

Musings on Caring Communities

July 28, 2021

As usual, George's response to my last 'Musings on a World without Borders' challenged me to ponder deeper. He wrote:

I am not clear about how they lead you to say, "I prefer a world without borders." Do you mean a world in which diversity is always welcome? What about the pathway and the strategy for getting there? The world is not going to change suddenly, all at once. I favor ideas that can start small and inspire others to adapt their model. I can imagine having small communities in which people live together well and do that so successfully that others reproduce it.

Of course I visualize a world where diversity is always welcome and, yes, the change will be slow until critical mass is reached and a trigger event snaps ideals into place. But, large or small, we do have to start. George is the one who introduced me to "caring communities" on the Proactive Nonviolence Cooperative forum which is no longer active. However, it has a lot of overlap with the current Global Satyagraha forum and many of you undoubtedly remember. And, yes, we also need a pathway and strategy to get there. So let's compare ideas. I will start with what I visualize and others can add, modify, object, or present a different approach.

My Vision

Our interim Global Constructive Program states: "In order to live more harmoniously as stewards of this celestial globe, and for the benefit of future generations, we see the need for widening circles of caring communities that accommodate diversity for all." (See <http://www.plrc.org/docs/200615A.pdf>)

I visualize those widening circles of caring communities as a widening area of the World that has no borders. This transition to a new cultural paradigm will take place as the global collective thinking evolves to the point where the 'Nonviolent Warrior Ethos' (<http://www.plrc.org/docs/What-is-the-Nonviolent-Warrior-Ethos-work-sheet.pdf>), or some comparable plan for living, becomes firmly imbedded in every lifestyle.

I say this *will* happen because I believe a Goodness Field does indeed encompass the entire Universe; and that a Goodness Force is acting upon all of us because we are in that Field. That being true, something similar to a world of caring communities without political borders is certain to happen. However, I am also convinced that cooperating beings coming together in global unity can make it happen faster.

There are many, many new ways of thinking that must be worked out before caring communities can prevail. People will pick vocations to fulfill their values, rather than to get rich. Their values will center on helping others and caring for them; and on caring for Mother Earth with all

her delicate cycles and balances. Fulfillment of these values will displace the ego-driven desires of materialism, entertainment, and ownership.

Some vocations, such as organic farming and ensuring balanced use of natural resources may have geographical communities occupying various portions of the planet and caring for the land. Other vocations – such as people in the medical, construction, and manufacturing fields – would be members of these geographical communities.

Indigenous people caution against large numbers of people living together. Ohiyesa warned that “the concentration of population was the prolific mother of all evils, moral no less than physical.” (Eastman¹) Urban crime rates bear that out. That is why Gandhi’s work was focused on small villages. The new concept of villages may be clusters of geographic communities.

In no case will anyone or any caring community own the land and be free to exploit resources as is done today. In all cases the living location would ideally be close to where vocations are practiced so as to minimize transportation costs and the drain on natural resources. Working remotely from home will be encouraged wherever possible.

Gandhi taught Lanza del Vasto the evils of a culture based on centralized economy and government. Cooperation and order within and among caring communities and villages will be guided by a system of just rules spelling out how various aspects of the Global Constructive Program should be interpreted. These rules will be determined by consensus and will not have the connotation of laws passed by governments that must be obeyed under penalty of punishment. Perhaps this will entail a vocation on mediating global harmony.

An equitable system for trading for different types of food and other necessary commodities will replace the rich man’s economic system. With modern technology and computer power this should not be difficult. Access to medical care, education, and other needs – such as adequate recreation and reasonable luxury – will be free. All of this can be envisaged under a concept called Bread Labor.

Bread Labor

The simple definition of Bread Labor is that every person, regardless of status or vocation, is morally obligated to perform the physical labor necessary to sustain his/herself. That is, to provide for one’s clean clothes, food, and living space maintenance.

Experiencing physical work and having the satisfaction of knowing one is providing for one’s own needs will boost self-esteem, lessen class differences, and promote respect for the labor vocation. “Gandhiji said that *sharirashrama*, physical labor and effort, was more important for maintaining the health of the society than it was for staying physically fit.” (*The Hindu*²)

¹ Eastman, Charles Alexander (born Ohiyesa, a Santee Sioux); *The Soul of the Indian*; 1911, Chapter 1.

² “The Idea of ‘Bread Labor’,” *The Hindu*, 19 November 2016; Updated 11 November 2017.

Gandhi wrote in the 29 June 1935 issue of *Harijan*: “May not men earn their bread by intellectual labor? No. The needs of the body must be supplied by the body. ... Mere mental, that is, intellectual labor is for the soul and is its own satisfaction. It should never demand payment. In the ideal state, doctors, lawyers and the like will work solely for the benefit of society, not for self. Obedience to the law of bread labor will bring about a silent revolution in the structure of society. Man’s triumph will consist in substituting the struggle for existence by the struggle for mutual service.”

However, in that same article Gandhi warned that “compulsory obedience to the law of bread labor ... is a state of slavery. Willing obedience to it must bring contentment and health. And it is health that is real wealth, not pieces of silver and gold.”

Yes, the concept of Bread Labor could revolutionize social structures. English philosopher John Ruskin included the concept in his book on economics titled *Unto This Last* (1860, 1862). Russian peasant philosopher Timofei Bondarev introduced his concept of labor philosophy in his treatise *The Triumph of the Farmer or Industry and Parasitism* (1888, 1906).

Count Leo Tolstoy was influenced by Ruskin and was captivated by Bondarev’s ideas. He wrote the introduction to and elaborated on *The Triumph of the Farmer*; and got the full text published in 1906.

Tolstoy greatly influenced Mohandas Gandhi’s but it was Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* that led Gandhi to coin the phrase ‘Bread Labor’ and start the Phoenix Ashram in 1904, in Durham, South Africa. (Gandhi later started other ashrams after returning to India) Gandhi translated *Unto this Last* into Gujarati and called it *Sarvodaya*. (See Chapter 12 of *The Goodness Field*)

What Gandhi undoubtedly meant by Bread Labor was growing crops for food and spinning and weaving for clothes. “Thus, artists, engineers, doctors, and scientists would do physical labor in order to pay for necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter, and offer their services in their respective fields free of charge.” (Varughese³) And if we are truly seeking a culture of goodness and nonviolence, “Ahimsa [nonviolence] is nothing if not a well-balanced, exquisite consideration for one’s neighbor ...” (Gandhi quoted in Varughese)

Lanza del Vasto was influenced by Gandhi and started ‘Community of the Ark’ in Southern France in 1948. Many such communities/ashrams have been started modeled on self-sufficiency. All experiments with Bread Labor have so far been to achieve sustainability as a small community. Bread Labor now has to be expanded to achieve global sustainability. Three aspects of Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* are adaptable to global application:

1. The good of an individual lies in the good of all.
2. All classes of work are worth the same because everyone has an equal right to earn their livelihood from their work.
3. The life of the hardest physical work is the life worth living.

³ Varughese, Suma; “Bread Labor, Anyone,” (*The South Asian Timae*, 4 May 2020).

As was discovered by the Community of the Ark, self-sustainability cannot be achieved because all the necessities of life cannot be produced by a single community – because of geographic location, insufficient workers, and/or lack of proper tools & machinery. With many cooperating communities, however, ‘trade’ in its true definition, without monetary imposition, can take place.

Properly-equipped hospitals, factories, research institutes, and the like; as well as transportation systems along with public services & utilities will be shared by communities. Investment of work and time by all vocations will enhance community and inter-community solidarity. And there *will* be time to pursue vocational work because bread labor, with everyone participating, will only take a fraction of the day (or week, or month).⁴

Housing will be durable for centuries, which will reduce the strain on natural resources. People will live as close as practical to where they will practice their vocation, which will alleviate transportation and the need for energy.

My vision of education will be a lifelong process motivated by individual desire to help humanity and Mother Earth. There will be some book learning but it will only supplement life learning. Initial classroom work may be desirable for the basic ‘Three Rs’ – reading, ‘riting, and ‘rithmetic – in addition to learning social harmony skills. Apprenticeships, internships, and other such concepts will fit in, and new concepts of education will evolve. Status motivation to score good grades and earn diplomas to get better-paying jobs will disappear as goodness motivations take over

This list is far from comprehensive and these concepts will take time to evolve. But they will evolve as new ways of thinking create a nonviolent culture of goodness.

Conclusion.

To accommodate this new paradigm will require a diversity of vocations filled by goodness-motivated people who are happy in their work and psychologically fulfilled by their contribution to fellow human beings. It is possible but not by today’s standards. When many people listen to their inner goodness and transcend today’s ego-driven culture of entertainment, a nonviolent culture of goodness will prevail. The paradigm shift suggested in this musing will take place.

Today, untruthful thoughts have been causing wrongful behavior. The richest and greediest among us have been stuffing *egothink* into people’s minds since at least World War II. We need to overcome that. We need to help people resist malicious propaganda so that goodness can control their minds. That is why I have consistently and persistently maintained that helping people generate goodness thoughts is the most proactive nonviolence activity that can take place today.

⁴ Suma Varughese (footnote 3 above) quotes Gandhi as saying: “I cannot imagine anything nobler or more national than that, say, one hour in the day, we should all do the labor that the poor must do, and thus identify ourselves with them and through them with all [hu]mankind.”

On this forum we already have a caring community of global Satyagraha pioneers. I have shared my vision for the future. Please, now, share your visions on how we can stimulate a paradigm shift to global well-being and goodness.

In peace and love, Bob Aldridge