

Recreating the Village

Visions and Strategies for
Sustainable Community
in the 21st Century

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As we approach a major turning point for life on Earth, many conscious people have become aware of the need for a new way of living. Some of us have been researching and refining our visions for a way of life that is balanced, sustainable, peaceful, healthy, loving, creative, joyful, nurturing, spiritual, ecological and pleasurable for several decades. Throughout history a few extraordinary individuals have managed against all odds to awaken to their potential for total aliveness. Meanwhile, for thousands of years this planet has struggled under a set of beliefs and practices whose end result has been environmental degradation, violence, self-hatred, conflict between men and women, and disrespect for life itself. The time has come for a major shift!

Many ancient peoples have prophesied such a transformation. For example, the Mayan calendar is said to “end” in 2012, just six years from now! Modern prophets such as Edgar Cayce, Rudolf Steiner, Buckminster Fuller and many others predict that humans are like caterpillars about to become butterflies and that Earth herself is about to awaken. Some traditions emphasize that awakening from the cultural trance is all that is necessary to realize our true nature. Others liken our current state to that of single celled organisms before they began coming together to create more complex life forms. Now our very survival as a species seems to depend upon making the leap to recognizing that we are all individual cells in the body of humanity whose evolutionary imperative is to learn to cooperate harmoniously.

As we move into this crucial period of change, powerful esoteric teachings from many spiritual traditions are being made public and available to all who will listen. Many of these traditions were forced to go underground during the centuries of darkness, persecution, and authoritarian rule. Now the lineage holders are emerging from secrecy while others are spontaneously receiving the wisdom and tools needed to navigate through this global crisis. Never before in the recorded history of this planet have so many people had access to so many different paths for psychological and spiritual evolution. Each of them offers a piece of the Truth and many of them agree on certain basic understandings:

1. All is One. We are inextricably linked to each other and to all of life. Our happiness and well-being depends upon experiencing this connection. The perception of separateness is an illusion. We are all part of the whole. The Islamic mystics, the Sufi's, say, La ila ha, il Allah hu – There is nothing but God.

2. The purpose of life is to learn to love well, to enjoy all that is and to be present to whatever arises. To sustain love means being aware of and courageously making choices which create more love in our lives.
3. Love, rather than fear, abuse, or force, is the greatest power in the universe and the most effective motivator. Jesus said, "Love one another."
4. Your body is the temple of your soul. The body has its own innate wisdom and knows what's good for you. Pleasure is healthy and productive. Honor and respect the physical being for it is our earthly home.
5. You reap what you sow. The Hawaiian's express this, Kanawai Mo 'aka 'aka. The Christians say, Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. The Hindus and Buddhists call it Karma. In plain English, you get what you give.
6. Self-responsibility. There are no victims. Through our thoughts and actions we create our own reality. The unexpectedly popular documentary film, What the Bleep Do We Know? beautifully illustrates this.
7. The harmony between yin and yang, Shiva and Shakti, sun and moon, body and mind, masculine and feminine – however you want to express the sacred union of opposites – is the creative power underlying all of life. The central symbol of Judaism, the Star of David, celebrates the union of male (upward facing triangle) and female (downward facing triangle). All ancient cultures agree that this sacred union is the key to harmony and heaven on earth.
8. Every one of us is a spark of the Divine. We are all Gods and Goddesses. The Kabbalists said, "As above, so below." Metaphysician Aleister Crowley said, "Every man and every woman is a star." The ancient Hawaiians recognized that each of us is our own highest authority. No being is any higher or any lower than any other. On the soul level, we are all equal.

The Unfilled Need

There are now hundreds of thousands of adults all over the world who are striving to live by these realizations, not because some external authority has indoctrinated them, but because they have realized the truth of these universal laws through their own experience. At the same time, the dominant culture still operates out of belief systems and institutions which attempt to undermine these values. Ultimately the old empire will fall, but in the mean time many individuals feel isolated, alienated, and confused as they struggle to awaken from the cultural trance.

These people want to gather with others who share their world view and who can support and rejoice in their process. They want to live with others who contribute to

their enjoyment of aesthetic, healthy pleasures and artistic endeavors. They want to engage with kindred spirits who can challenge them to wake up when they fall asleep and who can lovingly point out their blind spots. Many of these people have discovered that through their own healing journey they have developed the capacity to help others. Many find their creative powers awakening and are involved in artistic, scientific, and technological innovation.

In the past, nearly all spiritual communities were oriented around a single guru or teacher. The guru's vision was at the core of the community and it was typically his personal charisma that drew his followers into the community. Often, these teachers reflected the hierarchical, authoritarian, masculinized paradigm of the larger society. They discouraged or forbade questioning of the teachings and ex-communicated those who challenged them. While these teachers brought countless gifts to their students, many failed to "walk their talk." Secret sexual liaisons with married or celibate gurus were common. Many had mastery in some areas, but arrested development in others. They too were perfectly human, but preferred the super-human illusion.

Some intentional communities have been formed on a more egalitarian model but often these became mired in chaos, conflict, and poverty consciousness as egos struggled to implement impractical ideals such as consensus decision making. Cohousing communities seek to provide a modern, secular alternative to spiritual and intentional communities on the one hand, and soulless subdivisions on the other, but people are often disappointed in the relatively superficial relationships they find with their neighbors. **The dream of returning to a gentler and simpler village life is not so easy to recreate from scratch.**

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of people flock to weekend seminars and conferences, learning vacation destinations, spas, and eco-resorts of all kinds seeking the support, stimulation, and camaraderie of temporary community along with amenities not consistently available at home.

My observation is that a large minority of people currently living in "random" communities known as neighborhoods, subdivisions, retirement communities, condominium developments, planned communities, cohousing, and suburbs would much prefer to live with like-minded compatriots. My observation is that many people tolerate the noise, dirt, traffic, stress, and crowding of urban environments in order to have access to the spiritual artistic, medical, and cultural resources of the city when they would much prefer to live in a healthier environment.

The challenge has been: How can we get from here to there without relying on the charisma of the guru with all its attendant pitfalls? How can we get from here to there in the absence of the intact village, bloodlines, traditions, and lineage of elder wisdom?

The Goal

These days, many people barely know their neighbors, and are far from family and close friends. Their daily human encounters tend to be superficial at best. Many travel long distances, consuming increasingly scarce fossil fuels, braving unpredictable traffic and missed airline connections to gather with others with whom they share soulful connections. Often our human interactions are filled with conflict, fear, veiled hostility, and mistrust. Clearly, we want and need better alternatives.

One alternative is the development of new communities which are designed to meet the following goals:

1. To address the unmet need for living environments which support the social and spiritual fulfillment of individuals and families at this unique moment in history.
2. To provide a living and replicable example of a large and diverse group of unrelated people who are living close to each other and functioning as a harmonious whole over a period of time.

One way to reach these goals is to consciously create a thriving residential community built around an active conference center. Our aim is to attract people of varied ages, occupations, socio-economic status, lifestyle and ethnicity who share the common core values articulated above. **We will provide residents with tools, leadership, and venues which contribute to building trusting, meaningful, and empowering relationships with the people who live in their neighborhood!** Our programming will provide opportunities for shared recreation as well as education and conflict resolution. In other words, we will be an incubator for experiencing and living from a sense of Oneness with other humans and with all life forms.

While residence in this community will be open to all, residents will self-screen themselves by their desire and willingness to invest their time and money. We intend this community to be so exceptional in every way that there is no need to go anywhere else. Essentially, we are talking about creating the village of the future, complete with inviting cafes, live performance theatres, bookstores, yoga and dance studios, personal services, and markets. We anticipate that most of the families and singles we attract will be self-employed professionals, entrepreneurs, artists, or consultants whose work is location independent or involves travel. The community will also be a source of employment for some individuals providing needed services onsite and will attract small businesses in fields such as health care, education, elder and childcare, renewable energy, software engineering, publishing, and recording.

Some residents may be retired or financially independent. More and more baby boomers are reaching retirement age, and most do not want to live in age segregated enclaves. While many people have geographic ties in one or more regions, *place* is increasingly less of a priority than *people*.

The establishment of this community will directly serve the people who live there. It will also serve as a prototype for the creation of similar communities in many locations around the world. **When people experience the vastly increased sense of connection, synergy, harmony, and personal satisfaction available in a subdivision which places as much importance on consciously supporting meaningful human interactions as on designing buildings and roads, millions of people will want to live in these communities.** Once the first such community is operational, financing for future land acquisition and construction will be more readily available and available real estate will sell itself. The initial community may choose to franchise their name, development model, and/or personal growth technologies, or to serve as consultants for others who wish to replicate the concept. Once “sister” communities are established, residents will easily be able to do exchanges with people in other locations.

The Strategy

If we examine the creation of conscious community from a business point of view, we see that we are talking about coordinating two primary enterprises: real estate development and personal/spiritual development. Professionals in real estate development are well acquainted with the necessary steps in creating sub-divisions. Professionals in preventive health care, education, psychology, personal and spiritual growth, community development, and recreation know how to structure seminars and retreats which facilitate intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal harmony and which stimulate transformational experiences and group bonding. But rarely do these two groups speak to each other, let alone co-create a single project.

A possible first step in this process is to bring together a group of teachers who have been developing their psychological and spiritual maturity and technology for decades. Many of these teachers will already be at the center of networks of students who look to them for guidance and support. Some may be willing to undertake the experiment of establishing community with peers, with fellow teachers. This inner circle of teachers who chose to cooperate at the deepest levels will form the core of a new larger community of students who will have the opportunity, if they desire it, to eventually become teachers themselves.

This community of teachers will become the teaching staff for a quality conference center and health spa at the center of a new kind of subdivision. Many subdivisions are now being built around golf courses. Condominiums which have onsite spas, shops, and other amenities are becoming popular. A subdivision built

around a golf course attracts people who like to play golf and who want to be around others who are passionate about golf. A community with a spa and health oriented activities attracts people who are health conscious, but this is a very general grouping and does not necessarily foster satisfying social interactions. A conference center which hosts an aligned group of spiritual teachers and healers will attract people who are passionate about their own transformation and give them a common language and opportunities to bond with each other. People will not be required to attend these programs, but because Home Owners Association dues will support the facility and its programs, people will not choose to live in this community unless they value and intend to utilize the programs.

The buildings themselves will be simple and natural and utilize energy efficient technologies. In addition to providing infrastructure, the developer can build as many units as they wish to, including some rental units, or lots can be sold for custom homes. Guest quarters will encourage visitors who become prime candidates for purchasing their own permanent homes in the future.

Conventional developments have in the past endeavored to ensure that the cost and quality of homes is kept as uniform as possible. However, the success of projects which have instead encouraged a wide range of home sizes and costs, suggests that uniformity is not attractive to all buyers. A wider range of options offers a more diverse and interesting community and provides housing for the full range of service providers and age groups natural to a vital community. The security of an exclusive, gated community is replaced by the security that comes from knowing your neighbors and enjoying shared activities.

Traditional villages have evolved slowly over many years and generally consist of people with similar backgrounds, shared histories, and common blood relatives. People today deeply miss the sense of belonging and caring that comes from an intact social ecosystem. At the same time, they are often relieved to escape the burdens of dysfunctional families and small towns – the narrow mindedness, lack of privacy and autonomy, judgment, and obligation which sometimes accompany village life. Contemporary individuals are longing for meaningful connections with others and soul satisfying intimacy, but lack a context where such encounters are easy and natural. Conscious singles, couples, and families all want to live in close proximity to others who are fun, loving, responsible, and emotionally honest and who do not guilt trip or manipulate. What is required is both the physical living environment which supports comfort and sufficient opportunities for both privacy and connection, and the psycho-spiritual technologies which bring people together in a synergistic way.

Imagine that twelve different teachers each offer a month long series of programs one after the other. For example, one month we have Byron Katie. The next we have

Adyashanti, followed by Eckhart Tolle, Matthew Fox, Ken Wilber, and then Don Miguel Ruiz. The specific teachers can initially be chosen by the developers or their consultant (ie myself), or through market research, and later on by the Home Owners Association. They could include people who come out of various spiritual traditions, who are teachers of hatha yoga, tantra yoga, chi gung, dance, voice, music, visual arts, improvisational theatre, or massage as well as specialists in communication, leading edge nutrition, life extension, Chinese medicine, Ayurveda, shamanism, or drumming.

These programs, and the facility in which they are held, are supported partly by home-owners dues and partly by the developers. Ten percent of the profits from the initial subdivision and additional investment capital as needed will be used to design and build the center. Home owner fees will provide a stable and secure financial base for ongoing programming. This together with the opportunity to work with motivated people in an innovative community, and to have the option to form their own sister community consisting of complementary teachers, will attract the highest quality teachers leading to cross fertilization and innovation. Meanwhile, the spa and healing center can be operated as an independent business and provide employment opportunities for residents who desire them.

Here we have a situation in which people will self-select to live in this community based on their interest and willingness to make a financial commitment in the form of membership dues to ensure that quality programming continues. The ongoing growth seminars, lively community, and spa facilities also make this a desirable vacation destination, allowing owners who so desire to generate income through vacation rentals. Think Esalen Institute meets Quality Subdivision.

It is up to each person to decide when and how often they participate in the programs. They are available evenings, weekends, and for longer intensives free or at reduced cost. The same programs can be made available to non-residents on a space available basis at the going rate. The energy of the rotating teachers and teachings will permeate the whole community, enhancing the quality of life and increasing the well being of the residents.

The developers may also want to recruit desired service providers and businesses to locate within the subdivision. Features such as a Spa and Wellness Center featuring Chinese medicine and/or Ayurvedic treatments, assisted living for elders, yoga and dance studios, cafes and juice bars, bookstores, and performance spaces make the community village more attractive to prospective residents as well as providing jobs and gathering places. Other features such as an area for community gardens, ecological/permaculture designs, passive solar considerations, Feng Shui, pedestrian friendly walkways, children's programs, and innovative "green" construction materials can also magnetize like-minded buyers to this conscious sub-division.

The heart of this project and the thing that sets it apart from anything that presently exists is the emphasis on designing systems to help a group of strangers become best friends and to support each person to reach their highest potential.

Integrating wisdom and skills from a variety of teachers into a neighborhood setting will not only have the effect of attracting a certain type of person (cultural creatives), but will also create a situation in which people are interacting on an ongoing basis with the same people they are in seminars with, building a very intimate and vibrant community. It also provides shared language and tools for resolving whatever conflicts may arise. Instead of bingeing on workshops and then escaping home to continue old habits, living with ongoing reminders of the highest spiritual truths gently allows a new way of life to emerge where practical spirituality is the backdrop.

There is also a wonderful opportunity here for research which compares the happiness, psychological and spiritual growth, and general health of people living in ordinary sub-divisions, sub-divisions consisting of hand-picked people who have already developed skills relevant to living harmoniously with others (the teachers), and those who are living in a subdivision designed to foster supportive relationships.

Want to co-create it? Want to live it? Want me to consult on your project? For the past thirty years I have been actively involved in learning and teaching about spiritual and psychological development, wellness, conscious relationships, group process, and community development. I have a large network of my own and am in contact with many other "nodes" of networks. Investors, developers, real estate brokers, contact me at 415.507.1739 or email taj@lovewithoutlimits.com.