, it appears that human beings tend to wait until they are required to inconvenience themselves in order to accomplish a change. Perhaps our global situation is becoming shockingly real enough that some critical mass of us will turn to each other, crossing all boundaries and surpassing all previous limitations, in order to steward life on this planet. To do this we will need to practice relationship in manageable-sized human communities. This always has been the work of communitarians. This is motivated by the knowledge that nothing worthwhile is accomplished that does not come from relationship—from conversation, from dialogue, from disputation; through conflict to moving toward agreement, and finally celebrating shared lifeways that carry us forward into community.

Kosha Anja Joubert and Robin Alfred, editors of *Beyond You and Me*^v in the Gaia Educational Series, write:

“Sustaining community necessarily involves a healing process in which we step out of the cycles of pain, mistrust, and violence that run through human history and take responsibility for initiating new patterns. Most of us have been educated in a way that has made us believe that we are fundamentally greedy and selfish, and that the good life consists of a constant battle against evil forces within and without. We have come to mistrust the inherent goodness of human beings. This is a paradigm that breeds violence, instead of peace.”

Cultural historian Paul S. Boyer^{vi}, in the foreword to *Americas Communal Utopias*, writes of this:

“The communal impulse seems encoded in the genetic makeup of nearly all life forms ... One key to understanding the national character has always been balanced by a powerful affiliative drive drawing men and women into religious congregations, fraternal lodges, ethnic organizations, sports clubs, reform groups, mutual-improvement juntas, professional societies, civic associations—and communal ventures ... Developmental communalism rests on . . . assumptions. First, communal living is a generic social mechanism available in all ages to all peoples, governments, and movements. Second, communal structuring usually is adopted in an early stage of development (or in a crisis) because of the security, solidarity, and ease of experimentation it promises.”

I. The Communitarian Movement Has History

In the 1980s Bill Moyers introduced us to a historian of world stories—mythology. Joseph Campbell was a student and teacher of world cultures and he revealed to us their stories, rituals, and art. He focused on the teaching stories of each culture. In so doing he helped us see how similar humans are no matter what culture or what historic period. Campbell awakened a real hunger in many of us, a hunger to understand our own inner workings and our relationships through having insight into ancient human

themes in our own lives. **Myths** contain a variety of observations and aspirations. Similar to our awakening to the value of mythology is our need to awaken to historic community as a **source** of myth, myths being the *curriculum* for educating and training individuals.

The direct study of human relationships in all cultures and times is done by studying the forms of community that were established. Apart from reference to “humankind,” *community* is the largest word we use to describe how human beings relate to each other. People have always lived in communities because human beings are particularly **dependent on** each other for survival. We humans are slow to develop and slower to attain our full potential of human intelligence. Human beings have always been developed by their communities. One generation develops the next. Whatever else we grow, **the most important crop produced as a collaborative venture by community is the next generation of itself.** Community, being a relationship among families and individuals, has ever been charged with the responsibility to provide security, order, and a sense of direction. Community-as-relationship impresses its values on all segments of relationship: marriage, family, friendship, and collaborators in work settings.

Communitarian history focuses on the connections people have with each other. An individual’s community provides the meaning and the purpose to a variety of relationships and even establishes standards for them—all of which encourages trust-building.

Dieter Duhm³ states,

“Communities flourish if there is trust between their members. They do not function, or only seemingly function, if this trust does not exist. They break down quickly if the social glue was brought about through conformism or hypocrisy. Trust is the core power of a community. Without trust it can maybe take forceful action in the short term but in the long run it will perish. The amount of mutual trust that is present is determinative for everything that is important in the community. Trust determines whether true healing can occur, whether the community grows and flowers in the personal, mental-spiritual, and political realms. I am speaking about trust between men and women, in love relationships, between adults and children, trust in leaders, trust between the center of the community and the periphery, and between different project groups.”

No matter how a human collective is organized, *community* mostly refers to the ongoing everyday nature of human relationships where people are trusting and reaching out to each other. For millennia, within these relationships children were bred and raised and set forth. In these relationships individuals learned to be wise and to have skills and to make plans for the improvement of the whole. Here in relationships—from family to community and on to some larger sense of social order—the moral sense is cultivated, aesthetic awareness is appreciated, and human goodness is honored. Whatever fine things we might say about historical institutions and nation states, they have all been dependent upon the prior relational work done by marriages, families, neighborhoods, or in a word, *community*.

In the book, *Beyond You and Me*, Malidoma Some' from Ghana, who travels throughout the Western world saying, "My purpose is the reclaiming of our intrinsic human nature—our humanness. We have to start by recovering or reinventing family and community, and redefining what a purposeful life is. For this I rely on ancient indigenous wisdom. Having shared life with traditional natives in the Yukon territory as a child, John says, "I also know we have not only slaughtered indigenous people we have darn near killed off our own natural wisdom and spiritual insight in modern times."

Communitarian history observes a great river of interconnective relationships that flows through the terrain of human activity. We are often blind to the point of stories and myths until as adults we discover the practical wisdom in them. Our formal histories have focused too much on the obvious—property, government, crime, and warfare—and have not much valued the relationships among people wherein lies the true human story. Perhaps one of the most world-changing ideas in modern life comes from historical research by women into the lives of women and the relational world they lived in. *The Great Cosmic Mother*^{vii}, by Monica Sjoon and Barbara Mor, published in 1987, presented the fact that most history was a story of men and their exploits and ignored daily life, home life, and the world of familial relationships. They wrote:

"When we say that women created most of early human culture, we are not trying to sound radical. The evidence is there, quite tangible. When we realize how many basic life industries were the invention of women—cooking, food processing and storage, ceramics, weaving, textiles and design, tanning and dyeing, everything related to fire (e.g., chemistry and metallurgy), the medicinal arts, language itself, and the first scripts and glyphs. Grain domestication, animal domestication, religious imagery and ritual, domestic and sacred architecture, the first calendar and the origins of astronomy and on and on—then we don't need to project our imagination far back into the past to confirm these inventions, They are still around us today, they constitute our world . . . We do have to use our imaginations to remember that all were once warm, personal, and lovingly tended arts and crafts originated and sustained by early communities."

Malidoma Some', upon learning how we live in the Western world, offers a dream to restore something that we have almost lost. He writes:

"I dream of a world in which the global village *is interested in drawing together all traditions of the world* to synthesize them into a tradition that is not compartmentalized, hierarchical or competitive; one that doesn't say that one tradition is better than another; one that looks for the kind of beauty that each culture has. It is possible that once synthesized this global village would reflect a cultural universalism. It is a big task and won't happen overnight. But it is worth tackling."

Communitarian history pulls aside the veil of governments and industries and reminds us that a truly good life is relational. All of community life is lived in the intimate zone of mutual care. Within the communitarian movement, a primary concept is that the welfare of the individual relies on the welfare of the whole community because it is a

primary purpose of the whole community to support the concerns of the individual. Communitarians claim that this concept must be rediscovered in each generation. Rudolf Steiner, philosopher and founder of Anthroposophy and the Waldorf School's approach to education, says of this:

*“The healthy social life is found
When in the mirror of each human soul
The whole community finds its reflection,
And when in the community
The virtue of each one is living.”*

In the French revolution the slogan was “one for all and all for one.” As an individual communitarian, John says, “I am encouraged to appreciate my embeddedness in community, which is a *membership* that prepares me for a larger *citizenship* that respects regulation, law and leadership, so long as that leadership and those regulations **uphold a general standard of civility.**” It is community that trains individuals in **propriety and responsibility**. It is community that provides a **civil society that protects** the intimate world of marriage, family, friendship, and also **prepares** people to handle the whole span of living problems. It must be remembered that this psychosocial reality is not created or enforced by law, courts, police, or military; rather, this relational world receives guidance and support primarily from the social pressure of friends and the influence of public opinion. **The whole life of community is lifted when its people are relating effectively and happily with each other and when there is hope for the future of all.**

Ever since we founded the Goodenough Community with a group of friends 30 years ago, Colette and I have attempted to shape a social context where the collaborative relationship between individual and society is obvious. For the communitarian, community is an extensive resource that encourages men to help each other, women to help each other, couples to offer mutual support and families to collaborate in finding the resources they need. The entire community organizes to provide conscientious leaders and clear values to guide the activities of each of these relationship groupings. **Thus, community becomes a comprehensive methodology for personal and social transformation.**

This essay introduces you to the communitarian movement by first pointing out that to see its history is largely a matter of knowing what to look for. Actually, what we are looking at leaps out at us because we have a feeling response to relationship. To be a sustainable community depends on sustainable relationships and these relationships require open, consistent communication. This consistency is supported by a variety of programs and processes in which we learn to plan, decide, and act. **It is a core intention of community to build strong relationships** that are in turn of great value to the sustainability and effectiveness of the whole community. Again, men help men (with

marriage, parenting, work, personal development, and community responsibilities) and something similar might be said of women; also, relational partners work supportively with each other and families resource each other; and, working groups of various kinds not only attend to their tasks in teams but also maintain their relationships. **As a communitarian reviewing the worthiness and effectiveness of any aspect of community, one is looking for intentional relationships which also make valuable contributions to the larger community and society.**

So, to study communitarianism involves going back into history with the knowledge of what to look for—trust, commitment, endurance, ability to resolve conflict, loyalty, and the willingness to follow guidance and direction. Beyond this, we are to look for the transfer of knowledge and power from one person to another, from one group to another, and from one generation to another. **It is through relational empowerment that the commonwealth of one generation is passed forward to another generation ... and to another.** Notice that the building of capacities is dependent on the development of relationships that have the capacity to reconstitute themselves in a next iteration and another generation. Here we are looking both at an educational process and at relational rituals and celebrations that acknowledge the value of personal **maturity, sanity, positive attitude, and creative abilities—four key goals** of human development.

Another aspect of communitarians is that they learn from the past as the **first** step in preparing for the future. *Preparation* is a **key** word because it not only refers to preparation for the next week or season, it also refers to phases of community life where plans are made to positively influence the next generation, making sure that the stories, myths, rituals, and accomplishments of prior history are kept clear and strong as they are passed forward. This is a very practical matter of orientation, education, and training in such areas as agriculture, food storage and preparation, shelter-building, protection, and warfare; and of course, the maintenance and improvement of all manner of relationships in which healing, teaching, and skills-training are on-going.

Dieter Duhm³ reminds us:

“Community is the natural social entity that has experienced the greatest damage. It is a necessary part of the world, which was destroyed worldwide. Wherever people were abducted, enslaved or sold, communities were annihilated, thus destroying the life nerves of entire peoples. This process started with the Kurgan people’s invasion of Neolithic river settlements 7,000 years ago. It continued with the annihilation of the Native American peoples by the European invaders during the 17th century and continues to the present day, when the last indigenous people on all continents are being driven out of their natural habitat in the name of commercial interests.”

From a communitarian standpoint, there is a prevailing interest in how communities were able to develop strong, wise, talented, and compassionate individuals. Communities do not keep track of *gross community production* nearly as much as they count happiness, freedom, sustainability, and hopefulness as ways to describe a good

life. **The commonwealth is defined less in terms of finance and wars won than by descriptions of peaceful life, harmonious cultural activities, and hopefulness.** History is important to communitarians because it reflects their search for understanding and highlights what has been learned. Communitarian history is not a single story but an interweaving of narratives. Also, history is not placed in the past because history is a prologue to the present and the future—the future of the community of relationships and culture.

II. The Communitarian Viewpoint Has Always Been Visionary

Being visionary is where communitarianism has taken its worst whippings. The vision of communitarians is written off as utopian, a mere fantasy of a more ideal world. This involves a misunderstanding of the communitarian vision because communitarians are historians who remember their past as preparation for the future. So vision is a way of sustaining morale. It would function much like public advertising, getting people's vision formed in a certain way, motivating them. **Communitarian vision is utopian primarily because it grants permission to truly enjoy good times and work toward better times.**

As Deiter Duhm³ puts it,

“The disappearance of human community left behind a festering wound in human civilization. It was through the destruction of community that humans lost their authentic morality and sense of responsibility. People were torn away from organic communities. Piece by piece, this also separated them from their own higher selves, from their higher knowledge, and from the higher orders of life. Community was and is the natural breeding ground for trust and solidarity.”

There's a lot of good science today that tells of the importance of positive thinking, hopefulness, and compassion. Utopianism should not be ridiculed. For human beings, utopianism or hopefulness for a better world is a natural expression of human evolution itself imagining a better future. Communitarians are unabashed in their commitment to social evolution by improving the conditions under which they live in the present. A little later in this essay we will discuss how a communitarian's understanding of process is both forward looking toward the end result and also valuing and testing in the present what has been presented to them. Doing things for the future can uplift us now. Being able to visualize a good result motivates the good work being done in the present. Communitarians back into their future because of their strong memory of history. To honestly learn from the past is preparation for the future. **Vision emerges from integrity and confidence. The best future is in the eye of the hopeful beholder.**

Communitarian vision involves a claim to sustainability. It involves an affirmation of the power of a community's capacity to correct its mistakes and restore trust and credibility. Duhm expresses it this way, “Community is an intermediate stage in the scale of life, and it cannot be skipped. It connects the individual with a higher order and sharpens

her/his sense of the whole. A healthy community reflects a universal order, with which we can then connect easier. It is through this connection that a functioning community gets its high field-creating power.”

III. Communitarians are Process-Oriented

Process is a much used, probably over used, word. It is difficult to find a synonym for the word *process*. In the social realm, it refers to actions that move life along toward a desired outcome or experience. A process is by definition an intentional activity dictated by the commitment to get a desired result. For example, there are *internal* processes of many kinds, which are referred to as *systems* and *functions* and *organs*.

The mind is the seat of intention and, therefore—in wisdom-seeking people—the source of all processes that give us the life we desire. Our processes are our demonstration of plans coming into reality. Some characteristics of process orientation include:

- Process is the largest concept in human relations and speaks to many things that happen over a long time, such as education, growth, organization, and so forth.
- A process is a flow of behavior that moves toward a desired result or goal. A process is an expression of an affirmative action plan.
- A good process brings into existence the values we want.
 - It respects the organismic processes of the individual.
 - A good process involves saying what you believe to be true, what you need and want—no defaulting on authority or responsibility!
 - It involves active listening to others and being responsive to their needs and wants.
 - A good process includes trust, respect, appreciation of conflict, willingness to be changed.
- A good group process includes time for self-correction and process-examination with people stopping to reflect on what they want.
 - A good process is open to change and reevaluation.
 - *Good* is defined by the humanistic values of the people discussing the subject. *Good* is also decided “in the world beyond this world” as that which would make the future life of an evolving situation—better!
- It is understood that just as any one process does not always lead to a certain result, any one theory does not always indicate a specific practice. There is flexibility in accepting the possibility of more than one valid methodology for furthering a process.
- A good process does *not* suggest that it is the **end** of anything.

Kosha Anja Joubert and Robin Alfred⁵ write about how vision becomes process and how effective process realizes the vision:

“The vision needs to be re-created continuously. In the end, a vision is not made up of the sentences that express vision . . . Vision is the power behind these sentences to focus our intention on a common higher goal ... The only meaningful criteria for judging a vision are the actions that spring from it, and its power to sustain us when we face hard times ... Visioning is an on-going process of focusing intention which will never be completed.”

A Communitarian Version of Process

Since it is the very nature of community to respect tradition and to be ever-improving, because this is a customary way of doing things, **proven processes** are passed forward in time, applied afresh to whatever **new conditions** are present, and then evaluated. Communitarians have developed a body of knowledge about how everything moves through cycles of growth and decline. Communitarians also have developed their favorite methods to organize and to accomplish the work necessary in social, governmental, environmental, and technological areas. Communitarians were and are respectful of natural processes of growth, development, decline, and aging. The philosophy of Taoism is an illustration of the communitarian philosophy because it teaches cooperation with nature and collaboration with each other.

For communitarians the process is as important as the product. A process is an educational experience, and participating in any role and at any level trains a person to understand the process and to learn about collaboration. Education, or the generation of a new world through children, is strong in this philosophy. The generation of a new world was what has kept communities straight about educating children to be ready for a world that is an improvement over their current situation. At the heart of this education has been the requirement to thoroughly test an assumption of improvement before further adopting it.

Permaculture is an excellent illustration of how process-orientation is applied to an area of life, in this case to agriculture. Permaculture is knowledge about how the gardener can support natural processes to bring better harvests. Permaculture also suggests how process can refine the way people live on the land. Permaculture suggests many metaphors for a *human permaculture*—to develop a stronger crop of people. To monitor, evaluate, and course-correct is a strong feature of the communitarian way of life. We think that this also describes how the scientific approach works.

Three Processes that Move and Direct Community Over A Lifetime

1. The Process Involved in Growth.

The biological sciences are exploding with new awareness about the necessary conditions for life, its healing, its potential and the terms of its sustainability. Most of us have had the privilege by now to learn the stages of human development, perhaps as parents and as students of our own growth. We have been coached enough by “baby books” and parenting experts to realize there are a lot of technical issues in developing each other. Human beings have specific developmental tasks that are best accomplished in quite narrow time zones throughout the first 20 years of life. Also, we know that learning is lifelong and that there are developmental tasks to attend to that are as important as the tasks of childhood. Growth becomes more difficult as we age and is often experienced as a remedial process, correcting for missed development from the first 20 years of life. One of the ways the world needs to change is that our school system be so reconstructed that it serves us for a lifetime and addresses the developmental needs of all age groups with a communitarian curriculum that values **maturity, sanity, a good attitude (proactivity), and creative expression**. Historically, a focus on these four areas of growth enabled human development and social intelligence.

The growth process we speak of here is a biological term and reminds us that we are in a living universe and that community is a life-form that surrounds and enables our individual lives. Deiter Duhm³ speaks of this:

“A natural community is similar to an organism, and the individual people and groups are its organs. The organs of a healthy organism have different tasks and functions; the liver acts different from the kidney and the brain acts different than the heart, and yet they all belong to the same organism. When living in such an organism, people gradually stop living according to principles of supplementing and supporting each other. The system could not function otherwise. As this organism emerges, a new mental-spiritual subject develops; the communitarian ‘I’. This ‘I’ is at a higher level order in the spiritual hierarchy of life than the individual ‘I’. The communitarian ‘I’ contains the knowledge and the power of all individual ‘I’s’. All co-workers that are solidly a part of the community are connected to the communitarian ‘I’ and its mental-spiritual powers, and they can therefore access survival abilities that they would not have as individuals.”

The *growth* we speak of refers to life and to relationship. Therefore, **we promote an environment that respects life**: expecting it; receiving it; nourishing it in all ways; educating, training, and utilizing each life well. We do this with compassion and the intention to develop beauty, goodness, and wholeness.

We acknowledge that **freedom is a precondition of conscious life and a real need of humans in their development**. Therefore, we respect the *rights* of a free person and also hold each other responsible for our impact on each other and upon the culture of freedom. Matthew P. Dumont, M.D.,^{viii} a psychiatrist who defines mental health as being able to choose from the “widest conceivable range of choice in the face of internal and external constraints” adds, “The freedom I write about is not unrestricted individual

initiative but the shared aspiration for the widest range of possibilities for all. I call this aspiration mental health.”

As communitarians, and within the Goodenough Community:

- **We value knowledge about human development and developmental tasks that are best accomplished in their natural sequence and time zones.**
- **We encourage moral development throughout all of life.** Moral development requires individual discernment and allows the good to be chosen freely. Wherever possible, community discussions prepare an individual to think through how to respond in a situation so that they are doing both the **good** and the **right** thing.
- Through lifeways and programs, we encourage social maturation because **we train people from childhood to accept responsibilities and assist in shared endeavors.** In each of the time zones of development, individuals are encouraged to upgrade their response toward age-appropriate social activities and responsibilities.

2. The Process of Learning.

As you look closely at your own life experience, you will notice that for most of your adult life your learning has been shaped by the presence of many “experts” claiming to be the very wisest in their fields and the most revered for their accomplishments. However, they have not agreed and they have tended to refute each other’s viewpoints. All of this is done in the name of academic or intellectual freedom. As a **result we often conclude that it is not time to act because the wisest don’t yet agree.** We observe that the Integral Philosophy, as described by Ken Wilber, is a wise response to this fragmentation and solves this issue at the appropriate level when adopted and applied. And governments, afraid of cultural wars, have taken a hands-off policy in many crucial areas of life. This has been referred to as deregulation or “allowing market forces to decide.” Whatever the excuse, individuals and governments have colluded to postpone serious discussion and take necessary action--we now have a planet in peril.

We’re suggesting what we can do is to utilize our community relationship to learn what we really ought to do to sustain our individual lives and to act wisely as a society. The obvious next step is to put our ideas to work in support of our own lives, testing the hypothesis that our ideas have merit and might be useful to others as well. We must learn together. **We suggest a world-wide “back-to-school” movement, and it is adults we’re inviting to learn.**

After forty years of providing adult education, we are very aware of the following:

- **An erroneous assumption about the nature of the modern child.**

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Corrections have been provided by many leaders in the field of education; however, we cite the work of John Taylor Gatto and the Odysseus Group. Gatto states, “This is my central proposition: the mass dumbness which justifies official schooling first had to be dreamed of; it isn’t real.”*

- **Facing the inadequacies of our current forced education of children.**
“Children allowed to take responsibility and given a part of the larger world are **always** superior to those who were passively schooled.” *¹

The child will learn what she needs to know no matter what experiences we provide. Learning will happen! Also, human development is natural and mental health is much sought for whether it is thought of as peace, happiness, or the absence of suffering. Growth and learning only require nutrition, information, the opportunities for self-expression—and personal determination. John Taylor Gatto points out that many of the experiences that children are having at school are not good for them and that the educative experiences that schools intend are less influential than media influences.

As professional educators and counselors, we have concluded:

- **Learning in childhood, whether because of inattentive parents or a coercive school system, prepares adults to discount and resist educational processes.** A great deal of our effort must go into helping adults **want** to learn and be **willing** to actively pursue understanding. Much of community process necessarily involves learning—especially **learning how to learn** including learning how to listen and to take responsibility for understanding by asking questions and developing a relationship with teacher and class.
- **Learning is always based upon understanding one’s self and how one learns.** Self-knowledge is the basic curriculum and self-acceptance a goal.
- **Learning involves a lifelong commitment to acquire, assimilate, and utilize information.** Individuals must accept their mental and emotional needs for learning with the same mind that they accept responsibility for feeding themselves nutritious food and exercising their bodies. Community provides a smorgasbord of rich experiences with great learning potential.
- **Developing individuals is an on-going responsibility of community.** This is the role of mentoring, which helps others learn how to learn. This is a matter of educating individuals about their rights and responsibilities that need to be kept in balance throughout their lives. Participating in a community enables adults to continually reshape themselves in the direction of both more freedom and greater responsibility.

¹* *Underground History of American Education*, pg.xxiii; pg. 352

3. The Process of Changing.

To discuss *change* is now popular. It is a word that describes both a **process** and a **goal**. Change is happening to us and a change process involves us, often assigns a role to us and asks us to participate well in what is naturally trying to happen.

There are both **positive** change and **negative** change. Start by looking at the changes in our lives that we would call negative and where we experience suffering, for instance, *pollution*. In the 1960s we often disliked how cluttered the roadsides were with pop bottles, cigarette butts, and silver chewing gum wrappers. That was a pollution we addressed and we now have relatively cleaner roadsides. Yet as polluters we have continued to foul many aspects of the environment—oceans, waterways, soils, and air quality. And generally we have managed to ignore how costly pollution is. We have watched whales beaching, species being eliminated, habitat being ruined.

Human beings must develop or we will continue to experience these painful changes which erode our lives. And it isn't just the biological world that is changing for the worse, our social environment is degrading as well. We are a highly litigious society. We are closer to being a police state than we were. It is no longer *safe* for children to play outside of the yard and for older children to stay home alone for long or to walk after dark alone. The economic system isn't working for many of us and is destroying a majority of us. Government and enforcement groups acknowledge scams and all kinds of illegal trickery but seem helpless to do anything about them. We seem to have less awareness of the negative impact of these environmental and societal changes and how this experience discourages us. However, if we don't talk about it or feel any power to change it, we will succumb to a growing depression and anxiety.

Positive change comes when we learn how to deal with our problems better. It is positive to prepare not only for emergencies but also for the promised/threatened difficulties that are ahead of us.

Here are some changes that we would like to see:

For individuals:

- Give more care to **healthy practices** and make agreements with people to help you improve your health in specific ways.
- **Re-examine your life from a financial standpoint.** Appreciate what you have and enjoy the good life that is possible among us—while reducing your spending. Become accomplished at handling your finances and staying within a budget.
- **Network with other people in preparation for emergencies** and as a means of opening up conversations that can be mutually helpful to you and friends.
- For your **mental health**, begin by writing out your own concerns and then talking them over with a few people in your life.

- Avoid reacting to negative change by **putting creative energy into good experiences for yourself** and others.

For couples, living groups, and families:

The change that most needs to happen here might be called deepening. A deeper conversation comes from **asking pointed questions, making straight suggestions and developing agreements**, which you actually write down and post to remind yourselves. “What will we do if? ...” is a good question to be applied to many situations. This is not a time to offer the polite freedom of indifference. This is a time to get real and be practical.

For community:

The community we have lived in for more than 30 years, the Goodenough Community, has acknowledged itself as an activist community that is part of a cultural reformation that we hope is revolutionary. It is not so much that we are berating ourselves for anything we have done wrong, we are just trying to wake up and change our whole life. It is a matter of awakening to what climatologists, economists, and politically astute people are telling us about our changing world and the **absolute necessity of us changing our own lives**. We must learn to use our resources better and to be more collaborative in the way we do things.

The Goodenough Community has come a long way in learning collaboration, yet **we must improve**. We have begun to help each other with financial decisions. We loan cars, trucks, and equipment to each other. We help each other with projects. We assure each other of help when we're sick or injured (and we have a good track record on this as well). We are already doing much that the general population is not. However, as we deepen our sharing and are more straightforward in our requests of each other, **this new deeper community will emerge in our lives as something we know we need and cannot live without**.

IV. Communitarians Expect Leadership from Each Other

In communitarian thinking everyone is held able to learn and to pass on that learning to others. Everyone is asked to follow until they know the way and then they are required to take their turn at leading. Indigenous people of the Northwest illustrate this by reference to migrating geese who take turns leading the V-formation, but when tired move back in the formation where they are benefited by the slipstream of the other birds. Native people also value the **desire** to lead equally with the **ability** to lead, realizing that when someone wants to take responsibility, they are therefore ready to begin learning how to fulfill that responsibility.

Everyone is expected to follow until they are ready to lead but being leaderful is expected. Just as the educative process begins with the educator but depends for

success on the student, so leadership begins with someone who already knows and assumes that others wish to learn and be led. The overall communitarian process is one where each generation leads the next just as an older child is responsible to teach those younger. Offering leadership is premised on the need to be nurtured, taught, and led.

In communitarian thinking there is a focus on tasks and the match of leaders to the groups they will be leading. The best organization will come from a right match of leadership and group. Communitarian leadership is very much focused on training groups of people to work together. Leadership is largely a matter of being a good person and well intended. It also requires that the well-intended person be received well and appreciated by those he is working with. Communitarian views of leadership address the life cycle. Even children can help. Watchful care by elders is appreciated. In this view of work, children are learning while they are doing and while they are watching others. Youth, with its strength and beauty, is appreciated for what it can bring, youth being a gift of short duration. The mature and elder years are for teaching, coaching, and encouraging others. Mature leaders have practiced for many years.

In this way of looking at things, leadership is an aspect of self-expression and leads to a social life where each person affirms her own worth in what she does well. In this social world each person is encouraged to have meaningful work and be supportive of the task of passing forward truth, goodness, and beauty to a next generation that already values what they are doing—which leads us to the importance of *lifeways*.

V. Communitarians Pass Forward Their Culture and System of Governance through *Lifeways*

A lifeway teaches the attitudes and behaviors necessary to handle relationships and tasks. A *lifeway* may be as brief as a single “**authorized**” statement that has far-reaching consequences and deep meaning. For instance, the statements, “we don’t do that here” or “this is how we have decided to do this” are illustrations. A **ritual**, short or long, might be thought of as a lifeway. In this connection, our community’s covenant is a vow we make to each other and keeping that vow with its nine elements of agreement has been a comprehensive lifeway for us. Intentionality is at the heart of a lifeway, our aspirational values, and a commitment to practice. To illustrate lifeways, it seems most authentic to share the lifeways of the community we live within. In 1993, our community published, *A Goodenough Story, A Goodenough Life: An Experiment in Community Formation and Self-Governance*. In the section, *Lifeways and their Development*, four principles were presented:

Principle 1. Lifeways must encourage **personal maturity** by requiring a consistency of speech and action, and an honest statement of what the individual perceives along with transparency regarding the individual’s inner response.

Principle 2 requires that we treat each other with **respect and compassion—this principle highlights the importance of being proactive in our relationships.** This principle stresses the importance of joining each other to create a positive social experience. This is about cooperation as an attitude, and collaboration as a preference to working alone.

Principle 3 is about **claiming sanity and demonstrating trust** in each other. In this world, fear is unnecessary and its presence calls for immediate discussion and reassurance. Mental health involves avoiding judgmentalism, assumptions, and right/wrong thinking in favor of making decisions on an esthetic basis, having to do with right fit and good timing. This principle involves working with our shadow—things about ourselves we would like to ignore—and thus curtailing our tendency to project our faults onto others as a defense against accepting them inwardly.

Principle 4 requires that **our lifeways encourage both individual and social creativity.** Most individuals require some creative expression in order to feel fulfilled. Groups and communities of people also benefit from a shared intention to be creative as a social force. This cooperation among creatives requires a continuous conversation about the process as it unfolds in order that both individuals and organization facilitators of the social process identify outcomes and appreciate accomplishments. **Lifeways promote maturity, proactivity, and creativity.**

Since we first committed to these **four principles** which highlight maturity, proactivity, sanity and creativity we have found that some of our communitarian lifeways are focused on helping people value health and staying healthy. Our cooks have evaluated and modified recipes and event leaders make room for stretch and exercise.

Also, some of our lifeways focus on improving relationships. Our couples, parents and families have researched and tested lifeways that have promise of being most helpful. **There are lifeways in the relational/spiritual dimension of human existence.** The communitarian viewpoint does not find it necessary to talk about this area as “religion” and prefers the term *spirituality*. There’s no problem to be solved in spiritual life. This is illustrated in the spirituality of indigenous people, including the Celts (the indigenous people of Europe). In spiritual life as well as relational life there are preferred ways of behaving. In fact, within the perennial wisdom relational life and spiritual life are different aspects of the same reality—the longing to be a good person and be a good influence on others. The heart of both relational integrity and spiritual accomplishment involves respect for the other person. It is in the relational-spiritual world that we find an honoring of what is essentially human as being more than merely human; it is divine.

Communitarians looking back on western-made history usually see more equality among people, more collaboration between the sexes, and more wisdom in lifeways than is reported in social histories. (Consider the ideas of Sjoog and Mor in the book, *The Great Cosmic Mother*.) Again, we value the philosophy of Taoism where, in the *I Ching*,

the goal is to provide balance and order in which everyone benefits. Few things are right or wrong when seen in that context. It is more a matter of how something functions. For instance, to Lao Tzu, a criminal is a policeman's job, his way of earning a living. There is world of communitarian insight in Taoist philosophy and the lifeways including insights into private ownership when balanced by a general stewardship of what is held in common. The histories of many cultures show the importance of what westerners call "stewardship of the commons." This idea encourages respect for beautiful places and valuable buildings that are shared by all regardless of ownership.

In the communitarian viewpoint, **the problem of organizing people is transmuted into the possibility of self-governance.** Organizational lifeways reflect the history, honor the vision, demonstrate effective process, utilize resources well, and provide many persons opportunities to lead. Lifeways are a means of governance—a policy or politeness—that serves both culture and organization. **Organization is about partnership rather than power.** Organization is an opportunity to practice skills and strategies and to celebrate **relational** capacity. Organization blends being with doing and the mundane with what is special and sacred. The sense of "wholeness" brings a profound peacefulness to individuals who participate. Leaders, carrying great responsibilities, are seen in this philosophy to be working for the greater good and the highest values.

A Conclusion: Community Means Uniting With

The noun *community* refers to people who are in unity with each other. They are people who are sharing a common life and what they hold in common they usually hold dear. And when we search for what community **does**, the verbs we uncover can be reduced to the processes of **uniting and creating. The sense of unity *with and for* highlights both togetherness and the passion for working together well. Community is always about being or doing, being while doing and doing as an expression of being.** Community is a word that captures the fullness and wholeness of humans together. Within community I am both an individual and a member. I have both my individual *identity* and the *agency* that is powered by my membership. I am both called to be the best version of my own unique self **and** I am required to act, in a common-sense way, with respect for the uniqueness of others as well. Membership offers me the opportunity to be responsive and responsible. That's unity.

The descriptions for community speak of the importance of relationship, of trustworthiness, of the importance of integrity, of the importance of mutual appreciation and mutual care. The giving/getting contract suggests everyone is held able and accountable, treating others as one would want to be treated. In community it is not so much a matter of following rules as it is a matter of being sensitive to what is needed and wanted, to what is being offered or exchanged. To speak of community brings one to talk about peace, harmony, encouragement, empowerment, energy, hope, and continuity, and a vision of what a future ought to look like.

So *community* offers a felt sense of its own presence, enough so that community members know when their sense of community is diminished or absent. What *intimacy* is to two persons that are committed to each other, *Community* is to members who have joined each other. To capitalize the “C” in community enables us to talk about how a community may lose its sense of *Community* and in doing so to suffer as two intimates do when they are estranged. For *Community* to be maintained and increased, all of life must be lived in the intimate zone and the same transparency and sharing is required by communitarians as two intimates expect from each other.

The American Association for the Furtherance of Community was incorporated in 1981 as a learning community or *think-tank* for experiential learning about this elusive quality of corporate life, its *esprit de corps*. The Association began by valuing the many forms of organization used to form systems of cooperation and collaboration. In our early history we consulted with condominiums and cooperatives both to learn from them and to assist them. In more recent times we find ourselves learning about co-housing concepts and the principles recommended for ecovillages. There are many forms of intentional community as well as the ancient expressions of indigenous civilization that are found among contemporary natives. And we are discovering *Community* in neighborhood organizations, in communities of crisis, and not-for-profits when they are agencies of compassionate service. In each of these formats there are people who are motivated by the presence of or hope for *Community*.

The American Association for the Furtherance of Community has researched both the ephemeral qualities of a *spirit-of-community* and the practices or lifeways that support organizations in their intention to become a community known for peace, justice, and compassion. And over three decades, The Association itself has researched both being community and the processes and training that is needed for any group to become reliably a *Community*.

In 1984, the Association encouraged a group of friends to form the Goodenough Community as a multi-residential, intergenerational, intentional experiment in living with emphasis on human development and acquiring relational skills. By now, in 2010, we find support for what we have done in Daniel Goleman’s work highlighting the importance of emotional and social intelligences. The Association’s support of the Goodenough Community has been a worthwhile line of work—

- 30 years of exploring the value of cultural programs for men, women, couples, youth, families, and elderly.
- Sahale EcoVillage
- The True Holidays Campaign
- A youth camping program
- A leader development program

In addition, to the development of the Goodenough Community as an experiment in deepening intimacy and encouraging personal growth, the American Association for the Furtherance of Community has maintained its attempt to serve the larger world of communities as mentioned above. For instance, **the Annual Human Relations Laboratory, is celebrating its 41st year August 8 to 14, 2010**, has welcomed many people from other communities, other parts of the country, and other parts of the world.

The Association also encouraged the formation of an inter-faith group to celebrate spiritual diversity and the importance of respecting the many philosophies and faiths that were present in our midst. Convocation: A Church and Ministry was incorporated in 1988 in order to provide a unifying process among members and friends and as an agency for collaboration with other groups who celebrated a community of faith that honors diversity in seeking.

The American Association, beginning in the year 2000, **has been developing a service to all forms of Community, *The Village without Walls***. This village is global in scope and offers many ways for groups living in various forms of community to collaborate with each other. At first the heart of this program will be the web site of the Village without Walls. This is an educational site containing an overview of types of communities and non-governmental organizations that build and utilize community for their service organizations. This educational approach allows us to honor the communitarian movement and the work of Amitai Etzioni sometimes referred to as the father of modern communitarianism. Etzioni and a score of other scholars describe the history, values, and key features of the communitarian impulse wherever it is found. Also the work being done by Robert Keegan, Daniel Goleman, and others emphasizes the skills that are necessary for community living. Training in these skills becomes a core curriculum element in preparing people for community life.

The best term for what Sahale is becoming is an ecovillage. We are moving towards having permanent residents at Sahale. We practice and provide learning opportunities in the areas of permaculture and human permaculture, that is, the growing of good people and demonstration of a comprehensive and sustainable "village life" that is much needed in these times. The Sahale EcoVillage project seeks interested partners who wish to join the residential village.

We heartily endorse the work of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) and its Gaia Education series. Beyond You and Me, the first in that series is a must for your library.

ⁱ Donald E. Pitzer, introduction to *America's Communal Utopias*, Donald E. Pitzer, ed (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 3.

ⁱⁱ Carl Sagan, Ann Druyan, *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (NY: Ballantine Books, 1993),

ⁱⁱⁱ Dieter Duhm, "Community as a Universal Way of Living," in Kosha Anja Joubert and Robin Alfred, eds, *Beyond You and Me* (Gaia Education Series, UK: Antony Rowe Ltd, 2007), 2.

^{iv} Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982),

^v Kosha Anja Joubert and Robin Alfred, eds, *Beyond You and Me* (Gaia Education Series, UK: Antony Rowe Ltd, 2007),

^{vi} Paul S. Boyer, foreward to *America's Communal Utopias*, Donald E. Pitzer, ed (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), ix.

^{vii} Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth* (San Francisco, HarperOne, 1987), 33.

^{viii} Matthew P. Dumont, *The Psychiatrist As A Community Member*, [REFERENCE?]50