c.A.L.L.

Communes At Large Letter

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNES DESK

ICD

YAD TABENKIN

No. 30

Summer 2008

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the summer 2008 edition of C.A.L.L. This is my tenth issue as editor of this esteemed publication, and looking back over the years, it seems that we have succeeded in both highlighting new trends in the worldwide communal movement, whilst regularly revisiting communities which are of great interest to our readers.

This combination is no more apparent than our coverage of the goings on here in Israel. The nature of the changes in the 100 year old Kibbutz movement, as well as the new forms of urban kibbutz and communes that have been springing up over the past 15-20 years, have proved to be engaging reading for many. In this issue, we include a look at what has become of the classic kibbutz and feature an interview with a member of the urban kibbutz, Migvan, situated in the rocket-barraged town of Sderot.

Communities such as Findhorn in Scotland, Niederkaufungen in Germany, Jindibah in Australia and Twin Oaks in the USA are familiar to our regular readers, even if they have never actually visited these places. I feel like we have nurtured a long-term dialogue between these communities and C.A.L.L., as we regularly publish updates and stories reflecting life in these established communities, and how aspects have developed and changed over time.

This synthesis of the familiar and the innovative can also help us in our search for a positive communal living praxis. Building structures that repeat themselves can create a notion of stability and security (e.g. decision-making processes or yearly cultural events / ceremonies), whilst creativity and a willingness to embrace dynamism and change brings an atmosphere of freshness and freedom.

I hope you enjoy this issue, and don't forget that you can send us your suggestions, corrections, contributions and retributions to the email address below,

Warm regards,

Anton
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P.s. In the last issue I printed a report written by Dr Bill Metcalfe about the ICSA Conference in Damanhur. What I failed to mention was that this piece was originally published in the wonderful Communities Magazine. Apologies to both Bill and Communities Magazine for this oversight.

Life at Findhorn

An insight into life inside one of Britain's best known eco-villages – Findhorn
By resident Jonathan Dawson.
New Statesman
06 June 2008

Last week saw me down at the Green Heart of Hawick festival, celebrating GEN's recognition that the battle for sustainability would be won on the streets of our villages, towns and cities, with ecovillages more akin to research laboratories than models to be widely replicated.

And yet, as I come back from another working weekend away - this time in Sweden - I realise that this is not the whole story.

Re-entering the community is to be plugged into a living, thriving experiment in sustainability – rather as if dry theories on carbon footprint reduction had leapt off the page of their own volition to form a vibrant 3-D reality.

As I walk back into Findhorn on Monday early evening, the wind turbines are merrily dancing in the breeze, generating enough juice for the community here with plenty left to share with the national grid. Food scraps from the garden are making the journey back to the farm's compost piles – with such sandy soils, soil enrichment is never-ending work.

Moray Arts Centre

Visitors are leaving the just-opened exhibition in the Moray Arts Centre – as far as we know the UK's only carbon-neutral arts centre, equipped with hyper-efficient lighting, geo-thermal heating and photo-voltaic panels that also export juice to the grid.

Meanwhile, in our main meeting area, a group of sixty community members – what!.....on a sunny, Monday evening, is this entirely healthy? – gather to discuss the evolution of our decision-making structures as the community grows in size and diversifies. This is no cold and sterile laboratory. The models and solutions on offer are not off-the-peg selections aimed at bored shoppers in the sustainability saloon. Rather, the research that Findhorn and other ecovillages around the world are engaged in has blood in its veins and fire in its belly.

Dare we imagine a world in which communities like this constitute not just the research stations but, for some at least, the models they will choose to call home? Why not?! As Oscar Wilde has it, 'A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at'.

Jonathan Dawson is a sustainability educator based at the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland. He is seeking to weave some of the wisdom accrued in 20 years of working in Africa into more sustainable and joyful ways of living here in Europe. Jonathan is also a gardener and a story-teller and is President of the Global Ecovillage Network.

A Commune Grows in Brooklyn by Josh Nathan-Kazis

New Voices

Tuesday, 05 February 2008

Israel's Urban Kibbutz Movement Has Arrived in New York. Will It Survive?

To start a kibbutz in New York City is to face a multitude of small challenges.

Imagine, for instance, trying to explain to a banker at Bank of America that you want to open a joint checking account with five other people. This was the situation that Jamie Beran and five fellow alumni of the Zionist youth movement Habonim Dror found themselves in this summer, as they worked together to set up one of the first of a new breed of urban kibbutzim in the United States. The banker, says Beran, "could not comprehend why we wanted to do this," insisting that there were rules limiting the number of people on a single checking account. There weren't, and before long the newly minted kibbutzniks were issued a stack of Ben & Jerry-themed checks with all six of their names at the top.

Most groups of roommates share communal expenses to some extent, chipping in on toilet paper and light bulbs. These young Habonim Dror alumni have taken it a step further. They are among a few groups that are working to translate the new Israeli urban kibbutz movement to an American context. Geared towards recent college graduates, these urban kibbutzim trace their ideological heritage to the Israeli communal farms while replacing the kibbutz's traditional focus on the land with a focus on social action. Along with a similar commune, or kvutza, founded by alumni of Zionist youth movement Hashomer Hatzair, Beran and the Habonim Dror members are engaged in a sort of social experiment. Can this distinctly Israeli way of life thrive in the heart of New York City?

International Zionist youth groups have long played a key role in the kibbutz movement in Israel. From the 1920s through the 1980s, members of these groups came from around the world to build, live, and work on Israel's kibbutzim. Habonim Dror and its predecessor movements alone founded approximately 40 of the agrarian communes.

In the 1980s, the kibbutz movement as a whole dwindled. "When the kibbutzim were created, there was a need for agriculture work," says Habonim's Beran. "Their philosophy was based on a connection to the earth and the land." By the 1980s, Israel had outgrown the kibbutzim. Urbanization drew young people to the big cities, while privatization challenged the most basic principles of the communities.

Instead of abandoning the communal model embodied by the kibbutz movement and idealized by the Zionist youth groups, one Israeli youth group determined to adapt the kibbutz to the modern age. That group, called Noar Oved ve'Lomed, began to send its graduates to found small urban kibbutzim, called kvutzot, throughout Israel. Instead of a connection to the land, these kvutzot organized themselves around addressing specific social problems.

"As the world has modernized and Israel has modernized," Beran says, "the need now is to work on society itself, bridging the gap between the founding principles of Israel and the privatized, capitalistic society it's becoming."

In recent years, these Noar Oved ve'Lomed kvutzot have grown in popularity in Israel, and have

been replicated there by other youth groups, including Hashomer Hatzair and Habonim Dror. It wasn't until this past summer, however, that an attempt was made to bring the model to the United States.

Although college-age members of Habonim Dror have long lived together in communal settings, the new post-college kvutza, along with the Hashomer Hatzair's Brooklyn kvutza, called Kvutzat Orev, represent an entirely different level of commitment. While residents can casually join a college commune for as little as a semester at a time, the members of the new Habonim Dror kvutza, all between 24 and 26 years old, are contemplating much longer-term decisions about the ways they will spend their adult lives. Further, unlike many college students, they are fully independent of their parents, supporting themselves with full-time jobs. Members deposit their salaries minus long term savings into the communal checking account. Beran says that there is no set percentage, although those residents with higher paying jobs contribute more. The checking account is used to cover all expenses. "That's our bank account," says Beran. If a member wants to go out to dinner or buy a plane ticket, they use that account. Larger purchases are shared, as well. In the next few months, the group is planning to use communal funds to pay for a portion of a new laptop being purchased by a member.

Still, the policies on shared property are much more ambivalent than at the original Israeli kibbutzim, which banned private property. "I don't share everything," says Tal Beery, a resident of Brooklyn's Kvutzat Orev. He has his own computer, among other personal possessions. Still, he says, "I feel closer with members of my kvutza because we share." At the Habonim Dror kvutza, residents maintain personal savings accounts.

For Kenan Jaffe, a member the Habonim Dror kvutza, sharing financial resources is "only one factor out of many [that define the kvutza]." In addition to making decisions together, members of each kvutza make a conscious effort to build their small communities. Both kvutzot set aside times to share meals, particularly on Friday nights. Once a week, the Habonim Dror group holds a "Yom Kvutza," a meeting lasting for up to six hours in which members discuss issues facing the group, engage in group-building activities, and discuss selected texts.

Like their Israeli counterparts, the kvutzot define themselves in terms of their activist work. "We are trying to build an internal movement that has a large and positive impact on the world around us through education and other forms of activism," says Daniel Roth, a member of Kvutzat Orev. For some members of both of the Brooklyn kvutzot, this activism is expressed in a large part through work at their respective youth movements. Many of the members are currently on the staffs of the two movements.

The communal lifestyle also makes up a part of the appeal of the kvutzot. "It's a small, intimate group of people," says Beery. "This is a very unique way to live…It's a response to a time in our society that feels very alienating. This style of living has never been more relevant."

"We are all interested in working to break down the walls that the capitalist world builds between each of us," says Roth. "Through a communal learning environment, open emotional dialogue, and [communalized financial resources], we hope to become more intimate with the world around us"

The members of the kvutzot have a degree of trust in each other that is remarkable to the outside observer. Beran says that she is frequently asked whether she's worried that one of the members will take advantage of the group. She says that the possibility never even occurs to her. "Once you get to the point of having to think about that, it doesn't make sense to do what we're doing," she says.

It's still much too early to judge the success of Kvutza Orev or the Habonim Dror kvutza. Both are still in the process of developing, and are still engaged in important conversations about their future. Still, it's clear that they're off to a solid start. "Everyone's looking for a meaningful way to live their lives," says Beery. He and his fellow members are hoping that the kvutzot will provide just that.

This piece, the first of two parts, was written by two long-time communitarians with support from their friends and fellows in the North American movement. Due to the sensitive nature of their ongoing research, the authors are choosing to remain anonymous at this time. We at C.A.L.L. are highly appreciative of their willingness to share the results of their work-in-progress with a wider audience. Perhaps their openness will inspire communitarians elsewhere to send in further contributions to this important project.

COOLER THAN THOU:

What Our Community Friends *Really* Mean (Part I)
(a translation for everyone left behind)

1. "I feel unsafe."

Translation: I feel emotionally uncomfortable due to my past conditioning, my choices now, or whatever other reason. Because it's not due to your behavior there is not a specific actionable request I can make of you. But I want you to be blamed for this, not me.

2. "I feel judged by you."

Translation: You're not supposed to tell me to act differently when I treat you badly.
Alternate Translation: You are speaking a piece of the truth, and it makes me feel uncomfortable.

3. "Everything is co-created."

Translation: I don't want accountability around power dynamics. The people who are willing to treat others most badly should keep on getting their way.

4. Insistence on the use of "I" statements.

Translation: I want you to be restricted from talking about my behavior, so that I don't have to change my poor treatment of others.

5. "I feel that you are a . . ."

Translation: No matter how insulting my next words will be nor how critical my statement, it's really OK because I used the magical word "feel." It's my *feeling* and no one can argue with anyone's feelings. Furthermore, it's an "I" statement.

6. "I have the right to speak my truth."

Translation: Even though what I just said, or what I'm about to say, has no discernible basis in fact, I still want to beat you over the head with it. As long as I use the label "my truth," you can't possibly argue with me about the merits of it.

7. "This may be off topic, but . . . "

Translation: I think I should be allowed to say whatever I want in meetings at any time.
Translation 2: I can't get my pet project on the agenda because no one else is interested, so I'll take every opportunity to insert it in someone else's time slot.
Translation 3: I know that what I'm about to say shouldn't be said now, but I don't care about the rest of you.

8. "I just want to throw this out there."

Translation: I'm not sure what I'm saying, I'm not sure what any of you can do with it, but I just want to hear myself say it.
Alternate translation: I take no responsibility for what I'm about to say, and it probably won't help the group in any way because I haven't been paying attention to the conversation—but I don't want to be seen as noncontributory so I'm going to say it anyway.

9. "I don't know if this has already been covered, but . . . "

Translation: I was late, I don't know what's going on, but I expect you all to catch me up or listen to me repeat . . . I don't care if I make other people repeat stuff, because my time is more important than yours.

10. "I think we're moving forward too quickly on this issue."

Translation: I was absent from the last 2 meetings, and haven't read the minutes.

11. *"That's* not community!"

Translation: I don't like what you just did or said and I'll use the C-word to manipulate and guilt-trip you to get you to stop.

12. "I feel this community is seriously off track!"

Translation: It's not going the way I want it to.
Alternate Translation: I joined the wrong community and I'm blaming you for all the times I've tried to make it be like the community I wished it was. What's wrong with all of you; don't you see it?

13. "Why can't we all just get along?"

Translation: This process is really hard for me—can't we just stop dealing with it and pretend we all like each other instead?
Translation 2: I don't understand group dynamics very well.
Translation 3: Can't you just be a better person, and change your behavior? 'Cuz I'm not going to change mine!

14. "Just speak from your personal experience!"

Translation: Don't tell me you're concerned about so-and-so's damaging behavior in our community that you've learned about from others—if you haven't personally experienced it, it doesn't count and we don't want to know about it.
Alternate Translation: The person you are complaining about is better liked or has higher status here than you do.

15. "There are people who aren't represented here who have strong concerns on this issue."

Translation: I'm strongly opposed to this issue, but I feel insecure about whether or not the group will agree, so i need to invoke others to bolster my argument.
Alternate Translation: The people who aren't willing to come and talk about the issue should have more power than the people who are.

It shall return

By Avirama Golan, Haaretz - 18/04/2007

It wasn't only the prime minister and his wife who vacationed during Passover at a kibbutz in the North, and it isn't only tourism that is growing at the kibbutzim. The Kibbutz Movement's demographic growth department has its hands full sorting and accepting new applicants for membership. In 2001, 229 families and single individuals joined, in 2004 the number rose to 900 and the trend is continuing.

Most of the new members are children of kibbutzim who left, studied, worked and lived for years in the city and now want to return. Suddenly, they have realized that the promise of the city as a place where all the opportunities are open to them is deceptive. The opportunities are available only to a thin stratum of successful types, in golden cages of addiction to money and to work.

What they had taken for granted at the kibbutz - an excellent education in small classes, life in the bosom of nature and in an atmosphere of security and warmth - costs vast sums in the city. Housing prices are astronomical. All of their adult lives they have had to work hard to pay for a quality of life that is not better than that enjoyed by kibbutz veterans today. Exhausted by the savage competition that is devoid of social and existential security, they now recall the relaxed pace of life in their childhood, and the memory becomes more acute as they grow older. As long as they were very young and did not have children, they thought they had the world in their hands. Now that they can barely manage to spend any time with their children, they are beginning to long for the communal life that had previously looked strangling and limiting to them.

Now it is not difficult for them to consider returning, because the kibbutz is undergoing a dramatic change. Fifty percent of the kibbutzim have undergone total privatization and the salaries paid there are differential. Many dining halls have been closed and in others catering companies serve some of the meals. Many members work outside the kibbutz, and the returnees will be welcomed gladly with their outside salaries. The people who work in the cow barn and the people who work in the poultry coop and all the other wearers of faded blue work clothes are also still there, but now they are getting salaries. Even a film director or a sculptor can be a profitable branch of the economy.

The new kibbutz is not an ideal place, but it has bid farewell to the rigid fairy tale of equality that created many distortions and now offers an interesting model for communal life, in which one can find both security and a social challenge. The kibbutzim that are taking in new members are explicitly declaring full privatization and differential pay alongside "mutual responsibility in education, health and welfare." All of them, of course, are interested in young people with small children. Kibbutzim that are enjoying renewed economic prosperity are attracting more new members than they are able to absorb.

Yet many problems remain. The decision by the Israel Lands Administration, for example, that will make the expansion of construction in kibbutzim possible (a national planning decision that is mistaken in and of itself) will attract many inhabitants who are not members. In this way two different classes will be created that have different economic levels and different levels of responsibility toward the common property. It is possible that the solution lies in the establishment of a cooperative. At the same time, the delay in the registration of the homes as an asset that can be passed on through inheritance and the absence of a proper pension system are still hovering like a threatening cloud over the heads of the kibbutz veterans. It is a pity that the kibbutz politicians prefer realizing real estate values to the promise of universal social benefits.

Another problem that has been engendered by privatization has been the destruction of the community. There are kibbutzim where this problem is beyond the point of repair, but many kibbutzim that have gone over from total collectivity to alienated separation are now groping for a way to mend the torn fabric. If they find it, it's possible they will succeed in restoring to themselves something of their traditional role as cultural and social leaders. The kibbutz heritage in education and cultural creativity is in their hands. If they are able to breathe new life into it and develop it into wider circles, the kibbutz institution itself and not only those who have left it will return and build a future that will not shame its inception.

Can the kibbutz survive inequality?

By Daniel Gavron, Haaretz - 27/04/2007

In my study of the changes in the kibbutzim, published in 2000, I concluded with the following assessment: "The kibbutzim will continue to exist as settlements; they will continue to contribute to Israel out of all proportion to their size; they will not be kibbutzim." I argued that, whereas previous changes in the kibbutz way of life, such as increasing personal budgets and having the children sleep in their parents' homes, did not alter the fundamental character of the institution, the introduction of differential salaries indicated a sea change. The rejection of the principle of "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs," represented a fundamental transformation. The kibbutz, I reported, was becoming something else.

I read Avirama Golan's op-ed piece "It shall return" (reprinted on the opposite page) after having a conversation with a Danish visitor, who recently spent several months living on a kibbutz. Together, they have made me rethink my assertion. Golan and my Danish interlocutor both made the point that the kibbutz should be defined by "community" rather than by "equality." Golan's phrase "the rigid fairy tale of equality that created many distortions" says a great deal about the traditional kibbutz.

I have often been asked why the kibbutz failed. My answer is that it did not fail. It succeeded for almost a hundred years. Nonetheless, I identify three basic reasons for its having been forced to make such fundamental changes in its structure. The first was its failure to cater sufficiently to the desire for individual self-expression. The second was a lack of success in achieving genuine equality for women. The third was its relationship with the surrounding society.

As to the first point, the kibbutz was the ultimate commune. In the early years, individual ambitions and aspirations were ruthlessly subordinated to the will of the collective. Although the situation improved considerably over the years, every kibbutz has stories of members who were refused the opportunity to pursue higher education, personal fulfillment or artistic advancement.

Second, it must be acknowledged that, from the outset, female members had an inferior status. In Deganya, the first kibbutz, the men plowed sowed and reaped, whereas the women were expected to cook their food, wash their clothes and clean their rooms. Even when cattle were introduced to Deganya, the men refused to let the women near them, until the redoubtable Miriam Baratz learned the art of milking from the neighboring Arab village, rose early one morning to milk the cows, and confronted her male comrades with full pails of milk. The story of Baratz is indicative of the attitude the kibbutz movement had toward its women members for at least five or six decades. In addition, the burden of the system of communal child-rearing fell more on female members than on the men.

The third matter, the interaction between the kibbutz and the surrounding society, is only to the credit of the kibbutz. All communes over the centuries have been communities of drop-outs. Their members rejected the prevailing social norms and resolved to create something better. This they achieved by living in isolation from the surrounding society, something the Hutterites of North America have been doing for some four centuries.

The kibbutzim, on the other hand, aimed to be an integral part of their surroundings. They aspired to lead society and to change it. The Kibbutz Hameuchad movement hoped that the new Jewish society in the Land of Israel would become one huge kibbutz. The more left-wing Kibbutz Artzi envisioned numerous communes linked in a socialist structure for the Jewish nation. The members of Ihud Hakvutzot were less ambitious, but even they saw themselves as the spearhead of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine. It is a fact that the original borders of the State of Israel, although set by the 1949 armistice agreements, were largely determined by the location of the kibbutzim.

Sadly for the kibbutzim, contacts are a two-way street. The kibbutzim influenced society - indeed for several years they set the tone - but they were influenced in their turn. In the end, the intrusion of the outside society sapped both their principles and their self-confidence. When the severe economic crunch of the mid-1980s hit them, everything started to unravel.

Or did it? Maybe only some things unraveled. Is my insistence on the principle of absolute equality an example of the lack of flexibility that I note above? Perhaps individual freedom and self-expression have to include a measure of inequality.

Both Avirama Golan and my Danish acquaintance emphasize the pressures of modern capitalist society. They point to the frantic rush to acquire consumer goods, the inordinate number of hours spent at work, the lack of time spent with spouses and children. They note the positive atmosphere of mutual support and social solidarity that still exists on today's kibbutzim.

So, I am having second thoughts about my assertion that the kibbutz is changing into something else. The suggestion by kibbutz reformers that there should be some relationship between effort and reward, which I maintained was a rejection of the kibbutz ethic, suddenly seems to me like a relatively modest aspiration.

The return to the kibbutz reported by Golan is undeniable. If the new privatized kibbutz can create a caring communal structure that allows for diversity - and even a measure of inequality - it could yet prove me wrong. To paraphrase Mark Twain, my forecast of the death of the kibbutz may have been exaggerated.

Daniel Gavron is the author of "The Kibbutz: Awakening from Utopia" (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

Ecological Awareness is Increasing on the Kibbutz

The subject of ecology has not, until recently, taken its deserved place in the awareness of the Israeli public and not even on the kibbutzim. A decade ago, when we were asked about it in meetings with our overseas colleagues, particularly members of communes and intentional communities, we would respond that our worries were for the present serious existential dangers, economic and, particularly, security-related - the constant threat from several of the neighbouring countries and ever-present terror. "We have other problems and the future of the planet is your worry in the meantime", was our usual lightly humorous reply.

Although even then there were islands of ecologic activity in the kibbutzim, and here and there devoted Green organisations, they had almost no influence. Nevertheless with the worsening of the world's situation and the influence of the increasing global awareness of ecology, even before Al Gore's publicity tour, awareness had increased in Israel and in large part in certain kibbutzim.

Three particular Kibbutzim (but not only these) can serve as an example: Lotan in the south of Israel, in the middle of the Arava desert; Harduf in the north, in the Galilee hills; and Ein Harod Ichud in the Jezreel valley. The first is mostly focussed on developing organic agriculture and environmentally friendly (including to humans and their health!) farming methods; the second in exploiting natural resources in the environment (including solar energy); the third defined itself as a "Green Kibbutz", which in addition to preventing air pollution and recycling - as many kibbutzim and even other communities in Israel do - is active in developing original technologies to save energy in their cow sheds. For example: today milk comes out of the cow's udder at a temperature of 38 degrees Celsius and is then artificially cooled to 4 degrees to preserve it. At the same time, water is heated to clean the milking hoses. The idea is to pass the milk from the udder through a heat exchanger that will absorb the natural heat and use it to warm the water, in large part cools the milk and requires only a little bit more energy to get it to the desired temperature. The idea is still in research and development but when complete and installed in cow sheds the Kibbutz believes that it will save the milk industry tens of thousands of tons of fossil fuels each year.

In many kibbutzim, and also in other places, "Green Activities" are run which integrate ecological subjects into the school curriculum. There are also places where the students are active in environmental preservation projects, such as: cleaning river banks, parks, nature sites and preserves adjacent to their kibbutz and protecting plants and animals in danger of extinction (for example: children from Kibbutz Gal-ed protecting cyclamens in the Ephraim Hills, or protecting hatching areas of sea turtles on beaches next to kibbutzim along the Mediterranean Sea). And of course - most importantly the public has gained an awareness of recycling and preventing pollution.

Among the many changes taking place in kibbutzim, the increasing ecological awareness is one of the most positive.

Written by Eli Avrahami, Kibbutz Palmachim
Translated by Robin Merkel, Kvutsat Yovel

Israel re-brands kibbutzim to lure eco-aware generation

The Observer
Sunday April 13 2008

Israel's kibbutzim, once a rite of passage for thousands of young Britons, are staging an unexpected comeback after years of decline. The world-famous communes, which hosted a generation of volunteers from singer Simon LeBon to actor Bob Hoskins, are to launch their first advertising campaign in a decade.

The campaign, focusing on 140 sites in the north and south of the country, aims to tout the benefits of kibbutz living for a hip, new eco-aware generation. Re-branded for the 21st century, socialist ideals are downgraded in favour of environmental ethics and organic farming replaces conventional agriculture.

Israel believes its new-look kibbutzim can again entice a new wave of Westerners to follow in the footsteps of Sacha Baron Cohen, the comedian behind Ali G and Borat, and US actress Sigourney Weaver.

British actor Paul Kaye volunteered in a Tel Aviv commune in the Eighties. He told The Observer that the experience changed his life and was seen as 'a great escape from what was going on politically in Britain at the time'.

The advertising campaign is scheduled to launch this summer. One aspect of the campaign will be contacting former high-profile volunteers to endorse the make-over.

As the Zionist ideals of collectivism and egalitarianism fell from favour during the Eighties, popularity waned. By the turn-of-the-century, more than half of Israel's 257 collective farms were bankrupt. Now Israel believes the relaunch of kibbutzim can recapture their popularity. Against a backdrop of continuing violence between Hamas and Israeli forces last week, the Tel Aviv-based Kibbutz Movement said the move to re-brand the communes was vital.

Spokesman Aviv Leshem said: 'We want the world to see the other, peaceful side of Israel. The modifications to kibbutzim are a phenomenon of the last three years.'

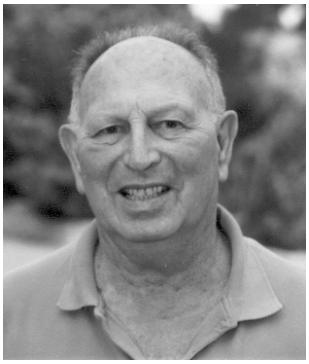
Others describe the development of the new kibbutzim as a confirmation of a changing world. Their reinvention will concentrate mainly on the communes' eco-credentials in an attempt to add ballast to Israel's environmental reputation. All new construction will be energy-efficient, using solar power and recycling water where possible. Plans to phase out conventional agriculture and replace it with organic farming are advanced, a move welcomed by the Negev Desert kibbutz, which is suffering from the effects of climate change. Another nod to the modern age includes the installation of wi-fi internet access.

Yet controversially, given the kibbutzim's once self-sufficient, bohemian ideals, the main source of income will no longer be agriculture. Leshem said only 15 per cent of the income would come from farming, with industries such as the production of plastics more prominent.

Meanwhile, 40 per cent of residents now work outside the commune. Such trends have been interpreted as a shift from communal living to individual fulfilment.

The Israeli Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni, hopes former residents, including celebrities, will help to publicise the communes to a world audience.

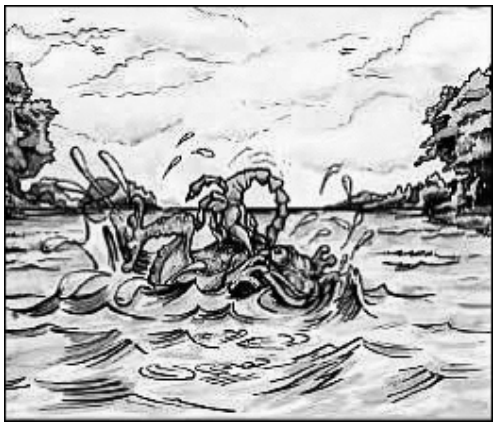
KALEIDOSCOPE



The Communitarian Scene from all Over and Under
Compiled (and partly translated) by Joel Dorkam

Seems to me that of late, two mostly contradictory trends are at work and we find ourselves unable to make up our minds about which one we would rather adopt; individuation on one hand, and globalization on the other. And as usual in such cases, we are trying a bit of juggling - to enjoy the benefits of both of them at once, and let the future resolve the dilemma for us with the help of God, and nature, of course.

Take healthcare as an example. Obviously we would like to have all the care modern medicine can provide, which is quite a lot (and more coming up) but sadly, an extremely costly affair. So what is the solution? Either private medical insurance, which only wealthy people can afford, or government medicare, which implies higher taxes and bureaucratic dependence, plus (frequently) lack of efficiency. Or consider ecological problems like air and / or water pollution. Of course these and many other issues cannot be resolved on a local basis, not even separate one-country solutions would be viable, as those depend on the worst of all factors: politics!



There is that nice little story about the Scorpion asking the Frog to carry him across this river. "No way", says the Frog – "you're going to sting me". "Certainly not", replies the Scorpion, "that wouldn't make sense at all. Look at the sky, there is a storm coming up, we have to hurry"! Frog lets himself be convinced, against his better wisdom, and takes Scorpion froggyback. In the middle of the river, sure enough, he gets his sting and complains to Scorpion: "What have you done, now we are both going to drown, that doesn't make sense". Just before going under, Scorpion manages to reply dryly: "Well, this is the Middle East for you, my dear"!

In 'Communities' # 136 of Fall 2007, the 'Peripatetic Communitarian', the late Geoph Kozeny regaled us with his usual blunt openness on his most intimate thoughts and feelings, after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, in a fairly advanced phase. You cannot but admire this guy's plunk, "looking forward to being among the 2 percent (that survive....) and aspiring to enjoy the experience of becoming an inspiring example of a contemporary medical miracle, although mainstream medical statistics say that 98 percent of the folks diagnosed with that kind of cancer are gone within a year".

In my first video, I made a statement about how to evaluate the success of a community:
There are two simple questions to check for what matters most. Do the members whole-heartedly believe in the system they're using, and are they participating with enthusiasm? No amount of theory, dogma, or peer pressure can substitute for clarity of vision, open mindedness, good communication, the spirit of cooperation, commonsense, and plain old hard work.

I still think that's good advice, although I left out a critically important piece. Without having solid and deep interpersonal connections underlying it all, the experience of community would be greatly diminished. It's useful to think less of "community" as a noun (a place) and instead emphasize the interactive activity of being "in community" or the relationship inherent in the verb "commune": *To share one's intimate thoughts or feelings with someone, especially when the exchange is on a spiritual level.* And that brings me back to my personal story.

My entire adult life, I've always enjoyed connecting with people at a level that goes deeper than what's ordinary. I always enjoy some small talk and learning about family members and accomplishments, but what really captures my interest is the conversations that explore underlying beliefs and values, people's priorities, and identifying where they find passion in life. I suppose I do a pretty good job of being open-minded and non-judgemental, because this exploration seems to work with people from all walks of my life: hometown friends, college buddies, co-workers, social activists, and scores of people in the communities I visit.

Since my cancer diagnosis, what has been remarkable about my interactions with family and friends is the quality and depth of our exchanges. I'm hearing much deeper and heartfelt appreciations and affirmations than I've ever experienced before, and it's helping me better understand how I come across to others and how they have felt served or nurtured by my work or by their experience of our connection. This outpouring of love is now regularly bringing tears of joy to my eyes.

The lesson here for communities, I hope, is to make it a priority to find ways for members to reflect and share deeply with each other so that the magical connecting glue of community has a real chance to take hold. As a culture we seem much better at sharing criticisms (which can be valuable!) than appreciations, so we need to develop norms and rituals that shift the balance in the direction of connection and intimacy. One of the most healing affirmations anywhere is "I love you, dear friend." Say it, say it often, and mean it. Spreading love is how we can heal our selves, our communities, and the planet.

Featuring another who is no longer with us, in what must have been one of his very last writings, our beloved late 'Communes Desk' secretary Sol Etzioni expressed his 'credo' about what we used to call "Renewing Kibbutz" and I prefer to denominate (some might call it demonicate ...) "Regressing Kibbutz". Obviously, when a collective community introduces differentiated salaries, it can no longer pretend to be an egalitarian society, even with the excuse of a safety-net (which frequently shows more holes than meshes). Apparently 'Communities' published Sol's letter without realizing its being posthumous:

97-Year-Old Kibbutz Switching to "Graded Salaries"
Dear *Communities*:

Incredibly, a recent kibbutz event drew the attention of the international news media! (It even got into New Zealand's Dominion Post). Kibbutz Deganya Aleph - the "Mother of the Kibbutzim" and an income-sharing commune for all of its 97 years - decided by a vast majority to switch to having "graded salaries" for community members; that is, compensating members financially according to their productivity, while maintaining a generous social security network for its less productive members. Some of the media regarded the event like the breakup of the USSR, despite the fact that many other kibbutzim have made similar decisions in recent years to privatize. As I see it, in a nutshell, Deganya Aleph has gone over to a classic definition of socialism: "From each according to his ability; to each according to his *contribution*." Thus Deganya will be less communal than income-sharing communities which compensate members according to their needs, yet will remain far more communal than most intentional communities, in which members have independent incomes entirely.
Deganya's decision was taken from a strong economic position, as it's doing very well financially. Ironically, Deganya Aleph's close neighbour, Deganya Bet, which is somewhat worse off financially, has recently decided against such a change. This runs against the conventional view - mine too - that lack of economic success is a big factor encouraging privatization in kibbutzim.

Sol Etzioni
[Now former] Secretary,
International Communes Desk
Israel

In Francesco #31 of Advent 2007, Brother Fritz Giglinger muses about "Looking with new Eyes" from his elevated perspective of accumulated wisdom:

"Today I am 72 years and 152 days old. Of late I have taken to undersigning my letters to Sisters and Brothers with "your old brother of old" or "brother Fritz, the old dwarf of Calvary". But what is old? And what is new? Perhaps there exists a mixture of Old and New? Could the Old confront suddenly with the New? And cannot the New appear to be looking antiquated?
Everything on Earth is subject to Time. Everything ages, each living organism ages. Many of us may let themselves go. The disintegration of the so-called "material" can never be halted. And what about the Spiritual? What happens to what derives from the spiritual capacities of the human body? All that has accumulated in the sciences and art, in philosophy and religion, in culture and ways of living together? Does it not reappear constantly as if it were something new? Isn't it rediscovered again and again as new? Nothing new at all under the sun, everything was here already?
At the Teachers seminary we learned that some experts tried to divide human life into phases. One of them - I forgot his name - maintained, that humans go through phases of seven years each: 0-7 infant, 7-14 schoolchild, 14-21 youth and so on .. Biologists assert that the human body renews itself entirely every seven years. I liked and still like this partition, because it befits rather nicely my own course of life ....
..... The Bible calls on us constantly for renewal. Already the Prophets agree with this request time and again… So I must join my "old, old, old" with the " new, new, new", and thus the Old and the New aren't contrasts at all, but rather a togetherness and an interlocking, because the New becomes Old and the Old becomes New. The Old and the New, the New and the Old complement each other. The Young need the Old, the Old need the Young. In all fields of life we can discover and apply this thought. Even the conflicts that result from the tension between Old and New become impulses of life - if you can avoid creating enmities or even killings.

As usual, the New Year wishes from "La Poudriere" community of Belgium constitute a kind of "Credo" and bring us back to some basics of community life.

Too often we identify growth with wealth, with progress, with the infernal logistics of "ever more". In a society where the Existential and the Sensational are liable to conceal the Essential, it is possible to prefer the growth of the Individual. So let us discover our own diversity, so as to enable the other's one.

A gratuity shall emerge, which will incite us to action and show us the way to happiness. Together we can better ourselves and put into practice a valuating trust for everyone. Let us search for differences - uniting solidarity, stimulating cooperation rather than a crushing competition. Let us establish a living togetherness.

Sibylle Alexander of Galashiels , Scotland expresses her feelings about introducing reading teaching for 4-5 olds, in Camphill Correspondance of March/April 2008:

School at six and Nature Kindergartens

British politicians are considering the possibility of introducing teaching reading for 4- and 5-year olds. This letter is a response to this debate.

All over the world 'Nature Kindergartens' are being built. For the last eighteen years successful

young people have used their skills to work for the environment and contribute to the fight against global warming. From Norway to New Zealand the four books by I. Kutsch *Nature Activities for Children*, Floris Books, Edinburgh have inspired parents, teachers, doctors and farmers with new ideas. Children who have two or three years of planting, sowing, and compost building and who learn to use their hands in other skills are not tempted to use drugs or alcohol and they are not obese.

Early reading increases unruly behaviour, truancy, mental health problems and drug-taking among children. If there is pressure on teachers childhood is diminished. May I urge politicians to look at these books and see the radiant faces of children with confidence and strong self-esteem. School at four or five has *no* benefits!

Abstract thinking develops only after the teeth have changed. Any formal education before six diminishes vitality and contributes to depression and a loss of self-esteem. Sitting still at an early age causes a decline in deep breathing, contributing to asthma, bronchitis, rheumatism and arthritis, and it weakens memory.

When Scotland had the highest academic standard in Europe, school began at age seven as it does in Scandinavia, Russia, Poland and Hungary. Thousands of Rudolf Steiner Schools worldwide show a brilliant wealth in creativity, health and happiness. All pupils learn two foreign languages from age six to sixteen, which inspires tolerance; they play at least one instrument and show independent thinking.

Britain is the only country which does not give financial support to Steiner Schools! When the first Waldorf School was built for factory children in Stuttgart, parents moved there to participate, or founded schools in their own towns. Hitler closed them down, but since 1945 we have 200 in Germany, 100 in Holland, but only 30 in the UK! Their pupils promote biodynamic farming, anthroposophical medicine, ethical banking, care and community living with people with special needs, eurhythmy.

Every state school can benefit from studying Waldorf Education, its understanding of the four temperaments, storytelling instead of reading to children, more drama and less testing. But the most important things are to raise the school age and to build Nature Kindergartens.

Chico Fajardo-Heflin seems to have some practical answers to our most acute present worries. In Shalom Connections of March 2008 he expresses his feelings, and what he is trying to do about it - not only for himself, but also for their neighbours. Sounds pretty utopian - but have YOU got any better ideas?

There is currently a lot of energy here at Reba Place, especially among the younger and newer generation (not to mention the lively energy of Covenant member Doug Selph), surrounding food and justice issues. Wendell Berry, local economy and farming are big topics of discussion, and the Fellowship seems on the brink of a new era of projects, ministries and initiatives surrounding food and the global economy. This is a very good thing. However, voices from the older (wiser) generation keep raising the question, "Yes, but what about our poor neighbours? They can't afford this food." Much of the time, when this question is raised, conversations seem to come to a halt. "But what about our poor neighbours" is an important question - and a difficult one. In fact, it might be one of the questions of our times.

The Church in America finds itself in a new and complicated position. Due to the emergence of an omnipresent, imperial economy, we discover that our "neighbors" are not only those who live down the street from us, but also those who live down the chain-of-production of almost all of our household goods. How can we live in such a way that we are caring not only for the struggling single mother with two jobs in our neighborhood, but also for the oppressed Honduran worker on a banana plantation? How can we live and eat justly in such a way that honors *all* of God's children, instead of feeling paralyzed by the seemingly either/or choices?

Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin, on the other hand, is more interested in work practices - common work, for instance. How important is it, and does it work? Sounds easy - but it isn't. Ask the Kibbutz Seniors…

Reba Place News

By Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin

We have a growing pool of people in varying levels of membership at Reba who are under the age of thirty, and a common thread knitting many of them together is an interest in food, agriculture, and sustainability. The theme of this Shalom Connections comes at a perfect time for us, as we have had several community-wide discussions on food at Monday seminars and Tuesday night meetings. Barb Grimsley, along with several others, has been working to co-ordinate a larger communal gardening effort, expanding beyond the several plots Reba folk were tending last season. We also hope to have our fingers a little more deeply in the dirt at Plow Creek, with CSA workdays scheduled throughout the upcoming season.

Another hot conversation topic (we may even be able to call it a "buzz word") has been common work, and the desire for more Reba folk to be able to work together in business or service enterprises. No concrete "new business" plans have been nailed down, but lots of ideas are flowing and a business council has been formed to give more attention and energy to the real process of cultivating common work. Allan Howe has begun Saturday afternoon seminars to talk about common work as part of community and mission. A lively group has gathered for the past several Saturdays in the basement of Plain and Simple Amish Furniture (one of our RPF-run common work ventures) to ponder the mission and work of historical Catholic orders, common work in present-day Christian communities such as Jesus People USA, and how all this dreaming might be made manifest in the day-to-day life of Reba Place Fellowship.

As an adequate finale, another touching little story out of Camphill Correspondence which carries a deeply meaningful message:

Many years ago I watched my daughter and her 'Anglo' friend take their infant sons out for their first springtime. My daughter set her eight- or nine-month-old son on to a barely greening lawn. She introduced him to the grass, encouraging him to touch it, even taste it. She pointed out the temperature, the breeze, the sky and clouds. The other mother came differently prepared for her son's encounter with the world. She brought a blanket, which she spread out for her son. She brought toys as distractions and she did not join her son so much as hovered over him in a protective manner: not allowing him to crawl away from the blanket; not allowing him to grasp at the grass ('dirty'). My daughter introduced her son to the world he lived in; the other mother introduced her son to a potentially dangerous 'environment'. The Anglo child's world consisted of his toys, his blanket, his mother, his artificial setting; the world 'out there' was alien. He ended his excursion in his mother's arms. My grandson ended his when his mother chased after him as he explored his new surroundings. 'This is the way it is done,' I thought. 'This is why we are different.' We discourage competitiveness and encourage co-operativeness; we frown on selfish behaviour and encourage perceptiveness of the other; we correct by offering alternatives rather than through threat of punishment or admonitions; we encourage laughter and camaraderie - there is no one 'out there' waiting to 'get us.' We transmit these values through loaning our attitudes to our children.

V F Cordova: 'Ecoindian: A Response to J Baird Callieot' in Ayaangwaamizin: International Journal of Indigenous Philosophy, 1 :1, 31-44 Quoted in Alastair Mcintosh, Soil and Soul, Aurum Press, London, 2001 p.33

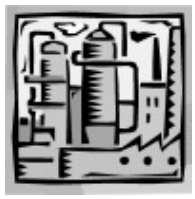
Yalla Bye, Joel Dorkam

Welcome to "Kibbutz Shorts", where we discover what's new on the Kibbutz in an update from around Israel.

Compiled mainly from the Kibbutz weeklies by Yoel Darom, Kibbutz Kfar Menachem

Less Fieldwork, More Industry

Every Kibbutz is a complex society based on social and ideological principles (which have undergone fundamental changes in recent decades), but it is also - and in many cases first and foremost - a large economic enterprise. The first 40-50 years saw the Kibbutzim as mainly agricultural enterprises - "Make the desert bloom" used to be one of the central slogans. Lately, the Kibbutz economy has turned more and more towards industry, especially as this promised much higher income and enabled many to pull out of their long-term financial crisis.



Nowadays industry is by far the biggest source of profit: 68%, while field crops, farm animals and smaller (partly private) initiatives combined bring in the rest.
The Kibbutz movement today numbers 700,000 people, of which 53,000 are members, the rest being children and temporary or permanent "kibbutz residents".

Don't Give Up Your Driving Force!

It has recently been noticed that quite a few women on Kibbutzim have given up driving even though they own a valid driving license. The "Women's Department in the Galilee" were not at all happy, but instead of complaining or preaching, they took action (like true feminists): they organized a refresher course for women drivers - with many participants - and the hope is that all or at least more women will head back to the road.

Kibbutz Migvan

Rockets On The Urban Kibbutz 'Migvan'

Twenty years ago a group of Kibbutz youngsters decided on a new way of life: not by settling on the land but by becoming the communal backbone of Sderot, a far-away development town. They live with complete "old Kibbutz style" sharing and mutual responsibility, while building up and intensifying a wide network of cultural and social centers for the whole town. They too suffer now (actually for years now) from rockets that are being shot at them as they are adjacent to the border with the Gaza Strip. As most of them raise their children there too, it is not easy for them to maintain their activities - and even increase them in view of the critical situation - while many of the older inhabitants have left the place. In our view this is truly pioneering work. (See Pages 20-21)

Forever – Or Temporary

Again and again some Kibbutzniks do not easily give in and decide on a trial period to keep their Kibbutz from deviating from its initial rules and laws. And indeed, a clause in the official Kibbutz regulations determines that for fundamental changes in Kibbutz life a majority of 75% is needed. Quite a few Kibbutzim find themselves in a position that the majority of members vote in favor of the proposed changes, but they do not reach the required 75%.
This is a very disturbing situation and causes ill-will and mutual accusations. Some Kibbutzim found a temporary way out: they claim that these changes are experimental, for one year only, and only then will the final vote be taken. The assumption is that after this year the Chaverim (members) will get used to the new ways of "privatization" and the number of opponents will be reduced to less than a quarter.
In some Kibbutzim one most obstinate Chaver makes a stand and turns to the courts to declare this "trial year" illegal, and indeed there are doubts: one judge accepted this claim while another one legalized the "trial" path of action on behalf of the majority on the Kibbutz. One fact is clear: not a single Kibbutz has turned the wheel back after a trial-year.

Green Driving

Ami of Kibbutz Ramot Menasheh has been fighting for years for more environmental action on Kibbutzim, where this attitude is not strongly represented. Lately he opened a new front: trying to spread the use of electric-driven small motorcycles, which could prove to be an ideal vehicle to get to the different parts of a large Kibbutz. You charge the battery from a regular socket and can reach a speed of 45 km/hour. The cost: less than $3000.

Make Newcomers Feel At Home

You are all acquainted with the name Joel Dorkam: he is the man who for the last 12 years represented us, as senior member of the International Communes Desk - in each and every issue of C.A.L.L. - with his outreaching review of the communal scene, under the title KALEIDOCOPE. But Joel is a person of many occupations. Amongst his other jobs and activities, he was active - for the last 50 years - in an area which is supremely important for Israel: the absorption of new immigrants.
To make the thousands of newcomers, who gather here from many different surroundings and cultures welcome here and turn them into Israeli citizens. is not an easy job. Only in the course of dozens of years did Israel understand how hard it is to serve as a "melting pot" for people - although they are all Jews - from Romania and England, Morocco and South Africa, Russia and the U.S. For the Kibbutzim this task is somewhat easier, because most new members have gone through years of target-directed education in the Pioneering Youth Movements, but even they had difficulties in acclimatizing.
Recently Joel was honored by the Ministry of Absorption in a special public gathering, and in his speech on behalf of the other volunteers he said: we all work for one important aspect of Tikun Olam (the bettering of the World in Jewish tradition), and after being driven out of Germany and then out of France into Spain where they put us in prison - I collected more experience than most in the desperate need of the "wandering Jew" for a homeland.

L'Arche, UK

Hugh Nelson, Community Leader of L'Arche Community, Lambeth, England (one of nine such L'Arche communities in the UK)

L'Arche communities were founded to enable people with learning disabilities to live ordinary lives, supported by people who respected them and engaged with them as fully as possible. Over 40 years later, L'Arche continues to build communities based on these values.

L'Arche in this country, and in over a hundred other countries, is an intentional community in the sense that:

- We provide opportunities for regularly coming together as a community – not instead of links with the local neighbourhood and with family and friends but in addition to and alongside these external links. (Our Community celebrations are attended by friends and neighbours, are often based on local church communities, and are often made possible by local support.)
- L'Arche communities are built on a fundamental belief that all people, with and without learning disabilities, have the same fundamental needs and hopes. Amongst our most important needs is the opportunity to have a network of strong, engaged and respectful friendships. An attractive environment, choice over the basic aspects of day to day life and well trained paid support is important, but it is the quality of relationships that is most important to most people. By providing a context in which such relationships are encouraged and nurtured L'Arche communities enable people with learning disabilities to get to know a wide range of people and to make friendships with them. In this way, people with learning disabilities in L'Arche avoid the experience of isolation and loneliness that faces so many, and are able to meet and make friends with people other than those paid to support them.
- L'Arche assistants (staff) are recruited not just to work for and with people with learning disabilities, but to live alongside them in shared houses and flats.
- Both people with learning disabilities and assistants often come to L'Arche (and stay with L'Arche) because they want to be part of a faith community – though we cater for and welcome people from all faiths and none. (Some of those who have been with us for many years, and have contributed hugely, do not identify with any formal religion.)
- Being part of a worldwide movement is not just an organisational fact. Both people with learning disabilities and assistants treasure these wider links, and visit other Communities in the UK and overseas. Big assemblies, such as that in Italy last year, are attended by people with learning disabilities from all over the world. (Language does not seem to be a barrier, even for those without any formal spoken language.
- People with learning disabilities, on behalf of their own Community and on behalf of the wider L'Arche, are involved in choosing the leaders of L'Arche at local, national and international level.

We are still learning – not least from those we serve, including those now part of a L'Arche Community from a base in their own flat; and we see a bright future for our sort of intentional community that reflects the intentions and the values of all our rich diversity of members. A nurse in the major teaching hospital where one of our originating members spent some time before coming back to his L'Arche house to die commented "He's really part of a family!" We like to think so. Families of course change; and not everybody chooses to live forever with their family. We support those who wish to move on, as well as supporting new ways of living for those who wish to stay and who need more support or less support, or simply different support.

Building community with people with learning disabilities means just that.

Hugh Nelson
L'Arche Lambeth

From the Frontlines by James Horrox

First published on www.allvoices.com - March 14, 2008

For the last seven years, the western Negev town of Sderot has been synonymous with Israel's strained relationship with its Palestinian neighbours in the Gaza Strip. Situated a kilometre from the Gaza perimeter, the city has been the target of relentless bombardment by Qassam rockets launched by Hamas and Islamic Jihad since the beginning of the Second Intifada. The intensification of the rocket-fire following Disengagement in 2005, and over the last few months in particular, has made Sderot a household name in the West, and has prompted as many as 3,000 of the city's 22,000 residents to pack up and leave for safer areas.

Sderot is an eerily quiet place. On Monday morning I travelled down from Tel Aviv for a meeting with one of the town's residents, Nomika Zion, granddaughter of Socialist Zionist leader Yaakov Hazan and founder member of Sderot's urban kibbutz, Migvan.

Established in 1987, Migvan was one of the first in a new wave of communal, kibbutz-style projects that began to put down roots in towns and cities across Israel during that decade. Its creators - six young adults, most of whom were from a kibbutz background - aimed to remedy the kibbutz movement's rapidly atrophying relevance to Israeli society by taking the communal idea and integrating it into an urban environment. More than two decades later, the community they established has grown to sixty members. Its residents live in family units in collectively owned housing and maintain separate households, salaries are pooled into a joint account with monthly budgets for personal and family expenses distributed on the basis of family size, (thus loosely 'according to need'), and the collective owns several cars and takes care of financing education, health, transportation and so on.

Nomika Zion

Migvan's members choose either to work regular jobs in the surrounding society or to be involved in one of the kibbutz's two main economic branches. The first of these is a hi-tech company, Migvan Effect, established by members of the community in 1995. Consisting of twelve workers - half of whom are members of the kibbutz, half of whom are not - Migvan Effect provides internet solutions to companies and organisations across the country. "Migvan are the owners and the managers of this company," Nomika explains, "but everybody gets the same salaries. There are no gaps. When we've had financial problems in the past, the employees have actually ended up with more than the directors".

The company has a participatory, directly democratic decision-making structure and places heavy emphasis on the idea that every individual employee feels he's creating something, that he belongs to something. "The salaries are very low in comparison to other hi-tech companies" Nomika says, "but you get social values here. Because we understand that salaries are so low, the directors have always made it clear that anybody can leave at any time and go to other places to work, and they'll have the full support of the company if they choose to do that. We ask ourselves the same question all the time, incidentally, because everybody from Migvan knows that if he left Migvan Effect to work in one of the big IT companies he could be earning fifteen, twenty, twenty-five thousand shekels a year, which is a vast amount more than he'd get here. We know this. But the question is, what's the price he's going to pay for that? Here, you get values. We finish work at 4pm, for example - we're not going to make employees work until late at night so they end up never seeing their families. Here, people come first. And the reality is that people don't leave the company".

The second, and perhaps more significant area of Migvan's work in terms of the community's impact on Sderot, is its non-profit organisation, the Gvanim Association for Education and Community Involvement, which it established in 1994. "The Gvanim Association built a social concept" says Nomika, "a communal concept of how to run the city. The association was established because Migvan's members wanted to be involved in educational and social projects in the city and the surrounding area, and over the years it's grown bigger and bigger and taken on more and more responsibility for different areas of the city's life. It's now responsible for around fifty projects in various different fields, including education, welfare, immigrant absorption, the development

and management of services for disabled people, programs for children and youth at risk, community organisation projects in Sderot's Caucasian community and the development of a model for community-based volunteer programs for other communities throughout Israel".

While most of the country's urban communes have established NGOs of some kind or another, Migvan's is unique not only in terms of its size (it currently employs around 250 people from Sderot and its environs), but also in terms of its scope. Gvanim has basically been running Sderot for the last decade and a half, and for most of its lifetime it's controlled many different areas of the city, but the fact that it's found itself at the frontlines in a conflict situation means that its work has taken on a whole new dimension during recent years.

"As a kibbutz we're personally in a very deep crisis because of the Qassams" Nomika tells me. "We've lived with this every day for seven years, and all of us are deeply hurt by the situation, particularly those of us with young children. Just two weeks ago one of our houses was destroyed by a Qassam, we've already had members leaving the kibbutz as a result of the attacks and right now we've got another family wanting to leave. The Qassams affect everybody in this place. I personally feel like they've made me much, much weaker as a person, but they affect every single person living in Sderot, the strong and the weak alike".

The Gvanim association is heavily involved in dealing with many aspects of the attacks, for example providing a trauma centre, therapy, psychological help and counselling for those affected by the daily rocket fire. "Many of the town's youngest residents don't remember life before the Qassams," says Nomika, "and the programs the association runs for children and youth at risk have therefore taken on a particular importance. There are currently ten projects aimed specifically at early childhood alone. The Gvanim also recently won the contract to restore Sderot's shelters and build safe-rooms in the city's public buildings".

"The government's reluctant to give the money to the municipality nowadays" Nomika says, "because there's so much corruption there. Millions and millions in government money has disappeared over recent years, so now they prefer to give the money to Gvanim because they know that if they do that, every last shekel will go to the right place".

As the government has gradually reneged on more and more of its responsibilities during recent decades - the state's increasingly being accused of comprehensively failing in areas such as welfare and education specifically - the NGOs and social organisations like Gvanim have been stepping in and assuming a much larger role in the day to day life of Israeli society. "The space that the government leaves, the NGOs fill in" says Nomika, "and there's a big debate at the moment about the limitations of the state's responsibility, about why the social organisations have to fill in where the government steps back, about the limitations of privatisation and the potential for cooperation between sectors".

"As far as the Gvanim's concerned, the idea has always been to cooperate. It's not a competition; we don't necessarily want to replace the municipality but to work in conjunction with it. The Gvanim's managed to develop a unique model of cross-sector partnership and cooperation, and for the last eight years or so people have been coming here from all over the world to learn about this model, to learn how you create real social change in your town".

In filling the vacuum left by an inadequate and oftentimes corrupt local government, Nomika and her colleagues at Kibbutz Migvan hope not just that their self-run educational and social projects will create genuine and lasting social change in Sderot - Nomika sees that happening already - but that their unique mode of communal life might act as an example and a model for others across Israel to follow. "It's not going to change Israeli society in itself" she says, "but it's another option. It's another alternative - that's how I see it. What we're saying is 'look, you *can* live according to different values and in different ways; people don't have to behave like animals to each other. We can build a new model of solidarity, mutual responsibility, a new model of human life. This is an option. This is an alternative. This is a challenge for Israeli society".

Communes make a comeback

Brisbane Times - July 20, 2007

Teepees, dope, nudity and lashings of idealism. These were the essential ingredients for Australia's first hippie communes, which sprouted up illegally along the NSW north coast in the seventies. Thirty years on, communal living is back in vogue, and a respect for nature and human values runs deeper than ever in these circles. But with high-speed broadband, high-tech sewage treatment, architect-designed housing and consultant psychotherapists who hold workshops on living together, communes have grown up. They are no longer run by hippies, anarchists and potheads but a much more familiar breed: the suburban professional concerned about climate change and soaring house prices; the cashed-up city slicker seeking a simpler life; and parents wanting space for their kids to play. And forget about calling them communes. They are now "intentional communities" - and growing weed is no longer tolerated.

Welcome to Jindibah, a modern-day intentional community in the Byron hinterland of northern NSW.

Jindibah (named after the local aboriginal word for "tawny frog-mouthed owl" and "wisdom") is currently home to six households, with another six planning to move there.

The look of the farm is immediately impressive. Spread across 113 acres of jade green farmland once cleared for cattle, a variety of modest houses stands proud on its hilltops, each with a buffer zone of native plants for privacy.

The remainder of the land is divided up - by original stone walls and solar-powered electric fences - between land for cattle, which keep the farm sustainable, and rainforest regeneration areas. The farm also has a swimming hole and a 1950s original dance hall (once used for pot festivals in the seventies, now a venue for meetings, parties and yoga).

The community was founded by Christopher Sanderson and Christobel Munson, who had always dreamed of starting up a sustainable rural community. After years working the corporate scene, they upped sticks from Sydney to Byron Shire in 1993 to look for the right property. "We decided that if we were going to buy five or ten acres, we might as well buy 100 acres and share it with friends," says Christobel. "It's great to bring the Jindibah vision to reality." The "vision", according to Christopher, is based on a triple bottom line. "After much analysis, we decided you need to take care of three things - economics, ecology and people," he says. "If you get this balance right, you have a sustainable community."

Like many communities in northern NSW, Jindibah is legally bound by a Multiple Occupancy (MO) agreement, which was approved by the local council in 1996. An MO is one title divided into usually equal shares among the community's occupants. Each share offers the right to live on an exclusive piece of land on the community, equal use of facilities, an equal share in agribusiness activities and equal participation in community decision-making.

Jindibah has attracted an interesting bunch of ages, nationalities and personalities - all for varying, yet similar, reasons. And there's one common thread - everyone is originally from the city.

Alan, a Qantas pilot, says he had reached the stage in his life where friends, family, community and a healthy, wholesome lifestyle were "an absolute necessity". He also wanted a change from the confines of being a wage earner.

Philip, an Australian writer who has been living in New York for the last 30 years, says he re-evaluated his priorities after watching his parents grow old. He realised that in his old age he wanted to be around friends, in a place of his choosing.

But although the residents are like-minded in many ways, Christobel describes Jindibah as an "interesting social experiment", because it's important that everyone agrees on decisions about the farm.

To avoid disputes, some communities have probation periods for new residents. At Jindibah residents spend a lot of time with someone new before they accept them, making sure the newcomer understands that everything has to be in the interests of the community. Potential problem areas (such as dogs which can upset the cattle) are set out in the community's by-laws (they must remain on the resident's own lot). And the community holds "living together" workshops, run by a psychotherapist, three times a year. One thing that ties Jindibah's residents together is concern over climate change and water. As a minimum, each property on the community has its own water storage facility and waste water setup, uses green electricity and enjoys an average of 0.69 hectares to grow fruit and vegetables. And with the help of funds made from the sale of housing lots, the community has spent $10,000 a year to regenerate the subtropical rainforest and native plants that used to cover the area, projects that would not be commercially viable for your average farmer.

The residents are also working on a soil improvement program to boost agribusiness potential, with mangoes, coffee and macadamia nuts all possibilities. Solar power and hydroponics are next on the list.

Community orientation on Jindibah for the last 100 years

Jindibah, formerly a dairy farm owned by local Bangalow identity Harry Fowler OAM, a well-loved community leader and master sportsman

Harry Fowler

- built the property's **swimming hole** in the 1920s; initiated learn-to-swim classes for local children every summer before local public pools opened
- ran such **community activities** as riding for abled and disabled, old style dancing, scout camps, and soldiers' reunions in the property's open-sided hall
- hosted famous open-air **pop concerts** during the 1970s featuring Australian bands like Misex, Jimmy Barnes, INXS and Rose Tattoo

History

- Jindibah members created a **permanent exhibition** of the history of the property and Harry's life, launched on his 100th birthday in his old dance hall
- Jindibah members aim to stay true to the **community spirit** that Harry engendered on the property and provide friendship, service and opportunities for our wider community

Growing up in Niederkaufungen
A very positive Experience

Interviews with five young people

JONAS (25) :
I remember my childhood years in the Commune with pleasure. I lived there from the age of 4 and left 16 years later, doing my year of civic service and then I went on to study. I acquired so much there: how to get on with other people, how to understand them and how to solve conflicts without personal animosity.
I cannot imagine a better childhood. I - like all children there - was protected by so many nice people (and not only your parents), who took care of all the small and large problems that befall you as you are growing up. Even as differences of opinion arose, you are confronted with more people than your parents. All in all I can say for sure that I grew up happily in the commune.

NORA (24) :
I left Niederkaufungen 5 years ago. In my good-bye letter I wrote: I imagine that the eternal discussions enriched me… Now - from a distance - I see that this came true, thanks to my communal education.
This also means that you learn that people hold different views and opinions and that mine are not necessarily better than those of others. It is definitely worthwhile to listen to them all, and the loudest speaker does not have to be the right one. True, this attitude demands a lot of effort but always pays off.
I also understood that a liberal stand will often achieve more than a dogmatic one. My commune experience also taught me that in our lives there are things that are much more important than money and power.

LOTTA (23) :
One of the important things I took with me from communal life is…the Bio and vegetarian food, which I have stuck to ever since, out of ecological consciousness.
In the larger commune you learn to appreciate the many advantages of close social life, and even after you leave you keep looking for opportunities of togetherness as well as consideration and understanding for others' needs. In Niederkaufungen I developed a curiosity for everything new and for the different opinions of others.

KALLE (21) :
When I think back at my time in the commune, I remember mainly an unburdened childhood, wild youth and a lot of fun. If there remained some negative memories, they are definitely few and insignificant. I think I received a good preparation for my future life and my childhood years were beautiful and rich in experience. I would like to be able to give my children a similar education, maybe in a collective housing project.

FELIX (19) :
A year and a half ago I left the community and traveled a lot, but each time I come to visit (or have a meal there), I feel welcome; at home. While living there, I came across many aspects that bothered me, mainly the food: Ecology seemed to be much more important than taste. Sometimes it bothered me to have so many people around me all the time. It was unpleasant to me that at the age of five our behaviour had to be "politically correct". The ongoing discussions if people could have a cell-phone or put up a Satellite-receiver sounded absurd to me.
But now, when I distanced myself from the commune, I realize how positive my formative years were in that "different society". I learned to get on with all kinds of personalities and honor their opinions. I learned to objectively judge my own actions and views in light of what others said. A lot of all this helps me today to live in harmony with the people who surround me at home or at work. I am proud and thankful for having grown up in a commune.

Translated from KONTRASTE die Monatszeitung for Selbstorganisation, Heidelberg - by Yoel Darom

The Utopia of Sharing in Oneida, N.Y.

New York Times, August 3, 2007,
By Beth Quinn Barnard

THEY wanted to create a heaven on earth. For 33 years they believed they'd succeeded, at a utopian commune infamous for "free love."

Nineteenth-century visitors to the Oneida Community in central New York State found a family of 300 individuals who lived in a rambling brick Mansion House and shared everything - their worldly possessions, their religious fervor, their sexual partners. Tourists came by the thousands on the railroad and paid 60 cents for one of the community's mostly vegetarian dinners, or 25 cents for an evening's "grand entertainment."

Twenty-first century visitors who stay in one of Oneida's eight guest rooms pay $100 for a comfortable bedroom, a simple breakfast and a private tour of the museum portion of the 93,000-square-foot Mansion House, which also contains 35 private apartments for permanent residents.

"I don't know of anywhere else where you can either live or stay in a museum," said Patricia Hoffman, executive director of the Oneida Community Mansion House. "It's very unusual."

So was the Oneida Community.

Led by a Vermont native named John Humphrey Noyes, the community's founders came to New York State in 1848 to put into practice their Perfectionist beliefs. Believing that the Kingdom of God on Earth had arrived with the second coming of Jesus during the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D., they embraced the communalism of the early Christian Church in their effort to create a more equal, just and rational society in their new Eden.

Beginning in 1862, Oneida's Bible Communists - their term - built the Mansion House as a bricks-and-mortar embodiment of their secular ideals, which proved more enduring than their religious beliefs: an openness to new ideas, a constant striving for self-improvement, the primacy of reason and the value of curiosity. Set amid 14 acres of tree-shaded lawns and gardens, the building offers an assortment of public spaces where residents, visitors and guests come together in an ever-changing series of contemporary Oneida communities.

These days 47 people live in the Mansion House. Some are Oneida descendants or longtime area residents who have retired. Others have no connection with the Oneida Community but like the grounds and the handsome old building.

The Oneida Community Cemetery, where Noyes and many of his followers are buried, is a five-minute walk away, amid the fairways of the Oneida Community Golf Course. The residents' library and lounge and the building's grounds are open to guests, as are several of the museum's public rooms.

The soul of the Oneida Community resides in the second-floor Big Hall, where the adults gathered after dinner each night for their evening meeting. Rather than the austere arches of a church, the handsome two-story hall features a sumptuous trompe l'oeil ceiling with figures depicting Justice, Music, Astronomy and History. In place of stained glass and a pulpit, the Oneidans built a stage backlit by three tall, velvet-curtained windows.

Every evening, community members might hear a "home talk" from their leader, make decisions about their business affairs, enjoy a concert by the community's musicians or air and settle grievances through "mutual criticism." Today the hall is rented out for weddings, concerts and lectures. The heart of the Oneida Community - and the sexual practices that brought it both fame and infamy - is next door in the Upper Sitting Room, an elegant two-story salon lined with portraits of the giants of classical antiquity and the doors of the tiny bedrooms where they practiced "complex marriage."

The unhappiness of some inside the Oneida Community and the animosity of outsiders to their radical sexual practices combined to bring about the end of the commune. In June 1879, fearing criminal charges for sex-related crimes, Noyes fled to Canada. In August 1879, complex marriage ended, and the Oneida Community's men and women began pairing off into monogamous marriages.

After the breakup of the Oneida Community, the Mansion House remained closed to the public for 106 years. But in 1987 the building began its third incarnation by adding to the private apartments a museum and eight guest rooms. Around 8,200 people come to the Mansion House each year as visitors or guests.

Communal living makes a comeback

Ideals bond members of state's shared communities

From "The Tennessean" By Bonna Johnson

When Linda Hoyle needs a new pair of shoes or even a $2 toothbrush, she doesn't make a trip to the nearest store. Instead, she jots it down on a piece of paper and tacks it to the bulletin board at the community dining hall.

Hoyle has her role - head cook for a 35-member religious community nestled in a valley near McMinnville, Tenn. Someone else does the shopping for members of the People of the Living God.

This religious group is one of at least 15 intentional communities in Tennessee, people who purposely band together to advance a shared vision. It's a lifestyle that has increased dramatically over the past two decades; in Tennessee alone, at least a dozen more are in formation.

Longtime Jump Off Community member Julia Stubblebine, with Joshua Mauzy and their daughter, Maya Indigo Simone Mauzy, of the intentional community in Sewanee.

Sharing land and sometimes housing, community members balance their needs with those of the larger group, pitching in to cover group expenses and toiling to keep the community running. Members say this style of living promotes deeper connections and sharing of interests that can't be found in society at large.

The agrarian People of the Living God are communal in nature. Most resources are shared and there is little or no personal property. They all work in the community, with some members tending the 101-head dairy operation and others cultivating hundreds of acres of crops - ventures to support their private academy and residential compound. Most of the women work in an industrial-sized kitchen, where meals are shared three times a day.

Other communities are less intertwined and members work outside the community and have independent finances, such as Jump Off Community Land Trust in Sewanee. Residents at this eco-village get together for potluck brunches just once a month but are there to help each other with big jobs on the home front, like plastering straw-bale walls or installing environmentally friendly water tanks.

"One common thread we share out here is that we're all interested in sustainable kind of architecture," said Sanford McGee, a founding member. "We don't use any toxins on the land."

Number has increased

Across the nation, new communities are on the increase, particularly those focused on ecological living. In the past 20 years, the number of intentional communities has risen nearly tenfold nationwide, according to registrations with the Fellowship of Intentional Communities. In 1985, there were some 65 communities; by 2005, that number was more than 600.

That could be just a third of the actual number of communities out there, with many preferring privacy and unwilling to be listed on national Web sites, said Harvey Baker, 61, who lives at the Dunmire Hollow Community, which promotes rural living in Wayne County and who is a nationally active community member.

Dependence on cars and computers can be socially isolating, Baker said. People may be networking online but not building personal connections that are fulfilling, he said.

Living "in community" means people are around to help each other and share ideas, said David Carroll, who is building a straw-bale home from where he'll commute to his Atlanta job as director of the Carter Center Democracy Program.

Members are close

…Members of the People of the Living God depend on each other for everything from the clothes on their backs to the education of their children, making them more of a throwback to the communes of old, though you won't find tie-dye, long-maned men or rock 'n' roll there.

Dunmire Hollow Community Building

"I have everything I need here and don't have much reason to go out in the world," said Hoyle, toting a small canvas bag proclaiming "Praise the Lord," as she walked the few steps from her trailer home to the long, white dining hall where Friday night service was about to begin.

"There is a closeness that exists between people in the community that does not exist in the world outside," said Brother Randall Walton, 85, the community leader who preaches each Saturday - their day of worship - to about 65 congregants in a vinyl-sided church that can seat up to 400.

"The early church held everything in common and nobody called anything his own," Walton said. The community started in 1933 with 125 members in California and wound up in New Orleans. They abandoned the Big Easy in 1982 because of its moral and ethical decline, Walton said.

These types of communities - communes where resources are shared and there is little or no personal property - are in the minority today, making up just 15% of the communities registered with the Fellowship of Intentional Communities, spokesman Tony Sirna said.

Urban groups exist

A majority of present-day communities are rural in nature, like Jump Off and People of the Living God, but almost a third are in cities, including Nashville Greenlands.

In this north Nashville community, 10 residents co-house in three homes - as many as four adults sharing one 1,380-square-foot home with a single bathroom.

"A great advantage of living in community is that it allows us to do with our lives what we think is important," founder Karl Meyer, 70, said.

This frugal style of living means they can spend less time working and more time advocating for peace and justice issues, like opposing the war and working for a cleaner environment, Meyer said.

In the inner-city neighborhood where they live, organic gardens flourish in their yards, providing 80 percent of their food in the summer, including some 45 quarts of blackberries, 300 stalks of asparagus, 300 pounds of pears, 120 figs, 500 onions, 70 butternut squash, plus grapes, beets, carrots and a selection of salad greens.

Members are required to work 20 hours a month for the community but otherwise live independent lives.

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