C.A.L.L.

Communes At Large Letter

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNES DESK

YAD TABENKIN

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Dear Readers,

I'm currently reading "Where Community Happens" by Henry Near, and I came across this wonderful quote which describes the collective experience of a young kibbutz in the 1920's:

"There was a sort of mutual yearning, a desire to sit together far into the night, and thereby penetrate the very depth of the vision of communal life. Soul touched soul. We longed to become a sort of river of souls, whose tributaries would merge, and together create a fresh and mighty current of friendship and fraternity".

Whilst I recognize that communal experiments past and present are extremely varied, specifically in terms of the varying levels of co-operation between their members, all communities, by their very nature, are an expression of people's search for some form of person-to-person connectedness.

In addition, the shared knowledge and experiences *between* communities, of which the ICD is a vehicle, is a further expression of wo/man's desire for partnership. In the current issue of C.A.L.L. we have a fine example of this; we reprint letters we have received from Austria and Australia, of community members reaching out across the world.

We also have a couple of articles profiling intentional communities in China, reflecting a communal renaissance of sorts, in stark contrast to the increasing adoption of capitalism there. Closer to home, we have an article on the Israeli Council of Communities for Social Action, an exciting network of which my community is a part.

This year, the ICD hosted a symposium of sorts, on the topic of Tikkun Olam (don't worry if this term doesn't mean anything to you yet, it will when you read our Study Group materials starting on page 10). Our very own Michael Livni opened the session with a presentation defining the concept, followed by Richard and Susan interpreting the term from the Ganas perspective (the name of their community in New York). Finally, Jan Bang described the presence of Tikkun Olam in the philosophy and practice of Camphill Communities (his presentation can be found on page 12). The discussions were fruitful, and my feelings from the meeting can be summed up by the following passage, also from Henry's book:

"..the collective experience often rises spontaneously when men and women of good will live, work and think together. In this sense, it is universal – or, perhaps more accurately, eternal, as fire is eternal: not that it never dies, but that it will always break out afresh, in places ever new and often unexpected".

You can send us your suggestions, corrections, contributions and retributions regarding C.A.L.L., to the usual email address,

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To coincide with the release of a documentary film "American Commune", a project by filmmaker-sisters Nadine and Rena Mundo who were born on The Farm in the 1970s, many column inches have been written in the press about the Tennessee community. Here we publish an interview with two long-standing community members

By Andres Diaz
www.hlntv.com

Phil and Mary Schweitzer met and fell in love on The Farm, a former hippy commune in Tennessee. Phil is a founding member of the community. Mary has lived there for about 35 years. Today they live in a beautiful home they built, which they run as a bed and breakfast. But life wasn't always so easy…

It must have been tough. It must have been really difficult.

Mary: I can describe it really easily. It was like camping out for 10 years. That's my standard line. It was hard. You know, only cold running water and then sometimes not even that. In the winter the pipes would freeze.... We were very committed to being together and doing this thing and raising our kids.

Phil: We were cold in the winter. We were hungry. There were times when it was hard to get shoes on your feet. There were real financial challenges for many years. And one of the things that sustained us was that we didn't just live here but we also went to do relief and development work around the world. And seeing the way people lived in the third world made us feel wealthy.

Someone described The Farm as being an intentional community. What do you think is the intent behind the Farm?

Mary: Well, we really have a nice group of friends here. We try to live in peace and harmony and not harm the earth.

Phil: We came here as a group because we wanted to have a collective voice that would be loud enough that people could hear. We weren't hiding. We weren't running away. We were saying, 'We have things we'd like to communicate.' But people aren't listening to one or two of us. But if we've got 200 of us, or 1,000 of us, then we're going to have a voice. And people will notice.

As many of the original members begin to reach their golden years, there's a new debate about what will happen in the future. There's concern among many

that the Farm will not survive without new blood. Phil and Mary say there's some resistance to that, from some of the current members.

Tell me about the resistance.

Phil: I can say this. That living in community is not easy. It's not for everyone. So we have challenges that we face. And one of them is, do we continue to grow as a community and bring in new people and allow new people to come in? Or do we become a hippy retirement community and just everybody disappear into old age?

Phil and Mary Schweitzer on the steps of their bed and breakfast

That's not the spirit in the Summer of Love.

Phil: Absolutely. And there is a conflict within the community about whether or not we're going to expand or contract. My personal view, and I know Mary feels this way, is that, without expansion, then are we really just going to be a one-generation flash in the pan and just disappear?

Every year the world gets more stressful, more technology and everything's faster and there's more stress. I imagine having an oasis from that, if nothing else, must be great.

Phil: It's interesting because our kids were born here and lived in the country and decided, 'Hey, we're missing out on the culture.' And they've all moved to the city. We, on the other hand, feel absolutely at home. Like this is our museum. These trees are our works of art that we can appreciate. So it's not an escape for us. It's really a way of life.

The Edge of Doubt (reprinted from Camphill Correspondence – March/April 2014)

There is always that edge of doubt.
Trust it, thats where the new things come from.
If you can't live with it, get out, because when it is gone you're on automatic, repeating something you've learned.
Let your prayer be:
save me from that tempting certainty that leads me back from the edge,
that dark edge where the first light breaks ...

Albert Huffstickler

Intentional Communities and Solidarity Economics

The mutual need for seeing each other

Michael Johnson, Ganas Community (ganas.org), Grassroots Economic Organizing (geo.coop)

Solidarity Economics is a powerful framework for thinking about alternative and grassroots economics being used across the globe (http://www.geo.coop/node/35). Solidarity Economic enterprises and organizations collaborate locally and regionally to build a just, peace-based, and fully democratic society. They collaborate with a diverse range of other citizen groups to build and share power in democratic networks where peace-building and peace-making are widely used to prevent and manage conflicts.

Onlookers may well ask, "Why all this agitation for alternative ways of living and earning livelihoods"? Our answer is quite complex, but can be roughly summarized. The dominant way our culture thinks about and does "economics" envisions, for the most part, human beings only as "consumers" and Earth as a "storehouse of resources" to be used for private gain.

Over the last 40 years intentional communities have become a major alternative economic institution in the United States. They are much more than that, for sure. They are solid, ongoing experiments in evolving cultures of cooperation. They are small "other worlds" already realized. In addition, the ICs in the US are a fully developed movement, and growing.

The more formal intentional communities are unique and vital for they are both a major form of alternative lifestyles and alternative economics. Activists of every stripe need to know about them and to understand the power of community and cooperation these 'formal' models offer. They need also to take note that the intentional communities movement embraces **"projects where people strive together with a common vision."** In both of these regards, nothing could be more aligned with solidarity economics and most other forms of alternative economics.

Grassroots economic activists are, to a very large extent, unaware of the breadth and depth of the intentional community movement, nor of how much they themselves have in common this movement. Likewise, many of the members in the more formal intentional communities don't realize how much they have in common with these activists and their varied alternative economic institutions like worker co-ops, food co-ops, land trusts, alternative currency, barter networks, and so forth.

The world is filled with alternative lifestyles and ways of earning livelihoods. Awareness of them is quite dim and scattered, however. Even people living these different lifestyles and practicing different ways of producing, distributing, and consuming goods and services are surprisingly unaware of each other. Mainstream media is, well, radically mainstream. GEO's Fall 2013 Theme (http://www.geo.coop/content/intentional-communities-and-solidarity-economics) seeks to fill and bridge some of the gaps that mainstream media's radically exclusive approach creates. This focuses on the connections between intentional communities and solidarity economics.

The Israeli Council of Communities for Social Action

James Grant-Rosenhead, Kibbutz Mishol, Kvutzot HaBechira of HaMachanot Ha'Olim

The first experiments of the new generation of intentional, activist communities in Israel can be traced back to as early as 1968. In that year, Garin Sha'al began building a prototype Urban Kibbutz in Carmiel, whilst the founders of the first Garin Torani began establishing themselves in Kiryat Shmona. These new social action oriented communities were from very different backgrounds, politically, ideologically and sociologically. Garin Sha'al founders were graduates of the Socialist Zionist youth movement Habonim Dror from North America, whilst the founders of the Garin Torani in Kiryat Shmona were from Orthodox National Religious backgrounds, including Bnei Akiva and Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav. Several similar Urban Kibbutzim and Garinim Toraniim were established during the late 1970's and 1980's but then in the 1990's they began blossoming in more significant numbers all over Israel, as a variety of networks and movements were by then focused on actively creating such intentional communities.

For the past three decades, the contact between these communities was rare and usually confrontational – based on political and ideological antagonism and rivalry, as these socialist and religious communities and movements competed and fought to influence and lead Israel in opposing directions with regard to many key issues. In recent years however, social and political developments such as the struggle against the privatization of the land of Israel and the growing poverty gap have brought the various community movements and networks together, putting aside some of their differences in order to work together towards mutual aims such as democratic Zionism, social solidarity, social action and community building. By the time that the massive socio-economic protests swept Israel in 2011, there were already at least 14 different community movements and networks representing, networking, and creating social action oriented communities across Israel. They can be

roughly described according to four general characteristics, although in reality there are many more overlaps and differences between them all, so this terminology can be misleading: Local residents (immigrants and minorities); Religious (modern Orthodox and Charedi); Educational/Cooperative and Secular/Pluralist.

1. Local Residents' Community Networks: There are three networks of immigrant activist communities, based primarily upon local young adult leadership groups taking responsibility for their own community's neighborhoods and thereby improving Israeli society at large. Hineini and Chaverim B'Teva are networks of Ethiopian immigrant communities and M'Dor L'Dor is a network of Caucasian (ie from the Caucasus region) immigrant communities. In terms of the process of forming the communities and their social action projects, the Druze network Ofakim L'Atid is similar to the immigrant networks, in that the community members are also local groups of young adults who are coming together in order to improve their wider communities and Israeli society.

The other twelve community building organizations are different in that they typically involve people deliberately moving their residential locations in order to form their communities and their social action projects in neighborhoods which they identify as relevant, often due to their socio-economic and/or geographic marginalization.

2. Religious Community Networks: There are three networks of religious 'Garin Torani' communities, including two which are 'Modern Orthodox' / 'National Religious' – the Bnei Akiva youth movement (which historically built many religious 'traditional' kibbutzim) graduate movement and the huge Keren Kehillot community network – and also the Nettiot network which includes Ultra Orthodox and 'Baal Teshuva'

('returning to the religion') communities. There are also other similar religious activist community networks who have not joined the Council.

3. Cooperative Educator Kibbutzim Movements: Four of the 'classic' Pioneering Socialist Zionist youth movements which historically built most of the 'traditional' kibbutzim have developed graduate movements of 'Educator Kibbutzim'. Both located in urban and rural settings, their communities are generally composed of smaller 'intimate kvutza' groups which have a highly collective communal life as well as a very high proportion of members working together daily in cooperative educational projects. In addition to Kvutzot Am (Habonim Dror graduates), Kvutzot HaBechira (HaMachanot HaOlim graduates), Hashomer Hatzair graduates and Dror Israel (Hanoar Haoved Vehalomed graduates), there is a newer fifth similar movement – Tarbut – of cultural activist communities, focusing on music, drama and the arts as their medium of social change.

4. Secular/Pluralist: Both 'Maagal HaKvutzot' and 'The Community Incubator' are networks of independent secular/pluralist urban communities and kibbutzim. Some of these communities define themselves as an 'urban/city kibbutz' and include various degrees of collective consumption and cooperative production.

The first difficult discussions about working together for the greater good of Israeli society during 2011 resulted in the establishment of a democratic, representative umbrella body in 2012. Together, the Israeli Council of Communities for Social Action today includes 14 different movements and networks, representing 270 communities nationwide, with some 8000 adult community members who are running social action enterprises which positively affect approximately 350,000 Israelis. Our work is just beginning...

PEACH and DRMIA

From Communities Magazine #158

By Ma'ikwe Schaub Ludwig

PEACH was created over 25 years ago by a group of income-sharing communities, the Federation of Egalitarian Communities. The intention was to pool resources in order to help communities handle larger medical bills, partly to protect a community from folding financially under the weight of a member's health crisis.

Five years ago, Dancing Rabbit joined the fund as the first non-income-sharing group, forming the Dancing Rabbit Mutual Insurance Association. DRMIA covers health claims of us to $5,000 and then PEACH takes over from there. Both organizations operate by consensus.

Essentially, any 20 or more people can get together and form an MIA. The basic model is that you pool your money over a period of time and provide partial or full coverage for members' needs at the time they arise. What we now think of as insurance companies were originally MIAs. I first heard the term in a college African American studies class, because the model was used heavily in the early 1990s by the African American community to help them weather the harsh realities of life as a group, rather than having to fend for themselves. (Gotta love historical examples of community.)

The biggest challenge for a bouncing baby MIA is getting together sufficient capital to provide a real sense of security for their members. Part of why insurance companies have gotten so huge is that larger groups of people pooling money is more financially sustainable than a small group. However, it can be done, and there are a number of interesting examples out there of community-based mutual insuring, including the Ithaca Health Fund (see www.ithacahealth.org/healthfund.html).

From the International Communes Desk (ICD) Study Group

Tikkun Olam

WHAT IS "TIKKUN OLAM"? WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE?

The literal translation of the Hebrew term "Tikkun Olam" is: "To mend, repair and transform the world". As such, the term embodies two different but potentially complementary ideas.

Whether mending a torn shirt or repairing a mechanical defect in your car, repairing and/or mending attempts to return something to its original functional state. Within the context of a social situation, it implies social responsibility within a given social and economic reality which commits one to good works, acts of lovingkindness and charity. In Hebrew, a language thrifty in words, "Tikkun" also means amending rules and regulations in response to changing reality.

On the other hand, the concept of "Tikkun Olam" as used in Jewish daily prayer means **transformation**.
"We therefore hope soon to behold the glory of your Divine Might. Then will false gods be felled and vanish and the world will be perfected under Your unchallenged rule".

The vision of transformation seeks a more just, a more perfect world – social and environmental justice. Social justice means quality of life for all. "Justice, justice shalt thou pursue" (Deut. 16: 20). Environmental justice demands that we be stewards of Divine Creation and not just exploiters of Spaceship Earth's limited resources. "The Divine took the human and placed him in the garden of Eden to till it and tend it." (Gen. 2: 15).

The heritage of Israel recognizes both the importance of mending and repairing in the here and now as well as the divine imperative of ongoing transformation. In the Bible, the priest and the king embody the here and now. The prophet calls for transformation. The legitimacy of the creative tension between the here and now and the transformation to a more just future constituted a defining feature of society in ancient Israel. The Bible introduced this ideal into the heritage of Western civilization. The idea of transformation was enabled by the Bible's recognition of free will – the responsibility of the individual and the community to choose between good and evil.

COMMUNITY AND PURPOSE IN LIFE.
All traditional societies assumed that humans live in the context of community – extended families, clans, peoples. The Biblical tradition added the dimension of purpose to community. The people became the assistants of the Divine in striving for ongoing

transformation as an infinite process to further Tikkun Olam – social and environmental justice.

With the onset of modernity, traditional community began to disintegrate. The process is still very much with us today. Most of us are not born into community. We are born into a framework of nuclear family, sometimes only partial nuclear family. An important aspect of the modern movement for Jewish national renewal, the Zionist movement, was the call for a return to purposive Jewish community. The best known expression of this aspect of Zionism was the kibbutz.

Within the context of modernity, the decision to participate in community meant the conscious decision of the individual to do so – in particular if the community is an intentional community. The individual has to decide if he/she wants a life of meaning and that such a life is best realized in a community of like-minded others. This was the essential personal decision in personal Tikkun, personal self-transformation, for those who sought to participate in Jewish renewal. The Labor Zionist philosopher, A.D. Gordon, 1856-1922, put it thus:
"Insofar as I have not yet experienced a change in my purpose for living there is no reason for me to seek a new life, as I will not find it. A new life is first and foremost a new purpose for living…"

Gordon's view was a balanced one. He rejected those who would sacrifice their personal self-fulfillment in work and love ("Life of the Hour") for the sake of an ideal ("Life Eternal"). He believed that the purpose for living had to permeate self-fulfillment in the here and now in order to realize a link to Life Eternal.

INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY, PEACE AND TIKKUN OLAM.
National and international movements of intentional community begin with individuals who seek a life of purpose. Tikkun Olam is a message of peace and sustainability for all.

"Rabbi Shimon said: The world stands on three things – on the Law, on the Truth and on Peace. (Talmud, Avot 1:18)

The intentional community becomes the unit for "being the change" (Gandhi) which seeks to realize "in micro" a vision for society "in macro". The striving for Tikkun Olam is a universal message for all peoples. Each people, in cooperation with other peoples must seek social and environmental justice in its allotted portion of Divine Creation through the lens of its unique culture. Only thus can universal sustainability and peace be realized.

In the words of the prophet:
"…all the peoples walk each in the name of its gods" to the goal – "Nation shall not take up sword against nation, they shall never again know war." (Micah 4:5)

Tikkun Olam in Camphill by Jan Martin Bang

Camphill Villages, a short history
During the 1930s a group of intellectuals began meeting regularly in Vienna. They were inspired by Anthroposophy, the teachings of Rudolf Steiner, and how these could be put into practice in the fields of health and education. They were joined by Dr. Karl König, Viennese by birth, originally Jewish, but in his teens he stopped attending the local synagogue and began attending a Catholic Church. Later he became deeply inspired by Anthroposophy. As the political situation became more threatening, they decided they had to move. After the Anschluss in 1938, when Nazi Germany invaded Austria, they dispersed throughout Europe. Many of them came together again at Kirkton Manse in rural Aberdeenshire in Scotland in the beginning of 1939, where they found an already very well established and connected British anthroposophical network.

They opened a curative educational institute and began taking in children with special needs. When the Second World War started some months later, the group was registered as enemy aliens, the married men were interned on the Isle of Man and the single men were transported to Canada. The women carried on working with the children and a larger house was found, and they moved there to Camphill House on June 1st 1940. When the men returned the community then comprised of some 30 people of which just less than half were children with special needs. The group saw themselves as political refugees working with social refugees.

During the 1940s, the community grew and by taking over other houses and estates, created a movement. During the next few decades the Camphill network expanded and developed, reaching out to England, Ireland, Germany, Holland, Norway, South Africa and the United States. In the early 1950s, König began to think about village communities, where adults with special needs could live together with co-workers in extended family situations. This was first put into practice at the Botton Estate in 1955, and the first Camphill village as we know it today was established. Botton created a model that has been the basis for Camphill for over half a century. The village now contains well over 300 residents in four clusters spread throughout a valley leading up to the North York Moors in northern England. Throughout the world today there are more than 120 Camphill Communities in over 20 countries.

Camphill villages, what are they?
Within Camphill villages most people live in large extended families, co-workers (both long term people with their families, and young temporary volunteers) and villagers (adults with special needs), sharing their lives, their meals, their living rooms and bathrooms. There may be as many as fifteen people or more gathered round the dining table three times a day. Each house has its own budget, and is run more or less autonomously by a team of responsible co-workers. In the morning and the afternoon everyone goes to work, in a variety of workplaces. A typical Camphill village might have a biodynamic farm, extensive vegetable gardens, a bakery, a weavery, herb growing and drying, and a large forest for timber and firewood.

Other villages have workshops which produce pottery, candles, dolls or wooden toys. It is possible to eat meals in Camphill houses where the table and chairs came from the carpentry shop, the table-cloth from the weavery, the plates and cups from the pottery, the candles (which are lit at

every meal) from the candle shop, and virtually all the food could be produced by the village: bread, milk products, jams, vegetables, herb teas, honey, and meat. This self sufficiency is not an end in itself, but rather a way of ensuring that each person is employed doing something that is useful to the village. In many cases in mainstream society, people with special needs are peripheralised and "looked after" and so denied an active and useful role. In the world of Camphill, every person has something to contribute, and feels self-worth even when fetching the milk or laying the table.

In addition to the work branches, there are the houses to be run; washing, cooking and cleaning. This is considered work, just as important as production, and the occupation of "housewife", "house mother" or "homemaker" is as vital to the well being of the community as any other profession. Everyone has a workplace, and contributes something useful to the running of the village, according to his or her capability. Within this sphere no money changes hands, and work is seen to be something that is freely given within the fellowship, recognizing that some people have higher capabilities than others. In recent years, more and more Camphill communities are experiencing a need to employ people for specific tasks, introducing a new group of salaried employees. However, Camphill still strives to create fellowship in the economic life, and a flexible equality in the social sphere.

The farms and gardens in Camphill villages are usually biodynamic, producing food of the highest quality while nurturing both soil and wildlife. Generally the organic waste from the kitchens is composted, usually by a village compost set-up. Horse transport is quite common, being very efficient and low cost at a village scale. Villages in England have pioneered waste-water treatment using ponds, reed-beds and «Flow Form» water cascades. These are now standard in the Norwegian villages, and throughout Camphill worldwide. Buildings, both communal halls and chapels, and the large residential houses, are largely constructed out of natural materials, and avoid the use of poisons and plastics as much as possible.

Camphill attitudes to the natural world and how to repair it

When Karl König came to frame the ideals of the Camphill Community he included the natural surroundings, and invited "All who do their work out of love for the children, the sick, the suffering; out of love for the soil, the gardens and fields, the woods…" to join and be active in the Community.

König was aware of the dangers that the environment faced and stated in 1956: "There are, however, other aims ahead of us. One of the foremost tasks will be the care of the land. Gardens and farms today are ruined and exploited by mechanised work and chemical fertilizers. The soil all over the world is like someone who suffers and cries out for help and healing. It is to be hoped that the Movement will find the right helpers to create remedial work in this field."

Karl Kønig: "The resources of the earth are gigantic and mankind has taken them for granted as unquestioned conditions of existence to which there was no thinkable limit. But in recent decades, the results of man's insatiable use of the elements have begun to loom threateningly all over the world."

In 1989 Fiona Wessels writes in response to the question, How can Camphill respond to the Needs of our Time?: "What is Camphill's contribution towards healing the pollution of the earth? Pollution makes the earth and her spheres into an ill body. It is the healing impulse within Camphill that can contribute to her healing. …in responding to the needs

of the world there will always be a true meaning behind the existence of Camphill."

In 1993 Peter Bateson gave an address at the official opening of Watch Oak Farm and summed up why Camphill was concerned with environmental issues. " …in agriculture, by using the Bio-dynamic method we try to bring about the same kind of healing-in-balance and balance-in-healing with our relationship to the land itself – to create in the life of a farm a complete and complex organism of mineral, plant and animal processes in one whole, husbanded by man. The fundamental principle is that in caring for the land, by maintaining the health of the soil, we can not only receive ever more richly the fruits of the earth, but can help to maintain and improve the environment itself. Care for the land, not exploitation. Ecology, not as a matter of mere self-preservation, but as a moral duty for the well-being of the whole earth."

Wider aspects of land use planning and what impact new thinking might have upon the wider community around Camphill led Cherry Howe to reflect upon "Our responsibility to be environmentally aware, in our farming and gardening but equally towards landscape and nature in general; to guard our places from increasing urbanization and dislocation from nature."

Andrew Plant takes the logical next step, "The Camphill movement could have a voice on issues such as community-supported agriculture, ecological responsibility and sustainability, social enterprises, and promoting community – both in its own right as the social form of the future and also as a setting for the inclusion of people with learning difficulties."

Noel Bruder, a co-worker in the small urban community Camphill Greenacres in Dublin, was very aware of the spreading ecovillage network, and began to apply some of the ecovillage criteria to his own community. In answer to the question 'Are Camphill communities sustainable communities?' he attempted a definition which would encompass both Camphill and the ecovillage "…in …the Camphill context a suitable definition of a sustainable community might be: an attempt to integrate the ecological, social, economic and spiritual aspects of life towards creating a harmonious and inclusive society in perpetuity."

What does Camphill have to offer for the future?

Our mainstream western, capitalist industrial civilisation has reached the end of the road based on materialism and reductionism. Recognising the spiritual dimension, and using holistic planning methods, Camphill can show a number of ways out of the dead end we have reached.
Camphill has built up a great number of working examples of micro societies where everyone is integrated, and where people with special needs are able to contribute meaningfully. In a Camphill village there is no unemployment.
Camphill has developed integrated environmental designs that are applicable in many situations, like rootzone waste water treatment systems using flowforms, low impact housing using local materials, producing energy from wind and biogas from farm slurry.
Camphill has been in the forefront of biodynamic agriculture, producing healthy food with a lower carbon footprint than chemical industrial farming and so mitigating climate change.
Camphill has pioneered new alternative economic systems, first with the economic fellowship where work and income were separated and everyone was given a secure economic support, and over the last decade by developing Community Supported Agriculture where farm and garden produce is distributed directly to a group of consumers, thus bypassing the enormous supermarket distribution models.

"The Sun Rises, and the Sun Sets": 14 Religious Communities Using Solar Power

Jeff McIntire-Strasburg
http://sustainablog.org

If I asked you to provide a one or two word answer to the question "What do you call a group of people who live together, share work and living space, and power their lifestyle with renewable energy?" you'd likely answer with "commune," or "ecovillage," or maybe even "intentional community." "Monastery" or "convent" probably wouldn't come immediately to mind, but perhaps they should: like their earthier brethren, numerous religious communities are now powering at least a portion of their buildings and groups with solar power.

The reasoning for this choice often involves a dedication to "creation care" by the men and/or women of the community, as well as the order/organization to which they belong. There may be more practical reasons for going solar, as well: a purchased array of solar panels will eventually pay for itself and deliver "free" energy. If there's an excess of electricity created, the community may take advantage of net metering options, or even sell the power to nearby homeowners and businesses. A solar lease, on the other hand, can fix electricity costs for a long term, ensuring savings on utility costs. Monks and nuns are like the rest of us in one sense: they're not interested in paying any more for power than they have to…

After digging around a bit, I've discovered these 14 religious communities that are powering themselves (at least partially) with the sun. If you know of others, tell us about them.

14 Religious Communities Using Solar Power

Benedictine Abbey of Christ in the Desert: Solar power was a true no-brainer for these New Mexico-based monks: the abbey is fifteen miles from the nearest power line. Their solar array is just one of a number of sustainable systems integrated into their complex.

Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration: The Tuscon, Arizona-based nuns have been using small-scale solar power for a number of years; their newest array powers much of their facility.

Deer Park Monastery: This Buddhist "mindfulness center" in Escondido, California, started running on solar power in 2008, and has three installed arrays.

Carmel of the Most Holy Trinity: Within the Notting Hill neighborhood of London, these Carmelite nuns replaced an aging gas boiler in their Victorian-era convent with a solar hot water system.

Engineering students install solar panels at DC Franciscan

Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land in America: Electrical engineering students from the Catholic University of America installed a solar energy system to power the Franciscan brothers' greenhouse heaters.

Gaden Jangtse Norling College Monastery: Originally founded in Tibet, and now located in India, this Buddhist monastery has used solar hot water systems for over 20 years. The original solar heaters were replaced in 2008.

Kauai Aadheenam: The monks at the Hawaiian island of Kauai's Hindu monastery installed a solar power system last year in order to gain "partial independence from the Island's diesel-generated power grid."

Monastery of Our Lady in the Desert: Yep, the US Southwest in well-represented on this list (which makes total sense!). Another Benedictine organization, these sisters had a solar air heating system installed just last year.

Mount St. Mary's Abbey: Here's the story that got me thinking about this topic. These Cistercian nuns in Wrentham, Massachusetts, needed a source of income that supported their aging population. With 500 acres of land, leasing the space to a solar energy company met the sister's financial needs and their religious values. They also make candy…

Rumtek Buddhist Monastery: In collaboration with WWF's Sacred Earth Program, these Buddhist monks have not only installed their own solar hot water heaters, but developed environmental guidelines for religious communities in the Himalayas. Buddhism has strong beliefs for food systems that encourage sustainability and compassion, including organic farming, which these monasteries advocate.

Stanbrook Abbey: Another Benedictine community with deep roots in Northern England, the sisters at the new abbey have implemented a wide-ranging sustainability plan, which includes solar power.

St. John's Abbey: The Benedictines clearly get this whole creation care thing – the monks at St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, have installed a large solar array to help power their various educational institutions.

Solar panels on the roof of Tintern Abbey

Tintern Abbey: We English majors know this name from William Wordsworth's poem, but sustainability folks may now want to pay attention: the historic Welsh abbey is now solar powered. Tintern (as far as I can tell) is strictly a historical site at this point, not a working monastery… but this was too cool not to include.

Woodside Priory: Primarily a boarding school in the Bay Area, Woodside Priory was founded by Benedictine monks who still reside on campus at St. Stephen's monastery. The institution went the solar leasing route with SolarCity, which estimates cost savings of over $3000 a month.

Franziskusgemeinschaft community in Austria.

We received a delightful postcard here at the ICD:

Dear Friends!
Anton was in Findhorn this past summer and met and talked with my Granddaughter, Lena Kager who lives there! I love thinking about how small the world is!
The community sends greetings and wish you all the best!
C.A.L.L. is one of my favourite (most favourite!) magazines!
Keep going,
Susie Reitlinger

And this from Alex at Ganas Community in New York

I want to be here. I chose to be here. I set this life up to go through to evolve my soul.... I needed to learn humility and compassion. I needed to prune the me tree. I believe that the soul comes to earth to grow. I had to have less of everything to see my arrogance was unfounded. Being here is helping me care, have compassion and openness. But you cannot do this without a partner. I cannot dance alone. This is making me see other people too. Not just my wife. Everybody else is everybody else to everybody else. It is letting me see the other in the me and vice versa.

To the editors of C.A.L.L.,

A few days ago I received your C.A.L.L. magazine – thank you for this issue. I was interested to read the various articles on intentional communities around the world. When I got to "Kibbutz Shorts" my interest rose to a higher pitch! What caught my attention was "No Private Property". Those words are exactly the main purpose of community.

Having grown up on a Bruderhof community in Paraguay, South America, we children were taught that no one owns anything. Everything a family needs will be provided by the community. Later living in a community in Connecticut, USA, I married one of the daughters of Hans and Margaret Meier. Spending considerable time over the following years at Hans and Margrit Meier's house, I came to love the many discussions that Hans had. He was socially minded and loved to discuss topics of the day. In the 1960's and 1970's he hosted many kibbutz members who came to visit him and our Bruderhof community. The most frequently discussed topics were: What do the Kibbutz movement and the Brudehof share in common? What is your and our witness for Israel and the world? We discussed these and many questions down to the details! One question which came up more than once was the word "community". Hans always said, "It means common unity. We all should be united in our communities".

…I was glad to read at the end of your article that you are asking for input, discussion and dialogue. All I can say is that when I first learned about the Zionist movement and what was happening in Israel, I got very excited. Our Bruderhof started to learn some of the Israeli dances and songs and wished for more visits and contacts with the Kibbutz movement. Once when we had visitors from Israel, one of them said, "Your Bruderhof movement and our Zionist movement are like two movements on two sides of a river. Now the river is so wide that no bridge can span the water". Hans Meier responded, "Down river it gets harder and harder, but if you and we go upstream back to the Source, we will meet there".

So we still hope for the time when both movements come together at the Source. We need to discover again that community is more than houses where individuals live, but a joy and strength in living, working together to have a common table where we eat together. A place where we worship and praise together a place where "Shalom" is lived out. This will be a witness to our country, to our neighbours, and indeed, to the whole world.

I greet you with our greeting of "Shalom".

Paul Kaiser
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Australia

Sharing Benches: Acts of Communalism

Francis Cape sees the use of benches as an important act of communalism common in both historic and contemporary societies.
By Francis Cape
January 2014

We Sit Together *(Princeton Architectural Press, 2013) by Francis Cape presents twenty-one beautifully reconstructed benches drawn from twelve utopian communities, both secular and religious, active from 1732 to the present. Cape investigates how the structure and values of each community found expression in their benches. This selection from the introduction discusses historic acts of communalism.*

Twenty benches are gathered in the middle of a room. Each is built from poplar and finished in the same rubbed linseed oil. No two are the same. This is the sculpture Utopian Benches. I made the sculpture as a way of thinking—and talking—about communalism as both a historic and a contemporary alternative to individualism. The definition of communalism I use here is the community of goods. Broader definitions such as that suggested by Timothy Miller do not make as clear a distinction from materialist individualism. Sharing a bench means sharing the same material support; also sitting at the same level. When gathered in a room for exhibition, the benches are used for public meetings and conversations on subjects chosen by those who have chosen to come. Leaders or moderators, if present, sit with the others on the benches; they do not address the group from outside.

I made the benches using measured drawings taken from original benches that were, for the most part, made for and/or used by communal societies. Each bench is a facsimile of one used and, in some cases, currently in use by a communal society. The originals are in a variety of woods and finishes. I chose to make them all in poplar sourced locally near my studio, as using locally available lumber is what they did. The linseed oil finish is characteristic of early Shaker furniture. My research took me from historic sites and museum villages to contemporary communes, both secular and religious.

The focus of the work is the nineteenth-century American intentional communities, particularly those with a craft tradition, most famously the Shakers, but also the Community of True Inspiration in Amana, the Harmony Society, and the Society of

Separatists at Zoar, Ohio. The earliest benches are from Ephrata Cloister, which was established in 1732, and is the oldest American communal society for which we have extant buildings and artifacts, now in the care of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. The newest bench was made sometime in the last ten years at Camphill Village Kimberton Hills, which is also in southeast Pennsylvania and less than fifty miles from Ephrata.

This newest bench stands in Rose Hall, which is the meetinghouse at Camphill Village Kimberton Hills. It is built from oak, which was likely sourced from the community's woodlands. Though built in living memory, the name of the individual who made it is already lost; that this could have happened is owed to the community's dependence on a continuing rotation of short-term coworkers. The story of the bench reflects the structure of the community. At Ephrata Cloister, the Feast Hall bench—which probably also stood in the Saal, the community meeting house, in an upstairs room where they held Love Feasts—will also have been built from local lumber. The name of that maker is lost in time. That the name of neither maker was recorded is characteristic of the anonymity of traditional craft practice. This is not to say that the craftsmen and women were not respected by their peers, but that for craft, as for communalism, it is the contribution rather than the contributor that is celebrated.

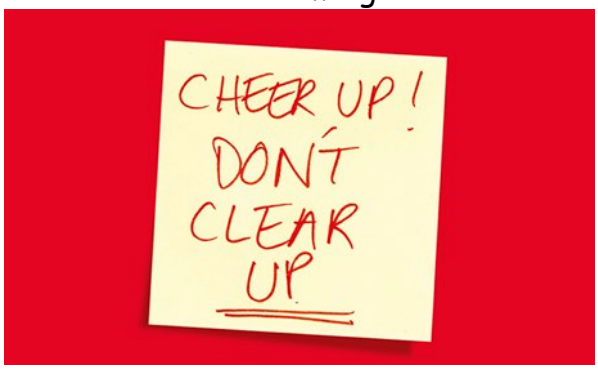
The benches, as shared seating, represent community. As examples of craftsmanship, they propose a reconsideration of value. The intentional association of craft with resistance to industrial practice—and in our times to mass consumption—dates to the nineteenth century with William Morris and the origins of the Arts and Crafts movement in Great Britain. Morris, who is best known for his naturalistic textile and wallpaper designs, also ran a furniture shop whose products followed simple English rural vernacular traditions, in sharp contrast to the opulent output of conventional designers of the day. He was, moreover, an active socialist who spoke regularly to workingmen's groups and advocated the overthrow of the social and political order of his time: an order that has changed little in the Western world in the ensuing years. He had been a poet before he took up designing for the material world, and he described his dream of a new life in his utopian novel News from Nowhere. Morris and his utopian vision, became the model for the Arts and Crafts community founded at Rose Valley outside Philadelphia (fifty miles from Ephrata Cloister, in the opposite direction from the Camphill Village).

A communist collective is not the same thing as a cult

There was no charismatic leader preaching emancipation through polyamory in the London commune I lived in during the 90s – although quite a few of us did have sex with one another. Sort of.

Sophie Heawood
The Guardian, 26 November 2013

If the horrific story about the women rescued from a house in south London wasn't extraordinary enough, it took an even stranger turn when details emerged that their home had begun as some kind of communist collective. "Wait," said my friend, watching the news with me in our fairly normal house, "didn't you used to live in one of those? A commune?"



Various passive-aggressive notes had been stuck to the kitchen table

Well. I gulped, I spluttered, and I rapidly explained that, without wishing to be flippant towards the unimaginable ordeal of these enslaved women, the lefty commune in which I lived for two years in the 90s, between the ages of 19 and 21, had a fairly standard voluntary application procedure. Then I wondered if this was going to be people's new association with communes, because until now, the question people always ask has been – did you all have sex with each other? At which point you always sigh, roll your eyes, explain for the umpteenth time that a commune is not the same thing as a cult; we all had our own bedrooms and doors and privacy, for God's sake; there was no charismatic leader preaching emancipation through polyamory. Until you sigh again and admit that, all right then, be that as it may, quite a few of us probably did sort of have sex with one another.

Still, this wasn't some remote wind-powered farm – this was a 17-bedroom house in central London. Or should I say, a 17-bedroom flat – a sprawling Victorian maisonette above a leather shop, which also had two kitchens, two bathrooms, one living room and a meditation room that scared the living daylights out of me. (I think I went in it twice in two years. Its empty silence was deeply distressing to the brain of a teenage raver with a Spice Girls fixation.) But I loved living in a house full of other people in the middle of the city. It was like living in a village, only the village was inside the house.

I'll never forget when one long-time resident, who did so much for the house that I suspect things would have fallen apart without him, started losing his hair. The hair

then got in touch with the household to let us all know where it had gone. Much to everyone's surprise, we started receiving weekly postcards from Mike's Hair, which had apparently gone on a round-the-world trip, and was having a particularly groovy time in Phuket.

Then there was the posh Tory who used to leave his wife and kids at home and come round and sleep with his secret boyfriend, who lived in the commune. How he loved to hector us for our silly leftwing politics. Looking back, I'm not sure why nobody punched him. But nobody punched anyone – that was the point.

Actually that's not exactly true – not everyone was a total pacifist. I remember being a bit surprised when one communard, on discovering that his ex-wife and child had been robbed, refused to ring the police, and instead got all his mates to pick him up in a car instead. Off they headed with baseball bats to solve things their own way, rather giving the lie to the myth that we were all twee, middle-class lentil-munchers.

Inside the commune, one conflict raged so long that an extraordinary meeting had to be called in addition to our bimonthly general meetings. This Relationship Meeting was because I and somebody else had fallen out over the fact I didn't fulfil my jobs on the cleaning rota. Various passive-aggressive notes had been stuck to the kitchen table listing each other's shortcomings such as it being "MORE IMPORTANT TO CHEER UP THAN CLEAR UP". (Shamefaced to admit that one was mine.)

At the time, fairly oblivious to what a spoiled brat I was being, I was just amazed that I had managed to get on so well with the other 15 people. I mean, a one-out-of-16 strike rate really didn't seem bad as far as I was concerned. That was, until I found out that the person whom I had driven into a war of attrition via Post-it notes had been nominated for a Nobel peace prize just the year before. The actual Nobel peace prize.

"Bloody pacifists," I remember muttering to myself. "Always fighting for something."

While living there, I dropped out of university and went to work in Red or Dead in Covent Garden. It was sometimes hard to explain to colleagues, when recalling what we'd got up to the night before, why I had 16 flatmates, so I usually didn't bother. Like anyone with an awkward secret at home, you got used to not mentioning it. Although this could be problematic too, because if I made it sound like I only had a few flatmates, like any normal person working in a fashion shop in Covent Garden did, and then I let slip that one of them was an 80-year-old German woman with whom I'd been dancing on the kitchen table to the Spice Girls video at four o'clock that morning, because I was stoned and hadn't yet gone to bed, and she had just risen from hers to salute the sun, and there in the midpoint between our lives we met quite joyfully …

You know, the more I think about living in a commune, the more I think I'd do it all again in a heartbeat.

'Communist' commune unnerves Chinese officials

New York Times
March 12, 2014

LINCANG - Members of an idyllic utopian commune tucked away in the mountains of south-western China share an agrarian life that would probably have delighted Chairman Mao: Every day they volunteer six hours to work the fields, feed their jointly-owned chickens and prepare enough food to fill every belly in the community.

Making noodles at the New Oasis for Life commune, which attracted people hoping to escape the smog, graft and social conservatism of contemporary Chinese life.

The bounty of their harvest is divided equally and apparently without strife, part of a philosophy that emphasises selflessness and egalitarian living.

"What we're doing here is basically communism," said Mr Xue Feng, 57, the soft-spoken founder of Shengmin Chanyuan, or New Oasis for Life, whose 150 members include illiterate peasants and big-city corporate refugees. "People do what they can and get what they need."

But Marxism does not often look like that in modern-day China, and New Oasis has unnerved local officials in Yunnan. Months of official intimidation and acts of sabotage have destroyed New Oasis' water and electrical supply and driven many residents away, emptying two of the group's three communes in the province.

At Lincang, though, a few holdouts remain, determined to stay on. They are steeling themselves for a final raid by public security agents, and their hopes are pinned to a court appearance, when they will defend the land contract that they say officials are trying to nullify.

Ms Xu Mengting, 25, who worked for a telecommunications company before joining New Oasis in 2011, dismissed the government's allegations of unlicensed production and sharing of wives as wild assumptions, saying officials had told

her their real objection to New Oasis was that "what we're doing is against the status quo of our country."

The Communist Party has never had much tolerance for independent organisations of any kind. While it has loosened restrictions on religious worship in recent decades, the government has moved to crush unsanctioned Christian churches, Buddhist teachers with their own followings and disciples of the Falun Gong. Even small groups such as New Oasis run afoul of the party's deep fears of independent movements, especially when they are led by charismatic figures.

Tending a garden. New Oasis has unnerved officials in Yunnan Province.

Certainly, some aspects of the group's structure and practices are rather unorthodox. Members are known as celestials, all property is shared and couples sleep apart. Marriage, money, supervision and punishment are all proscribed, because residents believe that those things impede happiness.

For the past year, officials have been pressing New Oasis to disband, claiming that it violated laws on marriage, forestry and education.

At the same time, they have mounted a campaign of unrelenting harassment. After thugs in plain clothes roughed up commune members and smashed water pipes and electricity generators, the commune complained to the police, but was told that there were no clues to identify who was behind the attacks.

Ms Cui Wenzhen, 67, had left behind a life of subsistence farming in Henan province four years ago to join New Oasis, weary of poverty. Her husband quickly followed.

Asked what they would do if they were evicted, Ms Cui said: "We sold all our belongings to come here. There's no home to go back to and no way to survive."

Filled with nostalgia for an era they never experienced, admirers of Chairman Mao have set up a commune where young Chinese can escape the pressures of capitalism

By Malcolm Moore, Righteous Path farm, Dingxing County, Hebei
The Daily Telegraph - 24 Apr 2014

Down at the Righteous Path farm, a gangly city kid wearing a Red Army hat dug his shovel awkwardly but enthusiastically into a huge pile of pig manure.

Students eat together, serving themselves from large metal bowls of the food they grow

"We love this job. We fight to be picked to do it!" called out another member of his production brigade.

The farm, which comprises 30 acres of rich soil on the plains of Hebei, is an attempt to recreate an era that many Chinese are still trying to forget: when Chairman Mao sent 18 million students and intellectuals out of the cities to work the fields.

Today the "Educated Youth", as they were known, are sometimes called China's lost generation, scattered across the land and unable to complete their education.

China has spent the last three decades reversing course: unleashing a free market and allowing hundreds of millions of people to move from the countryside to power the booming economy of its cities.

But for 46-year-old Han Deqiang, one of the leading figures in a current revival of Mao's ideology, and his students, it is time to turn back to the land.

With roughly 30 university students and recent graduates, Mr Han has reincarnated the communist collective farm.

"We call ourselves the New Educated Youth because that was a very important social concept," he explained. "The students were sent out to strengthen the bond with normal workers and the countryside. What we are doing now is quite similar."

Each morning, his students rise at 6.15am for a brisk half-hour of exercise, followed by a hearty breakfast of rice porridge and steamed buns.

Students eat together, serving themselves from large metal bowls of

the food they grow. They also sleep together, in small dormitories.

The farm grows eight or nine crops of organic vegetables and raises sheep and free-range chickens. Three or four local farmers have taught the students how to manage the land. This year, the strawberry crop has been particularly successful, with enough left over to make plenty of jam. "We sell our produce to Beijing for quite high prices," said Mr Han.

"We work every day. We do not have weekends," he said. "But we respect the traditional Chinese holidays. And when the students have free time they study. There is a small library with books on agriculture, history and philosophy. The students are free to learn by themselves what interests them."

Students from Beijing make preserves from organic strawberries at the Zhengdao Farm in Hebei, China

Mr Han, an economist by training, is one of the most famous critics of China's economic liberalisation and has become notorious as a co-founder of the Utopia website, one of the leading Maoist forums.

In recent years, those left behind by China's economic miracle - the workers fired from the state jobs that were once as secure as an "iron rice bowl", or those who have struggled to get on the property ladder - have begun to wax nostalgic for the "good old days" under Chairman Mao.

"Because China now has the largest wealth gap in the world, it is normal that people are missing the past," said Mr Han.

Most of these new Maoists are too young to remember the viciousness of his rule, and have only been taught in school to lionise him as China's saviour.

Mr Han said his students all practice "Mao Zedong Thought". But what they take from it is not the fire of furious revolution, but the freedom to drop out of the pressure cooker of modern Chinese society.

"What it means to me is serving the people," said Yang Ling, a recent graduate. "The current value system where everyone wants to make a better life for themselves, to be successful, stops you from feeling for others," she said.

"I do not have any desire for a fancy house or car. I have friends in Beijing

and Shanghai or other big cities who went there to work and they are lost and struggling.

"Here on the farm, everyone is so different. People who have a little money left over spend it to buy machinery for the farm, for the common good. And we all eat together in the canteen."

One of the most senior members, 29-year-old Li Zhe, graduated in spacecraft design from Beijing's university of Aeronautics and Astrophysics before arriving at the farm.

Students, mostly from urban backgrounds, help shovel and prepare land for farming at the Zhengdao Farm

"Most of my former classmates are now working in research institutes designing satellites or missiles. But I did not want to live in a city full of skyscrapers and I am more interested in exploring the relationships between people," he said.

Rather than politics, the students have heated debates on the relationship between man and nature, or the alienation of modern society.

Indeed the farm seems more of a hippy commune than a Maoist work project.

"Hmm. It is pretty much like that," said Mr Han. "I do not know what else you could compare it do. A kibbutz perhaps? I am not sure if there are any other places like this in China."

"This is not very political," he added. "This is about culture."

One of the younger members, 21-year-old Ren Xue, said she had abandoned her boyfriend at Shenyang university to come to the farm. "I want to live here forever, I do not want to buy my own house," she said. "My ex-boyfriend thinks life is all about making the right connections and working towards goals. I also used to be like everyone else, blindly following trends and copying what others did. But after coming here I changed completely. Now I think the purpose of life is to find freedom in your mind and heart. When I went back to university after my first trip, my classmates wanted to drag me back to my old life of playing computer games at night and sleeping in the day but I resisted."

Instead, Miss Ren may find love on the farm. "Yes, some of the boys and girls here do fall in love," she admits coyly. "Two have even got married. Now they sleep in their own little room."

Meanwhile the local farmers who work the adjacent land seem bemused by the arrival of the students. "They do not grow as much as us," laughed one.

"But it is good for students to see different walks of life."

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