

Chapter 1

THE BIG QUESTION

As we look at our cities, our country, and our planet, we know what the challenges are. They are the problem buzzwords of our time: poverty, hunger, the economy, pollution, healthcare, crime, war, and the increasing destruction of our environment. Most of us are aware of the doom-and-gloom scenarios about what will happen by, say, the year 2020—when the population has grown to 8.2 billion or more, there isn't enough food to feed everyone, and we have altered and polluted the planet to such an extent that the environmental issues, such as global warming, have become by far the most significant issues of this millennia as they threaten all life on the planet.

Serious problems, right? But now ask yourself this: Since there are enough resources and manpower on this planet for ALL OF US to live not only abundantly but also in balance with nature, the big question is: WHAT THEN IS THE PROBLEM? Why are two of every five people in the world living in poverty? Why are there people who cannot get proper nutrition, sanitation, and medical care? Let's repeat the startling and simple truth that is the cornerstone for finding a solution:

IF WE CHOOSE TO MAKE LIFE WORK FOR EVERYONE,
THERE ARE ENOUGH RESOURCES AND MANPOWER ON
THIS PLANET FOR *ALL OF US* TO LIVE ABUNDANTLY!

Just now close your eyes and ponder that for a minute. Let it really sink in. Ask yourself why it isn't happening. Then, you may well ask yourself, "What can we do about it?" The forces at work that are causing the imbalances seem to be beyond our control.

There are too many environmental, economic, political, and social causes and situations to correct that it's simply overwhelmingly impossible. At best, most solutions are a Band-Aid approach since everything is interconnected. For example, we can't address starvation in a given geographical area by simply providing food because there are usually political, economic, and environmental causal factors that are quite complex.

Part of the problem is the pervasive, long-standing attitude of againstness that we hold towards each other and towards others. This againstness probably stems from our need/addiction to control our lives. This often happens at the expense of another, and it permeates most of the interactions between one power broker and another, between one interested party and another, and even between one family member and another. This againstness along with the unwillingness to go for a creative approach to collectively make our planetary situation truly work for everyone are roadblocks we must overcome. Given all the imbalances on the planet and the destruction of our environment, the sands are rapidly running through the hourglass for life as we know it on Earth. There is an answer, but it means that we must start making the planet work for all life on the planet. Stated simply:

IF WE'RE GOING TO CONTINUE TO HAVE A WORLD,
WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO START MAKING IT WORK
FOR EVERYONE.

Given the connectedness of all things, we must go after the one thing that can address and include everything else, and that is HOW WE AS PEOPLE LIVE TOGETHER. Currently we live in what can best be described as an everyone-for-themselves world. That may look like every country for themselves or every family or every whatever grouping, but it all boils down to the everyone-for-themselves model. We do not have a "what would work for all of us" mentality and approach to life. The everyone-for-themselves approach to living and survival is so ingrained through thousands of years of practice that most people have never even conceived of an alternative approach—especially one that would include our entire planet. The piecemeal way our lives are set up, the way our

cities are designed, and the way our economy runs all have the end result of isolating and separating us. They are set up for us to try to survive and get ahead on our own and to continue to intrude upon and disrupt our environment.

Therefore we need to move away from this individualistic model to one that really works for all of us and for all life. We have to start acting like one family where the needs of the one are the concern of everyone. This does not mean taking care of those who are thought of as not contributing, but it does mean setting up how we live together in a way that truly works for everyone. This is a total systems-approach—the systems-approach tells us that *all* things are interconnected and that to change a part, i.e. poverty or our ecology, we therefore need to change the entire system in order to really create effective changes. At this point in our history, nothing less is called for and nothing less will work for all of us. This new model has to be that we live on this planet in a way that is *for* THE HIGHEST GOOD OF ALL LIFE so that *we all* can experience more abundance, health, nurturing, loving, and fun.

Think about it, it's very simple to see the solution. In fact, it's so simple that that's why it's hard, because, in our fragmented approach to trying to understand and solve things, we're looking for something complicated to get us out of our present Earth predicament. We have so many thousands of years of programming in our power-based, everyone-for-themselves paradigm to overcome that it's difficult to perceive workable solutions for the planet as a whole. We have an endless history of againstness and conflict that get our minds focused and locked onto looking at life as a struggle for survival on our own as opposed to looking at life as a cooperative adventure that can work for all mankind and for all life on the planet.

We need to create a new model. All the “isms”—capitalism, communism, socialism, nationalism, racism, sexism, etc.—are not working for us, so we have no large-scale model of change to look at. However, CHANGE ON THE SCALE THAT IS NEEDED CAN ONLY BE BROUGHT ABOUT WHEN PEOPLE SEE AND EXPERIENCE A BETTER WAY.

"Since the everyone-for-themselves approach isn't working for the planet, why do we continue to do it?"

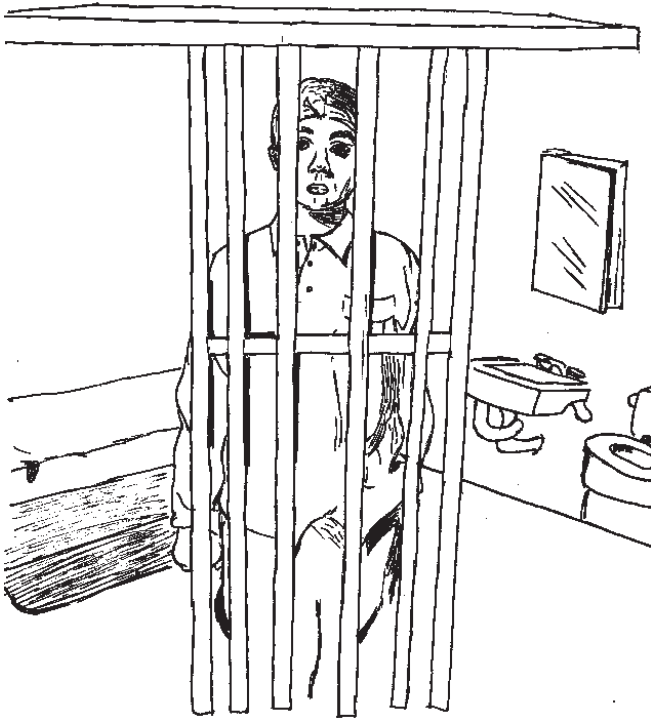
"Because we just do life that way, that's the way life is."

"But, why, when it really isn't working for individuals and for the well-being of the entire planet, do we continue rather than seeking a more workable alternative?"

"Because we've done it this way for thousands of years. It must, then, either be the best way or the only way."

"But why haven't we considered other alternatives?"

"We don't know. It's all we know. It's the way things are."



cartoon by Aly Roth and Ian Dietz

"HELP, I'M IN PRISON. I WANT OUT OF HERE!"

We are only limited by our assumptions. The assumption that we must continue doing the everyone-for-themselves model has us and our world in prison.

Fortunately, the best way to show this is also the easiest for a group of people to bring to pass. The way we live together and relate together in Community is the basic building block that is needed to transform the planet. If we design Communities based on a Highest Good For Everyone model, we can live very, very abundant lifestyles that would appeal to almost everyone while simultaneously restoring our environment. This book, then, is about how we can live in Community for The Highest Good Of *All Life* and about the ultimate transformation of the planet, which will be caused by making life work for all of us.

As you continue reading, you'll keep hearing some form of this term, "For The Highest Good," over and over again. [I apologize if that term doesn't just roll off the tongue, but I don't know of any other term that fully encompasses the concept of making the world work for everyone and for the planet.] It includes both creating the outer form to work for all life and the consciousness which that choice requires, and it permeates every aspect of how we choose to live together on this planet. It's an internal commitment to all life on this earth, to wanting the best for all life on the planet, and it's putting that into action by fundamentally changing the form and consciousness of how we live together. It is the antithesis of the short-sighted everyone-for-themselves paradigm that has wrecked havoc on the earth and resulted in the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual hardships and lack that touch all our lives in varying degrees.

Again, the simple truth—there are enough resources and manpower on this planet for all of us to live very abundantly and in harmony with ourselves, each other, and the environment if we change our model of living and our consciousness from everyone-for-themselves to a Highest Good For Everyone model. Drink this in, for this must be *Our Next Evolution*.

As you look at this idea, I invite you to expand your consciousness to include the welfare of the entire planet. Imagine that you are *all* people in *all* countries and in *all* situations. In many cases you would currently have basic human needs that are not being met, and you would be living on the very edge of survival.

FROM NEALE DONALD WALSH'S
CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD: book 2

GOD: *"In terms of geopolitics, why not work together as a world to meet the most basic needs of everyone?"*

AUTHOR: *"We're doing that or trying."*

GOD: *"After all these thousands of years of human history, that's the most you can say?"*

"The fact is, you have barely evolved at all. You still operate in a primitive 'every person for himself' mentality.

"You plunder the Earth, rape her of her resources, exploit her people, and systematically disenfranchise those who disagree with you for doing all of this, calling them the 'radicals.'

"You do this for your own selfish purposes because you've developed a lifestyle that you cannot maintain any other way.

"You must cut down the millions of acres of trees each year or you won't be able to have your Sunday paper. You must destroy miles of the protective ozone which covers your planet or you cannot have your hair spray. You must pollute your rivers and streams beyond repair or you cannot have your industries to give you Bigger, Better, and More. And you must exploit the least among you—the least advantaged, the least educated, the least aware—or you cannot live at the top of the human scale in unheard of [and unnecessary] luxury. Finally, you must deny that you are doing this, or you cannot live with yourself.

"You cannot find it in your heart to 'live simply, so that others may simply live.' That bumper sticker wisdom is too simple for you. It is too much to ask. Too much to give. After all, you've worked so hard for what you've got! You ain't giving up none of it! And if the rest of the human race—to say nothing of your own children's children—have to suffer for it, tough bananas, right? You did what you had to do to survive, to 'make it'—they can do the same! After all, it is every man for himself, is it not?"

AUTHOR: *"Is there any way out of this mess?"*

GOD: *"Yes. Shall I say it again? A shift of consciousness.*

"You cannot solve the problems which plague humankind through governmental action or political means. You have been trying that for thousands of years.

"The change must be made, can be made only in the hearts of man."

—Neale Donald Walsch, *Conversations With God book 2*, Hampton Roads Publishing Co., Inc., 1997, Charlottesville, VA, pages 172-173.

However, the solution is so simple that it has escaped us: let's make the planet work for everyone; let's choose to live *for* THE HIGHEST GOOD OF ALL LIFE.

As you continue reading, I invite you to toss out your reference points and to step outside the box of how you think life has to be. So hold onto your hat as I first point out the obvious in terms of current conditions on the planet, and then I offer a practical solution for not only saving the planet, but also making this Earth a more enjoyable place to hang out for *all* people and for *all* life.

LET'S MAKE LIFE WORK FOR ALL OF US

What if we thought of ourselves as one family where the needs of one, whether it be a person, a group or a country, are the concern of everyone. Granted that to do this we would have to rein in our egos and sacrifice our selfishness, but what could we gain? What do we really want more of in our lives? Some immediate thoughts are more leisure time, more play, quality time with good friends, opportunities for creative expression, beauty in nature, etc. We'd all probably also opt for less stress, more peace, less pollution, and more healthiness.

So, again, in thinking of ourselves as one cooperative family, let's plan how we all could be living very abundantly on all levels. Let's let go of our notions of this everyone-for-themselves social, economic, political system. Let's start from scratch in terms of what we think has to happen to accomplish our goal, and let's just say that the environment and all life forms must be taken care of in the best way possible. These are the only requirements. Theoretically, let's also toss out all jobs and then start creating and, if necessary, putting back only those things that support our goal.

If we are truly cooperating as one family and we are taking care of all life, we find that we need only about 20 percent of the current jobs. Only 20 percent, and probably less, of the current jobs are essential! The other 80 percent plus are either there to protect and perpetuate our everyone-for-themselves economic caste system or they are what I call "nonsense jobs" which are created solely for the sake of providing a person or some people with money to survive in the current system. Falling into that category are an incredible number of products that are created, again, solely for peoples' incomes in our non-cooperative economic model. Just drive down any city street and see how many establishments wouldn't have to be there if the idea was for the system to really work for everyone.

As an example of the waste of mind power and creativity in our capitalistic system, I know of two very bright men who wanted to make big money with as little effort as possible. What

they came up with was providing a bunch of cheap products for promotions, thus using manpower and resources for products that will soon take other jobs to haul them to diminishing landfill sites. They are making a lot of money, but it would be nice to put creative people to work doing something useful and not needlessly consuming our planet's resources. Many lawyers are very sharp too, but, in a cooperative society, few if any of them and the host of other jobs they support would need to exist.

All the jobs involved in the game of making money from money would also be gone. That means the banks, investment houses, and speculators. Dealing with the stock market is really like going to Las Vegas. There are the slots and the dealers who take the house share of the money. Meanwhile, some of the players win, some lose, and a bunch of non-essential and nonsense jobs are created. The interest game was also one of our system's really horrible ideas. Who invented this system-from-hell which basically enslaves individuals and paralyzes whole countries, while a few money brokers do very well? Jobs were created to make money off of money, and, now, as I related earlier, the whole economic system has grown into a monster-out-of-control that really is not working well for most people on the planet. If something needs to be done, we need to have a system where we can just bring our manpower and resources to bear on correcting the problems and just DO IT, and do it in a way that's in harmony with nature! Then we can start saving the planet.

The current economic system is one of consumerism, which aims towards more jobs, more production, a bigger GNP, and less sustainability. If we can create a system that will work for all of us while also eliminating those 80-plus percent of the jobs and the nonsense and unessential products and their accompanying manufacturing plants, storage facilities, and stores, then we could cut way back on our work week hours, do more leisure and creative activities, have more time communing with nature, and use the manpower to start restoring the planet. We could also use that manpower to start creating a better lifestyle for all of us.

Again, there are enough resources and manpower for every

being on the planet to live abundantly. Not providing services and a good living environment for all life because there is “not enough money” is an illusion based on our lack of cooperation and creativity. But, what is not an illusion in our consumerist society is that the damage done to our environment has become the major issue of our time. Adding to this, our skyrocketing world population coupled with our rapidly decreasing ability to produce food with our ecological damage means that the quality of life in our everyone-for-themselves economic system will continue to decline. In fact, a Cornell University Team concluded in a 1994 study that the world can support only two billion people at the standard of living now enjoyed by industrialized nations.³⁴

We are at almost 6 billion now with 8 billion forecast for the year 2019. The National Resources Defense Council said that the 55 million people that will be born in the industrialized countries during the 1990’s will pollute the planet more than the 895 million born in third world countries.³⁵ Remember that the Worldwatch Institute reported that “As a result of our population size, consumption patterns, and technology choices, we have surpassed the planet’s carrying capacity.”³⁶ That is RIGHT NOW! With our declining environment and a couple of billion more people, the situation will become much worse unless we choose to do something drastically different.

Yet, amazingly, the multinationals are pushing for globalization to open up new markets. This is really crazy because it will only hasten the environmental decline of the planet. The physicist/ecologist Vandana Shiva excellently discussed this concept:

“Development, to me, is a word that basically has extremely benign beginnings, in the biological domain, where a seed of the oak tree develops into the oak tree. It’s something built into the seed. It’s something built into the structure of self-evolution, self-organization. Development really comes from that biological sphere—a child develops into a grown-up, stays himself or herself, but becomes different. And that capacity of inner-generated evolution is where the word “development” really began. But the way it came out of the World Bank—and it did come out of the

World Bank—development became, not internally generated, but externally imposed. Development was not something that happens with your resources, your abilities, the abilities of a society, an organism, a person; development becomes that for which you have to take loans and credits, and get indebted; and get enslaved—just the opposite of what development should really be. ...

“The narrow concept of development—and not just the narrow concept...the perverse concept of development, as it has guided the relationships between the North and South over the last five decades—is definitely anti-ecological. It’s anti-ecological because it tries to globalize a pattern of production and consumption that is globally impossible! It tries to universalize the consumption of materials at the scales in which the affluent industrialized West does. We know that twenty percent of that tiny population of the West consumes eighty percent of the planet’s resources. So if the development project really had to be achieved, it would need literally five planets to meet its objectives. It is therefore against the very logic, ecological logic of this planet’s resources. We don’t have five planets! We just have one. ...

“Maldevelopment’ is basically a development paradigm that destroys; does not build. Maldevelopment is development that does not build on peoples’ capacities, it does not build on the limits which ecosystems put on human activity. It disrupts cultures. It violates ecological boundaries, and it just imposes a very, very narrow model of what a preferred human existence is on the entire world. In fact, when development started...and it started absolutely around 1948, where the rest of the world, of the Third World, which had been left poor because of colonization, was declared ‘underdeveloped.’ Suddenly, we were ‘underdeveloped.’ And development was a yardstick in which the only measures were how much paper you can consume and how much cement you can consume, how many chemicals you can consume, how much petrol and fossil fuel you can consume. Now quite clearly, subsistence societies did not consume any of that! They were not involved in the ravaging of the planet. And maldevelopment basically sucked them in with loans from

the World Bank and bilateral aid. And made them feel that unless they could shift from organic fertilizer into chemical fertilizer they were 'underdeveloped.' Unless they could shift from their bullock carts to tractors, they were 'underdeveloped.' Unless they could shift from the hundreds of diverse housing materials that are used across the world according to what is available, what is the climate, how will people protect themselves and give themselves shelter? That diversity of housing was devastated by concrete and steel."⁴²

Indeed, we can have an abundant lifestyle for all the billions of people on the planet, but this cannot be achieved in an everyone-for-themselves paradigm based on the God of profit. It can only be done when we create a model where we can make the world work for all the people, and this means equitably sharing, conserving, and renewing resources. It also requires having the consciousness where we care enough to act for The Highest Good Of All.

Don't mess with Mother Nature! We're now finding out what happened to earlier societies that prospered and grew and then mysteriously abandoned their civilizations. With their farming practices along with their need for lumber, many cultures from Mesopotamia to the great pre-Columbian cultures of Central America ruined their environment to the point where it could no longer support them. Eerily we now are repeating this past mistake, only now it's on a worldwide scale, and, unlike previous civilizations, there is no new land to migrate to! When history looks back on us 50 years from now, the question will be asked, "Why didn't people of the 20th century see what they were doing and change it? This was madness."

We are now near the end of the line in our current way of relating with our environment. Those who don't believe that are still clinging to the attitude of subduing the environment to serve mankind's needs. In his book, *The Green Lifestyle Handbook*, Jeremy Rifkin described environmental relationships as being "similar to personal relationships. By attempting to subdue nature, by refusing to accept it on its own terms, by manipulating it to serve expedient short-term material ends, we have made our long-term

relationship with the environment less secure and now face the prospect of a wholesale depreciation of the life-supporting processes of the planet.”⁴⁶

To take care of ourselves and all life, we need to move into sustainability, which means a way of living on this Earth so that each generation passes on the Earth’s natural resources intact to its children. We are facing an emergency and must make decisions that will be not only for our Highest Good today but also for the Highest Good for generations to come. While changing the way we live in order to preserve ourselves and our planet may be a big change, it can be accomplished with a workable plan. I call that plan “The Next Evolution: making the planet work for everyone,” and I’ll get into the details of that plan in the next chapter.

NEW DEFINITIONS

To keep our resources intact, we need to eliminate as many non-essential jobs and products as possible, and, acting as one family, we need to share our wealth and resources. We need to redefine wealth as USE and ACCESS rather than as POSSESSIONS and POWER. The everyone-for-themselves paradigm has used up our planet’s resources by producing more materialism—for some, *and only some*, people, but not for the vast majority of the people on the planet. The majority would have far more if wealth were redefined as “use and access” and if we all acted according to that definition. We can live cooperatively with so much more abundance available to us. As a planet, we can no longer afford to have individual ownership of so many things when we can get by, and do even better, on much less when it is shared. For example, almost none of us have boats, but, with the Highest Good “use and access” approach, more people could enjoy boating and with far fewer boats (and thus the resources it takes to build and maintain them). In almost any marina, about 99 percent of the boats go unused most of the time. If we shared access, those boats would be in use rather than 99 percent docked. Just think of the possibilities if this were a “Use and Access” world—we would all have the freedom to do so much more.

Did you know that there are over 25,000 supermarket items,

including two hundred kinds of cereal? There are also over 11,000 magazines, mostly filled with ads for more products.⁴⁷ There is such a tremendous amount of stuff in stores and warehouses with more being produced all the time (and eventually hauled off to landfills). In fact, there may be as much in storage as there is being used. Much of it is also the art of selling us what we don't really need. Such is the nature of capitalism. Also, in the spirit of sharing, we need to look at quality of life more in terms of intangibles such as fun, shared creative activities, nurturing, loving, etc.—things that money really can't buy. I have reserved the next chapter to describe more in detail what that might look like in a creative model of living that would work for all of us.

The idea of great wealth at the expense of great poverty doesn't make sense any more when we must now do no further damage to our environment. Molly Olsen, a member of President Clinton's Council on Sustainable Development, stated that "A society with a grossly disparate distribution of the fruits of development cannot possibly sustain itself in the long term."⁴⁸ Take deforestation for example. Because most industrialized countries have already destroyed most of their own forests, most deforestation is now occurring in Third World countries where people are living on the edge of survival and need either more farming land and/or fuel to survive even this generation. Along with that, their debt-ridden governments think they must sacrifice their forests and resources looking for short-term profits to pay off their debt interest. We can't just ask Third World countries to stop cutting down their forests because the issue must be tied into improving the quality of their lives. We can't have people living in poverty trying to support a family because they will take from the environment what they have to in order just to survive.

But, as a reminder, the issues are not just environmental. We can't have people working at minimum wage trying to support and effectively raise a family. Put yourself in the place of those trapped by poverty, the lack of education and skills, and even the lack of positive role models. With that hopelessness it's easy to understand why people turn to drugs and crime.

So we must change the world on the level of how people live together. For this to happen, it requires a change of consciousness where we switch from the everyone-for-themselves paradigm and start acting for The Highest Good Of All. We must also consider the Earth as a partner in that change. Imagine the Earth as a living being—would we choose to continue to slowly poison it or choose to begin to heal it? To heal it, we have to start thinking about what we're doing every time we buy, use, or discard anything, and we need to creatively rethink how we can change the whole system that created our current patterns in the first place.

Unfortunately though, we haven't set up our lives so that we as a group can easily make Earth-healing choices. On the one hand, we have those trapped in poverty forced to use up the environment, and, on the other hand, we have consumerism producing unnecessary, and far too many, products with their accompanying packaging and disposal problems. Most of our cities' landfills are full and closed and are contaminating our ground water in addition to releasing methane gas into the atmosphere. We Americans have been throwing away enough "waste" each year to fill a convoy of ten ton garbage trucks that would reach over half way to the moon.⁵² The packaging for our consumeristic lifestyles contributes the largest percentage of that "waste"—50 percent of all paper produced in the U.S. and 90 percent of all glass.⁵³ We Americans also have the highest level of consumption in the world. With 6 percent of the world's population, we consume more than 30 percent of the planet's resources.⁵⁴ In addition, we use twice as much energy per person than any other country and are responsible for more than one-fourth of the carbon dioxide and CFC emissions.⁵⁵

As a result of the Industrial Revolution and the resulting pollutants now being released into the environment, man now has the possibility to destroy the planet, even without a nuclear war. However, the fact that there may be no easy way out of the world economic dilemma, along with the now obvious environmental threat, may be a good thing. Ultimately it will push us in the direction of trying to act for The Highest Good Of All Concerned, of acting like one family, of taking care of each other in a more loving

and nurturing way, and of addressing the quality of life for everyone on the planet.

WE NEED A WORKABLE NEW MODEL

So where do we start? There are so many imbalances, so many things that need to be corrected, and so many just causes that trying to do something about each little area of interest gets to be an overwhelming task. Save the dolphins, the whales, recycle, end political corruption, save the rain forests, do something about crime, reduce our drug use, eliminate domestic violence, etc., etc., etc. So much to do, and so little time left for the planet. Also, there's the problem that everything, as physics' Systems Theory tells us, is interrelated, so something like saving the rainforests is not as easy as it seems because it relates to so many factors including the quality of people's lives. Therefore, there must be a systems approach to rescue the planet, and it must include and address the quality of life for everyone on the planet. To do this requires two things: we need a different approach for how we as people live together, and share together and we need to move into the cooperative consciousness required to do this—the consciousness where we truly dedicate ourselves to living for The Highest Good Of All.

Because most of the people in the world would have no idea what it would look like if we chose to live together for The Highest Good Of All, the first step would be to create a MODEL COMMUNITY, based on the concept of making life work for all of us, to show the world how life could be very, very different. While "intentional" egalitarian communities are certainly not a new idea, with many small ones currently existing, none have been created with the intention and on the scale that is needed to arouse worldwide interest. We need to see an approach that not only could heal the planet but will also show a different way of living with a daily quality of life that would be more uplifting for almost anyone living on the planet.

The way we live together and relate together in community is the basic building block that is needed to change the world. The creation of a model Community that demonstrates living for The

Highest Good Of All will enable others to see how we can all cooperate and enjoy a higher and happier standard of living. With the successful demonstration and media coverage of this model, people from all over the world will be able to see and hear about a lifestyle that they too can enjoy and how we can start by setting up life to work for everyone, for The Highest Good Of All.

Again, there are enough resources and manpower for all of us, all life on the planet, to live together very abundantly. We just haven't set it up that way yet because of the legacy of our everyone-for-themselves socio-economic-political approach. It is now time, so I invite you to expand your consciousness and open your heart as we describe a model that could work for everyone, that would stave off the dire predictions of what otherwise is in store for us.

Chapter 4

LIVING FOR THE HIGHEST GOOD IN COMMUNITY

Utilizing the concept of living For The Highest Good Of All Life, how do we design our model living situation (Community) so that it will work for all of us? We must not only meet the needs of the planet by living sustainably, but we must also meet the needs of the people involved by optimizing the quality of life for ALL people. So the questions are:

- (1) Does being ecological mean that we have to suffer? and
- (2) Does sharing our resources mean that we all have less?

The answer to these questions is an emphatic NO! In fact, living in harmony with each other and the planet can be more fun, far more abundant, and much more satisfying than the lifestyles most of us are currently living. Given the Western society's penchant for consumption and indulgence, if we can't provide a more satisfying model for living, we won't change how we live until the decaying environment eventually forces us as a society to change our consumption patterns. But we don't have to let it get to that point because doing the best for the planet will also optimize the quality of life for all of us if we choose to live together in a way that can truly work for all of us. So open your mind and your heart to the possibility of how we could be living, and, if there's something that we may leave out of our description or that you may wish to alter somewhat, just put that in because you would be a part of this model too and your needs are important.

HOW HAVE WE DESIGNED OUR TOWNS AND CITIES?

As a starting point let's look at how traditional towns and communities get started. How did your town or city end up

looking and operating as it does? Chances are that it started out with a single home or two—possibly even farms—located on some fairly flat land. Then there were probably more homes built as people moved into the area, and they were followed by some businesses. When the cluster grew big enough, government and service buildings were added until there was an unplanned and unintegrated hodgepodge of structures and streets. Also, because of the everyone-for-themselves economic model, most of the space under roofs and most of the concrete laid down to cover the earth ended up robbing people of their connection with each other and with nature, which eventually got pushed out of their lives.

With the advent of cars, we started paving streets, driveways, parking lots, walkways, and freeways until an astounding amount of land was covered with asphalt and concrete. Since it was easier to build on the lowlands and flatlands, we forced the farms further and further out from the cities and, with suburban sprawl, further out still—eventually even leading to the demise of the small farmer. Then, as the cities overcrowded, those who could moved away from the town centers dreaming of the good life with a home in suburbia. They moved into their large suburban homes, which now don't even reflect the current living/relationship patterns. But, with the need for the everyone-for-themselves income, we often have to jump back onto the freeways and spend a lot of time in congested rush hour travel. We also have to get back into our cars to go and do almost anything—shopping, recreation, errands, meetings with friends, etc.

So, before anyone ever stopped to do an environmental or sociological impact study, we created havoc for both our immediate environment and our lifestyles. We pushed out nature. We pushed out fresh food grown on the best farmland. We tied up our lives in traveling and depersonalization to the point that many of us now get minimal exercise (we are now a nation of overweight and obese people largely because of this factor), minimal playtime, and, most importantly, minimal quality time spent with good friends and family. Chances are, for many of us, the jobs we have to do to support ourselves take up—and sometimes become—most of our lives, and many of us spend 99+ percent of our time

with concrete between us and the earth.

CAN WE DESIGN LIVING IN HARMONY?

But what if we could live in harmony with the environment, with each other, and with ourselves, and what if we could also enjoy really abundant, nurturing, creative, and fun lives? Imagine living in a Community of loving, nurturing friends who live and work together as one family. This Community has been meticulously designed and built so that we are living in harmony with all life. Because we have chosen to live in a way designed from the beginning to be for The Highest Good Of All Life, we are living integrated with nature rather than having to use the vast amount of building and concrete space inherent in the everyone-for-themselves model.

The Community produces all its own clean energy and, through cooperation and the use of positive technology, is as nonpolluting and sustainable as possible. Nature flourishes on hundreds of beautiful acres, and most of the organic food is grown through advanced techniques and nonobtrusive, edible landscaping. Since vehicles are parked at the outskirts of the community, and pavement is used minimally, it's a wonderful place to play outdoors or go for a walk and touch the land.

When residents are done working in supportive, nurturing jobs, the Community offers a full array of recreational, creative, and growth opportunities. Organized sports, games, music, movies, just hanging out with great people, and other fun and relaxing activities are freely available, and the residents enjoy them with friends who are within easy walking distance.

The population of the Community would be between 400 and 500. That size would be large enough so that the Community could have the kinds of amenities and opportunities for a variety of recreational and creative expressions, yet not so large that it would preclude each person from taking an active role in the decision-making process in the Community. Cooperative communities have existed for years, but none based on the Highest Good For All model on the scale that would have more universal appeal such that people not living there would say,

“Yeah, this Community’s lifestyle is much better than my own. I’d like to live there!” Most are too small to have the amenities and the diversity that would appeal to people used to certain opportunities of urban living.

Critical to the design of the Community is what I call the fun factor. Communities have stagnated and ultimately failed because they weren’t fun, and people lost interest. But, if people are having fun, others are drawn in. Thus, for the Community model to be viable, fun and pleasure must be interwoven into every facet of the Community. In fact, a Highest Good approach mandates that fun, joy and loving be the essences in our daily lives, because they are so essential to our individual and collective well-being. People need to know that we can have a society where we’re really connecting with each other and having a lot of pleasure. Most people now have grown up thinking that fun is having control over others, being self-indulging, being greedy, being lustful, and competing with and having enjoyment at the expense of others. People need to rediscover in a deeper way what fun is for them, and a Community designed for The Highest Good Of All will provide the ideal stage for this rediscovery. The tremendous potential of the “use and access” principle I described earlier is an integral part of this.

SUGGESTING A MODEL

Not being an experienced writer, this chapter, describing how life could be in a cooperative Community on the scale I’m proposing, was the hardest chapter to write. What was the best way to paint a picture of how life could be? I considered a “day-in-the-life” type of approach, but that seemed a little trite to me. Instead, since presenting the vision of how life could be very different is the key factor to seeing how we can live together in harmony, I decided to go with a more detailed description of a possible Community designed for The Highest Good Of All.

As a way of introducing a description of what life would look like in a Community built on the principle of The Highest Good Of All, I’d like to share with you the introduction from the proposed model that I, along with a few members of the Community Planet

Foundation, wrote a few years ago. We have been working with various models, so keep in mind that this is just one possible option we're considering and there are a lot of possibilities:

"Imagine looking out and seeing unspoiled nature with clean air and a stream running by with clean drinkable water. Imagine at the same time that you are in the middle of a Community where people are living and working together as one family. The residents here increase their abundance by sharing Community resources which allows everyone access to a full range of recreational, educational, and creative interests. A purpose of this Community is to support individuals in their growth so that they can make their dreams a reality. It is also the aim of its members to find peace and harmony within themselves, with others, and with nature, in hopes that this will assist in bringing peace to this earth.

"This is the vision shared by the members of the Community Planet Foundation, which is bringing forth a planned cooperative Community. We are designing an environment that enables us to live in greater harmony and balance with ourselves, each other, and our environment. In this Community it is necessary that our lifestyle not only has abundance and success but is also nurturing and fun. In creating such a model Community, others will be able to see how we can all cooperate and enjoy a higher standard of living. Others can learn from sharing our experiments and experience through publications, seminars, workshops, and temporary residence in the Community. Eventually we envision that the replication of our Community or similar models will have a transforming effect on individual and world peace and the prosperity of all mankind.

"Our first challenge is to create that initial successful model. To do so we believe that the key area to focus on is how we live together. We consider issues such as how to incorporate the latest technology and how to live in harmony with nature to be very important. However, our primary concern is how we interact and relate with one another and how we make decisions that include and involve everyone. Without this we would be missing the

essence of what a Community really can be—a loving and joyful support group for all its residents.

“To capture the essence of what we want in our Community, we created this affirmation:

“We are living in a Community, a home of peace and loving, dedicated to:

- Demonstrating harmony with all life;
- Nurturing and supporting each other;
- Sharing our wealth as one family;
- Listening to the truth within each other and responding with kindness, consideration, and loving honesty.

“At first our plan was to describe the Community through focusing on areas like economics, agriculture, education, recreation, etc.. Instead we chose to focus on more expansive questions involving how people live together:

- 1) How do we share our abundance?
- 2) How do we interact with our environment?
- 3) How do we reach consensus?
- 4) How do we beautify our environment?
- 5) How do we enjoy ourselves?
- 6) How do we enrich ourselves?
- 7) How do we coordinate what we live to do?
- 8) How do we nourish ourselves?
- 9) How do we vitalize ourselves.?
- 10) How do we communicate?
- 11) How do we bring forth inner wisdom?
- 12) How do we expand our Community?

“To see how much more expansive these twelve ‘How do we ...’ focus areas are, notice how the areas of health involves so much more when we consider, ‘How do we vitalize ourselves?’ Likewise with food production and preparation, when the question is ‘How do we nourish ourselves?’ it makes us think about all the aspects that are important in nourishing ourselves rather than just putting good food in our bodies. We see how the

twelve focus areas are all interrelated, and we think it is important that, as we move into a new age of cooperation, that we begin to consider our lives as a whole rather than to compartmentalize them.

“As we explored the twelve focus areas, we intentionally tried to avoid making hard and fast rules; we wanted the individual to have as much freedom as possible. At the same time we realized that everyone in the Community would have to have a commitment to the Community’s well-being and its mission for it to succeed.

“There are three parts in describing each of the twelve focus areas. The first is a short Overview. Next are Essence statements, which are the ideals we feel are the essences for that focus area. Last, we list the Guidelines, which are the standards we will observe and the explanation of how our community functions with respect to that focus area.”

IT’S IMPORTANT WHAT QUESTIONS WE ASK

Not only is it important that we ask questions about how we live together, but it’s important to ask the right questions. Any community is only going to be as good as the fundamental questions it asks and is willing to take on. The questions determine the outcomes, so it all starts with the questions. In 18th century America we once asked the question, “How can we live with more freedom, equality, and harmony?” It was, at the time, revolutionary in the world. Even today, everywhere in the world, people know of Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin. But we’ve stagnated and largely forgotten that noble question that was the foundation for our country, and it’s now time to take freedom and equality to the next level. In fact, with what we’ve done to the planet, it’s needed for our very survival.

Any good idea, or good question, is always subject to corruption if it is not constantly and creatively explored and energized. Right now it’s obvious that the power brokers and money interests in our everyone-for-themselves paradigm have exploited the once noble question our founding fathers asked. The planet isn’t going to survive in an everyone-for-themselves paradigm with the questions that the power-based system asks: “How can we get

control and shape people's lives?"; "How can we gather for ourselves as much wealth as possible?"; and "How can we disempower and numb people out so they don't overthrow the system and we lose control?" While the last question may not be absolutely conscious, the big players absolutely have a huge stake in maintaining the status quo. Remember the Nicola Tesla story earlier, well that's just one of a million examples.

Because of the stagnation and narrowness in the questions we currently ask, that's why we, in our Community Planet Community description, decided we had to be really expansive in the questions we chose to ask about how we live together in Community. For example, the question we asked about how we govern ourselves—"How do we reach consensus?"—stands in stark contrast with the current ideology of how does everyone try to get their way and how do the power brokers manipulate and control the masses. If we were to ask "How do we reach consensus?" in all our decision-making, the question is so expansive and all encompassing that we would eventually come up with a decision-making system that includes The Highest Good For All. As part of that question, we would take on the more fundamental question I've posed, "Given that there are enough resources and manpower on the planet for all of us to live abundantly and in harmony with our environment, what is the problem?" As long as we have the imbalances on the planet that we currently have, we need to passionately keep asking that question and start acting upon it. Eventually we would end up with a model that would work for all life on the planet and for future generations.

Again, it all boils down to what questions we ask and are willing to take on, and I think most societies have been asking very limiting questions, at best. For example, the Puritan culture, which still has an influence on us today, asked very controlling questions: "How can we get people to behave out of fear?"; "How can we punish people to keep them in line?"; "How can we show that suffering is good?"; "How can we keep women in their place?"; and "How do we repress people and get them to keep their feelings to themselves?" At this time in history we need to ask very different questions, the kinds of questions that we asked in

our Community description of how we would live together more successfully and more abundantly. Underlying all the questions is our foundational, fundamental question, *"HOW CAN WE LIVE TOGETHER FOR THE HIGHEST GOOD OF ALL CONCERNED?"*

HOW DO WE SHARE OUR ABUNDANCE?

One of the first questions a group of people living in any community needs to ask is how to define their financial interrelationships. This question gets answered by default in our current world economy because we just continue the old everyone-for-themselves paradigm without exploring other possibilities. Also, wealth is typically defined as a person's net worth. But isn't wealth so much more than that? An ailing and/or depressed billionaire would probably give all his or her material wealth in exchange for health and happiness. Recognizing that abundance in our lives means far more than material wealth, in our question concerning how we interrelate with respect to "wealth," we chose to ask how we can ALL live together abundantly. This planet could be a paradise for ALL of us to share. It's a very abundant place to live, if we would just make that choice.

As I stated in the previous chapter on the Highest Good, sharing resources has incredible advantages. We can have so much, much more when we pool our resources. We currently tie up so much of our wealth in individual possessions that we individually use. If we can redefine wealth as use and access rather than as possessions, then we can really cut down on our consumerism while at the same time having access to much, much more than we would individually have. We don't need to each own a lawnmower, a complete set of tools, laundry appliances, vacuum cleaners, etc.—we only need easy access to these things. Although there is nothing comparable in scope to the model Communities we're proposing, the 60 members of the Twin Oaks community were living on only \$250 per month each in 1986¹, and the 14 members of Alpha Farm in Oregon were living comfortably on \$140 per month each.² Through sharing resources, we can not only have use and access of far more things than we normally would, but we would be using far less of our own financial

resources, not to mention using far less of the planet's resources. We also don't need as many people laboring to produce the quantity of material goods that we consume.

In designing a model Community, one of the most challenging questions to consider is to what extent do we share our individual and group wealth. Even if we're eventually headed towards an egalitarian model, for our first model Community we may want to create a system where people with diverse economic backgrounds, choices, and lifestyles can still participate together as we transition from the old everyone-for-themselves model. In the transition period, we think it is important to provide for these individual choices while at the same time capitalizing on the tremendous economic and lifestyle benefits through living cooperatively. On the one hand, we want to take care of each other as a family. On the other hand, sharing everything equally might be asking too much of many people at first. That step would probably be further down the line when people can see how well it works to live cooperatively. With the dual purpose being to create an abundant Community that is a joy to live in and to provide a working prototype to encourage other Communities to spring up around the planet, we know that we have to create an economic model that will make sense, and work, for almost everyone.

At first, because our planning group for the Community Planet Foundation's model was sharing oriented, we considered what would happen if we all shared equally. We felt that we, the planning group, could all do it and, through sharing resources, could all enjoy a very abundant lifestyle. However, we also knew that some people might be turned off to this—people who, at least at first, might individually want more than others. As we always worked with design situations where everyone can win, we came up with a unique solution.

Because we see ourselves as one family, we decided that, "The land, structures, and communally-used or provided resources belong to and are the responsibility of all residents." As we look at the damage we've done to the planet, in retrospect it looks truly crazy that people have been able to do whatever they wanted to

the environment regardless of The Highest Good Of All. When individual interests can do what they want with the land, water, and air as opposed to planning as a group with the welfare of generations to come taken into consideration from the start, then we have a recipe for the life-threatening environmental problems we now face. Instead, we need to design land usage to work for everyone; we need to again think of and act towards land and nature as being sacred. If we don't do this, housing and cities get stuffed together, nature and productive land upon which to grow food disappears, pollution becomes a major problem, and concrete spreads like a seal over the land while walking disappears. This is *OUR WORLD, IT BELONGS TO ALL OF US*, including future generations, and we need to plan and share it and its resources with ultimate care for all life in order to keep it intact for our children and our children's children.

In regards to housing, group ownership becomes a very freeing concept. As the system is now, people can become stuck in housing situations due to finances. Many have moved to suburbia with long commutes and the necessity of jumping into a car to do almost anything. We usually also have no idea who our neighbors are and no real connection to them as people. Because buying and selling is at the mercy of the ebb and flow of the market, people get trapped in locations, sometimes for years, while their lives get progressively more isolated. Then, because they need their 9-to-5 jobs to continue their lifestyle, they get trapped on the treadmill of life.

Our model Highest Good Community would provide basic human needs to all residents. These benefits include food, shelter, health needs, recreational and creative equipment and supplies, communication systems, educational opportunities, and transportation. However, if a person chose to work outside the Community and the person earned more than the average cost per resident cost of living, the resident would only be obligated to contribute ten percent of that excess amount to the Community. Likewise, residents working within the Community and making money outside (i.e. through outside investments) would

contribute ten percent of their outside income. With the above system, we felt that all residents would have a baseline lifestyle at a very high level, and the people who want even more could not only still have that, but also their increased riches would benefit the whole Community as well.

As I wrote earlier in the “Highest Good” chapter, the now prosperous Mondragon area of Spain is an example of people working together for the benefit of all. Another example of the value of cooperation is the kibbutzim in Israel. With less than four percent of the population living on about 250 kibbutzim, they still produce forty percent of Israel’s agriculture and seven percent of Israel’s industrial exports.⁵ At the same time, they provide all the food and housing for their members as well as the medical needs, education, and entertainment, and recreation.⁶ With an entire Community planned from the beginning to be in harmony with all life, with the sharing of resources, and with our renewed sharing with nature and with each other, we can do even better in our model Community in terms of the abundance of our lives on all levels.

The Community Planet Foundation’s overview description for “How Do We Share Our Abundance?” is as follows. Again, there are many possibilities, so this particular description is just our attempt at painting a possible picture based on the Highest Good For All. Because a friend of mine said that the “Guidelines” portion of the description read a little dry, I tried to spruce it up a bit by interjecting some non-italicized comments.

HOW DO WE SHARE OUR ABUNDANCE?

We in Community Planet operate under the premise that there is enough wealth on the planet for everyone to have a very abundant standard of living. Historically the problem in achieving this has been in the distribution of wealth. With people tying up so many resources in the accumulation and protection of possessions, much of the planet’s wealth goes unused. When we share a Community, we do not need tennis courts, swimming pools, and beautiful gardens of our own, we just need access to those facilities within the Community. Likewise, we do not need a car for every person, we just need enough cars so that everyone who needs to drive away from our Community has access to one. We can collectively

save a huge sum of money by sharing our abundance on many levels. Possibly wealth in our times needs to be redefined as use and access rather than ownership.

We have also created a system in our Community where people with diverse economic backgrounds, choices, and lifestyles can still participate together. In Community Planet, we think it is important to provide for these individual choices while at the same time capitalizing on the tremendous economic and lifestyle benefits through living cooperatively.

ESSENCES: *How do we share our abundance?*

- *By supporting our growth through an attitude of dynamic openness. (It's amazing the abundance that can come to us when we are open to the gifts that God has in store for us.)*
- *By sharing our wealth as one family. (We must eventually recognize that we are all sisters and brothers on this planet.)*
- *By sharing out of our overflow.*
- *By sharing on the basis of need. (When will we finally learn that the needs of the one are the concern of everyone?)*
- *By being joyful givers on all levels. (Giving joyfully and being of service are excellent ways to be abundant.)*
- *By recognizing that the source of our abundance is in our inner qualities of love and joy. (We need to realize that the quality of our lives has more to do with what is happening inwardly than what is happening externally.)*

GUIDELINES:

- *The land, structures, and communally used or provided resources (i.e. vehicles, furniture, equipment, etc.) belong to and are the responsibility of all residents. (We don't need the burden of so much stuff, it's ALL ours.)*
- *Residents have ownership of their personal possessions, which may include furniture, equipment, vehicles, etc., which the residents have individually purchased. (But you can still use my oldies cd's—I can't listen to all of them at once.)*
- *The living structures belong to the Community and the residents may have lifetime tenancy. (Let's free ourselves*

- up without losing any of the real advantages.)
- *The Community provides basic human needs to all residents at a fair and reasonable exchange rate. These benefits include food, shelter, health needs, recreational facilities and equipment, communication systems, and transportation. Every resident working in the Community will earn enough to provide for their living and personal expenses. (Until we truly take care of one another, it's still an everyone-for-themselves world.)*
 - *Residents working outside the Community contribute 10 percent of their income over "x" amount/month to the Community general fund. ("x" = the average cost of living per resident.) They have the option of contributing more than 10 percent.*
 - * *Residents working within the Community and also making money outside (i.e. through investments) contribute 10 percent of their outside income.*
 - * *They have the option of contributing more than 10 percent. (I'll be sharing all of mine and getting so much more in return.)*
 - * *They do not receive the monthly income if their income is greater than the amount of the cost of living plus the monthly income.*
 - *Requisitions are available for emergencies, trainings, education, etc.*
 - *Excess Community income, by the process of consensus, can be put into the general fund, put into special projects, or used in any other way that the Community decides. (This must be our decision, not the decision of special interest groups.)*
 - *Incoming residents give a non-refundable entrance fee to the general fund of the Community. The guideline is that the fee is large enough to show commitment but not too large as to exclude people.*
 - *When a person chooses to leave and get re-established outside the Community, the Community, to the best of its*

majority of people. If there's not even enough money in circulation to pay the national debt, then there is a finite amount of what people think of as wealth, thus producing the haves and the have-nots. We've bought into having lots of possessions because we think they create freedom through security. However, freedom is anything but being stuck on the treadmill, and wealth is really so much more than money or material goods.

Part of the essence of freedom is having fun and pleasure, and living in our Community will be incredibly fun and rewarding on all levels as we heal the alienation and isolation that have characterized our civilization, and we move into being nurtured by nature and by each other. That really is our divine heritage.

HOW DO WE INTERACT WITH OUR ENVIRONMENT?

Remember that, since the time of Francis Bacon in the 17th century, the question that our culture has asked about our environment has been, "How can we detach ourselves from nature and manipulate it to advance our own human interests?" This question has led us to our current environmental crisis. Utilizing the concept of The Highest Good of All Life, the question we must ask is, "How do we design a physical situation that will work for *all* of us and *all* life on the planet?" We know that we must meet the needs of the planet by practicing sustainability. We must also meet the needs of the people involved by optimizing the standard of living for all people.

Let's imagine taking a piece of land for a Community. This could either be raw land or land where we could eventually replace any existing structures. The first thing we'd do is an environmental impact study in order to see how we can best protect and restore nature, what the population carrying capacity of the land is, where it's best to build and to grow food, etc. While the minimum amount of land needed would depend on each location, I would foresee at least 1,000 acres for a Community of up to 500 people. While some of you may think that's a lot, keep in mind that we don't have to live as packed in as we now do, especially as we start growing food within the Communities and as we begin to restore nature. In designing the Community as a

ability, will support that person to get re-established.

Think of the impact that redefining wealth as use and access would have on crime. People currently don't know what to do about crime. We talk about harsher punishment and more enforcement, but creating a lifestyle with abundance, opportunity, nurturing, and loving based on a sharing model would reduce crime much more effectively. Because of the resource sharing in the Community, crimes of property become almost meaningless. What can a person really steal when they have access to virtually everything the Community has to offer?

Also, living abundantly has less to do with consumption and material goods than it does with the quality of our lives on all levels. I know of one family of four that was living in a cabin in California's Sierra Nevada mountains on less than \$10,000 a year. The husband then got a job in the San Francisco Bay area that paid \$200,000 a year. However, with all that this income could buy, the family came to the realization that the quality of their lives and their abundance was far greater when they were living in their cabin.

Interestingly, while our consumption has increased 45 percent since 1970, the Index of Social Health reports that, during this same time, the quality of our lives has dropped 51 percent.⁹ Consumption and materialism do not equate with abundance and often are the antithesis of what abundance truly is. A 1995 Merck Family Fund survey indicated that Americans would be happier with lifestyles based on gratifying personal relationships rather than on consumption.¹⁰ According to a *U.S News and World Report* poll, 51 percent "would rather have more free time, even if it means less money."¹¹

One downside of what we typically think of as wealth is that most of us get stuck on the treadmill of having to slave to perpetuate our lifestyles, and that really drains the life out of most people. We've been chasing a concept of freedom that we've thought of as having enough money to do what we want, when we want, to the extent that we want. The trouble is that in an everyone-for-themselves model this isn't possible for the vast

designing from scratch rather than trying to retrofit, we can save a huge amount of energy by designing and building in energy efficiency in the first place instead of coming along later and trying to correct past mistakes. It's interesting that ancient cultures even knew how to save energy in their designs, but we blindly build for convenience and try to muscle in, by use of fossil fuel, things like heating and cooling. Technologically, this Community would in many ways be like a Disney World Epcot Center built along the lines of sustainability. The Community would be a living demonstration of a future that is not grim, foreboding, and poverty stricken, but rather a future that is both sustainable and very desirable. Built with local, non-polluting building materials, the Community would also be a showcase for positive design, technology, and building materials.

Designing a Community to work for everyone will look different in different environments. However, in every environment, we can improve the quality of all life by designing and building cooperatively. For example, in areas with a lot of snow, we can build domes over the living and working areas, just like they put domes over stadiums. This will enable the residents to enjoy the winter while at the same time being able to walk around and play without the burden and expense that snow and ice and cold impose.

In many places water is now a problem. However, there are many ways to deal with water without resorting to dams and pumping water from great distances—practices that have had a devastating effect on our nation's waterways. For example, the California city of Arcata uses a two pond wetlands system where the sewage is naturally purified by plants. That water can be recycled for agriculture, etc. It is also possible to design structures that collect and store vast quantities of rainwater. Ancient cultures knew enough to do that. They didn't have the ability to use fossil fuels to build dams and pipe water hundreds of miles. If an area like Los Angeles had been designed effectively in the first place, we would not have to pump water long distances. We would also not be sending so much pollution into our bay, making it dangerous to swim in and contaminating the sea and the chain of

whole, we can plan for its growth and limit its size to that which the area can naturally support.

Because of the cooperative nature of the Community, one of the immediate design improvements we can make would be to design it to be a pedestrian Community. We could bring walking back into our lives, and, when needed, use the Community solar rechargeable electric carts. Because most people would work within the Community, we could also cut way back on the use of cars (which would be parked on the outskirts of the Community). For a Community of 500 people, we may only need 50 or so cars, probably even less. With the amount of resources most of us tie up in our cars, just think of the savings we can have in transportation. Also many, if not all, of these cars could be run with non-polluting energy. In addition, just picture a living situation without fences and without all that concrete and space we use for roadways and parking areas.

According to the USDA, we're losing over 3 million acres per year of agricultural land to development.¹³ That's almost three times the size of Delaware, much of it being put under concrete, every year! Almost all of this is due to the lack of cooperation in our current system. When we all finally start living For The Highest Good, there are machines that eat concrete and turn it into sand. Then we can reverse our current course and instead start eliminating millions of acres of concrete every year. In addition, the buildings would be designed from the beginning to be multi-use and multipurpose structures. In the current everyone-for-themselves paradigm, most private and even civic structures go unused a great portion of the time. In a cooperative Community, we would need to have fewer structures while, at the same time, having far more facilities for all of us to use.

Using existing technology, we can generate all of our own energy—through solar power and other options, depending on location. As examples, there are six thousand villages in India that are running on photovoltaic¹⁴ and the story of the Gaviotas village in Colombia provides us with an incredible model of energy self-sufficiency in the most challenging of environments.¹⁵ Also, when

life that it supports.

Because we can design a Community with recycling in mind, it will be easy to recycle our paper and just about all of our waste products. When we can't recycle, we can use our group purchasing power to buy products without all the wrappings that characterize today's commercialism, and we can buy products that are biodegradable. When we had to buy these more positive products individually, we may have thought them to be too expensive in our previous lifestyles. Remember too, that when we can share and recycle resources, we use far, far less of our planet's resources. For the survival of our planet, we obviously need to start using resources only at the rate that they can naturally renew themselves.

The promise of technology in our age was that it was supposed to improve our lives by lifting us above the whims of nature. While science and technology have largely delivered on that promise, it has often come at a price—the earth has been monumentally damaged, and there is now the threat of irreversible damage not only to the environment but also to the future quality of ALL life on the planet. Technology was meant to be our servant, not our master, and we are now left with the task of trying to figure out how to correct the damage that we've done. This task is made even more difficult because we don't want to sacrifice any of the Western consumerism to which we've become accustomed. Creating a positive model for future development is the key to returning technology to its role as a servant to humankind. Fortunately, we currently have the science and technology to rectify most of the problems facing us, especially given that we can change the way that we live together to make it work for all of us. However, it is obvious that we first need a revolution of consciousness. As Einstein said, "It has become appallingly clear that our technology has surpassed our humanity."

From our Community Planet description:

HOW DO WE INTERACT WITH OUR ENVIRONMENT?

We are creating a Community that is in harmony and balance with nature. In designing a Community as a whole, we can plan for its growth and limit its size to that which the area can naturally support. Our

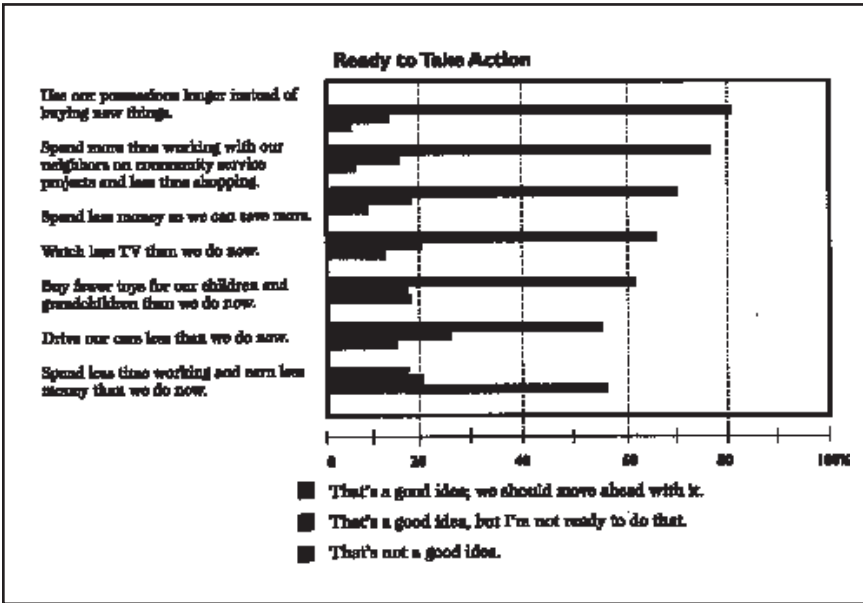
design will include the recycling of resources and the fostering of a positive relationship with our environment. We will also make maximum use of the technologies that work in harmony with nature, while minimizing those technologies that pollute. Ours is a Community where people, nature, and technology work in unison to create an environment that works for the benefit of all.

ESSENCES: *How do we interact with our environment?*

- *By respecting and living in harmony with our environment.*
- *By keeping as natural an environment as possible.*
- *By utilizing innovations in technology to preserve our natural environment.*

GUIDELINES:

- *Limit the number of people in the Community to that which the area can naturally and sustainably support. (We've gotten into our imbalances with nature by trying to concentrate too many people into areas that will not naturally support those numbers. There is enough land for all of us to live in balance with nature.)*
- *Maintain as much natural surface area as possible and respect the flow of nature.*
 - * *Minimize concrete surfaces. (Use natural pathways instead of roads.) (We have enough concrete already.)*
 - * *Encourage natural wildlife in harmony with space and nature.*
 - * *Build on the basis of need.*
 - * *Utilize multi-purpose buildings. (So much of our space under roof goes unused in an everyone-for-themselves world, and this has caused a proliferation of buildings that are not necessary if we truly cooperate.)*
 - * *Require justification for individual housing space (square footage and number of rooms). (If we are cooperating with each other and with nature, we don't need as much space under roof, we just need the flexibility to change the space we're living in.)*



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—The Harwood Group, “Yearning for Balance,” a 1995 study of citizen perspectives on the issue of consumption, commissioned by the Merck Family Fund

- *Keep pollutants from going into the environment.* (With the current crisis in our immune systems, we've got to do this.)
 - * *Recycle waste materials.*
 - * *Recycle water.*
 - * *Use biodegradable products whenever possible.* (And it's almost always possible. If not, we need to start making more innovative choices so we don't pollute.)
 - * *Use natural pest control.* (Organic farmers do this now, but the huge growers are dependent on chemicals because of what they've done to the land. We need to return farming to smaller local operations.)
 - * *Minimize noise pollution (i.e., have noisy machinery underground).* (We have too much noise in our lives, and we don't have to live that way. In Cairo people are going deaf from the constant honking of car horns.)
 - * *Utilize unobtrusive indirect lighting for pathways.*
- *Self-produce as much natural energy as possible by using the most efficient, non-pollutant energy systems available.*
 - * *Maximize solar heating and cooling.*
 - * *Recycle energy (i.e., exchanges between heating and cooling systems, etc.)* (In the consumptive way we've designed things, this resource has gone untapped.)

HOW DO WE REACH CONSENSUS?

When we were meeting to generate the Community Planet description, we realized right away that perhaps the most important question to consider in designing a Community in harmony with the principle of The Highest Good of All is "How are we going to govern ourselves?" The age-old, supposedly politically correct model is democracy's "majority rules" system. Unfortunately, this is the very system that has swept across the planet, resulting in the mess in which we currently find ourselves. So what were the alternatives? Through the centuries, many groups like some of the Native American cultures and the Quakers have successfully used consensus decision-making. Right away

we loved the idea because a Community of people living together really do need to be living in harmony with one another, while still providing for individual needs and considerations.

Popularly, consensus is thought of as decision via compromise in which everyone loses something. So you don't get confused with how politicians use the term, we described consensus as "differing with other forms of decision-making because it stresses the cooperative development of a decision with people working with each other rather than competing against each other. Everyone has a chance to be heard and come into harmony with the decision. Thus a decision is reached that is acceptable to all, a decision that everyone can say 'yes' to. There is no voting, and therefore no losing minority. Because the essence of consensus is creativity and accessing The Highest Good of All Concerned, there also isn't the need for compromise."¹⁷

So, in the spirit of The Highest Good of All, the question of how we not only govern ourselves but also do our decision-making in the Community became, "How do we reach consensus?" Meeting weekly for months, we brainstormed, explored, and sometimes argued about how we could do consensus decision-making in a Community of up to 500 people and still have it work. It was a monumental, yet fun endeavor which finally paid off in the very unique design which you will read about in the "Guidelines" section. Through the whole process, we, ourselves, adopted the consensus process, and every decision we made after that point was always done by the process of consensus.

When we ask "How do we reach consensus?," the question stands in stark contrast to the fundamental question that the governments run by the power brokers have asked through the centuries. Their question has basically been "How can we impose our will over the greatest number of people with the most efficiency and the least resistance in order to further our own self interests, and how can we get it past people so they either don't notice or don't object?" Make no mistake about it, this has been the basic agenda on the part of the forces that have controlled

governments. Also, whether it's decision-making in businesses, organizations, or groups of all types, the most powerful and outspoken have always had a disproportionate influence over these decisions that affect our lives. The everyone-for-themselves approach has been characterized by a very definite lack of true consensus. It's time that we start asking how we can make decisions on all levels that work for and include everyone. To do that we need to consider the deeper questions we keep asking: "Given that there are enough resources and manpower for all of us to live abundantly, what is the problem?" And, "How can we live together for The Highest Good of *All* Life on the planet?" This takes creativity, it takes challenging our assumptions about how we have to live together, and it takes respecting and valuing each other and all life on the planet. We can do this, and we must.

A consensus decision-making system is only workable when there is the commitment and consciousness to go for The Highest Good of All. However, as I said before, if we're going to continue to have a world, we're going to have to start making it work for everyone. This first model Community will require that consciousness of committing to go for The Highest Good of All. Then, when people see how much more freedom and abundance they can have through cooperation, that will probably be the most significant thing the Community will contribute to changing the world. As McLaughlin and Davidson wrote in *Builders of the Dawn* about the Philadelphia Life Center (Movement For A New Society), "They see consensus as a concrete example of the real healing work that is needed in the world, the elimination of power relationships between people and the celebration of our mutual



Conceptual pedestrian Community by Thomas Slagle