

## Papers on Community Dynamics

### Introduction

For years I have been interested in community living and in the organizational dynamics of communities. I have been especially interested in communities with a spiritual base, and for a long time the idea of living in such a community appealed to me. During the eighties, I found ways of working with intentional communities that permitted me to observe from the outside. I worked with the leadership of a Zen Community while they went through a difficult transition. I participated in the "organizational diagnosis" of the New Age Findhorn Community in Scotland. I served on the Board of a Findhorn inspired retreat center in California. I participated in a long term study group on community living which birthed a fine book on the subject, *Creating Community Anywhere* (Shaffer and Anundsen, 1993)

In 1990, I joined the Ananda Community, a spiritual community established by J. Donald Waters. As a member, I have deepened my experience and thought about community in a new and more personal way. This section consists of three short pieces, written at different times in my work with communities. Each of the pieces addresses some aspect of integrating the Divine into community life, and spiritualizing the work we do with the physical and the mundane. The first, "A Model of Community Culture" describes my experience of being "gifted" with an organization model for community which has proven widely applicable and helpful in understanding some of the differences in values and energy flow that arise over time in communities. In it I show how I believe a focus on *Spirit* can harmonize and bring into balance the

competing needs and forces which may otherwise pull people's energies in different directions.

The second, "Looking on the Dark Side of a Center of Light" was written when I was on the Board of the Findhorn inspired retreat center, at a time when the community was facing deep financial difficulties. I felt our New Age faith and trust in the power of a vision to manifest what we needed was getting in the way of our dealing effectively with reality. The paper presents my view of the appropriate relationship between focus on the vision and focus on physical reality as we work to birth our dreams.

The third, longer paper, "Building Attunement in Community through Social Architecture" speaks of organizational design in community. It introduces the concept of social architecture and applies it to the task of building and strengthening the spiritual center in community life.

### **The Meaning of Attunement**

I had my first community client in the early eighties when the large Zen community mentioned above asked me to work with them during a difficult leadership transition, and I learned much about ways of learning, doing and deciding that were different from anything I had come across in business. At the time I was working with and writing about the concept of "attunement" (Harrison, 1984\*) a word I originally learned from François Duquesne, a leader in the Findhorn community. "Attunement" is a word I use frequently in speaking about how to bring the power and wisdom of the Divine into our work in the world. In its larger sense, attunement refers

to a way of thinking and acting (doing business) that continually attunes to *the whole*, meaning all the connections among the parts of one's organization or system, and its connections with the wider environment. Other words for this way of thinking and acting are *appreciation* and *holistic thinking*.

I especially like the word, "attunement," because of its connotation of music and harmony. An enterprise conducted according to the principles of attunement seeks to be in harmony, both internally and with its many stakeholders: suppliers, customers, community, and the ecosystem which it impacts and from which it draws energy and resources. The Zen leadership gave me my first practical experience of attunement in action. The experience demonstrated to me that "attunement" as a way of making decisions works.

I use attunement to refer to a process whereby members of a group "tune in" to their sense of the highest good, and open themselves to receiving intuitive guidance from that source. When such guidance is received, it is shared with others. If consensus is not achieved at once, the process is reiterated, with each member continuing to seek guidance light and guidance in the light of what has been said so far. The method seems to be practically identical to decision making processes traditionally used by the Society of Friends (Quakers). The Zen community leadership group with which I worked sought to do its business in this way. Its deliberations were slow, even ponderous, with many silences, and frequent references to the interests and opinions of other groups and individuals whose interests needed to be held in consideration. The group was *inclusive*, wanting to keep everyone connected,

involved, and feeling as though their interests were being served. Working with the group was inspiring for me, because it was one of the few times up to that point when I had seen attunement working in the world, contributing to an organization's being productive and taking care of business. Attunement is a powerful and practical way of bringing *Spirit* to bear on community and organizational issues. I refer to it often in the three papers which follow.