

The common denominators of the communities I visited

Written by Michael Livni

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The impressions of MICHAEL LIVNI, a member of Kibbutz Lotan, garnered in the summer of 2001 from three conferences: the International Communities Studies Association, the International Community Meeting and the Global Eco-village Network (GEN). Copied from CALL No. 19.

The first common denominator - the experiential dimension for myself. I did not anticipate that I would have such a really good time at all these meetings. I can't recall ever having met so many fascinating people and ever having made so many friends all in one short month.

Most of those present, like myself, had made a very conscious decision to live in a co-operative framework. Their openly stated motive for doing so was that such a framework makes it possible to allocate energy for Tikkun Olam (world-mending). There was a true feeling of togetherness between all of us from all over the world, aged mostly 30-50.

The general atmosphere was such that I felt compelled to teach the Israeli hit-song of 20 years ago "Ani Ve-Ata Neshane et Ha-Olam" (You and I Will Change the World). And so I did, with the help of Sol from Kibbutz Tzora.

Another common denominator was the pleasant, non-aggressive and yet quite determined leadership of the women. Behind that feminine softness - steel-like determination. In most communities this feminine leadership has an ideological rationale behind it - either implied or overtly stated - which has developed beyond the "ad hoc" American approach.

In different ways, one hears the demand to abandon the competitive capitalist norms of the patriarchal society, in favor of matriarchal norms identified with love and Mother Earth and community life.

In most of the non-religious communes the nuclear family does not have the legitimacy as the desirable norm. As an institution, the nuclear family is seen as a product of the patriarchal-acquisitive-capitalist world. There is a spectrum on this issue - all the way to the defined and institutionalized norm of freedom in love as practiced in ZEGG.

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You all know the "ice-breaking" games, where you stand in a circle and the facilitator asks questions: "All those who have been to Finland, into the circle", - "All those who have lived in community for over thirty years into the circle (Sol Etzioni and I were champs on that one), and then "All those who have three or more lovers" - a third of those present entered the circle...

DECISIONS

Most communes try to make decisions on the basis of consensus, some on consensus minus-one. It seems clear to me that this limits the size of the group. The ideal size of the commune would appear to be 100 adult members. Commune Niederkaufungen, which numbers 55 adults, has this as their aim.

Many of the techniques are used (which we know from Kibbutz practice too), such as committees and subgroups to prepare the subjects under discussion for the general meeting. If no consensus is reached, there comes another round of preparation.

Transparency and readiness to bare oneself in public are present to a much greater extent than by us.

ECOLOGY

A central theme. Only vegetarian food was served in all the communities I visited. I was told that in one's room one could eat what one pleases. The accepted slogan is: ACT LOCALLY -THINK GLOBALLY!

But what is the future of these communities? Most have existed for no more than twenty years now. Will they all go through the processes that have marked the Kibbutz movement? Indeed, they are all asking that question. In my opinion, their future "hangs in the balance". Jewish sages of old said: "The whole world constantly hangs in balance. Each and everyone of us can tip the scale - and every hour is the hour of decision".