



*Dreams of
Home*

by Donald Skiff

Dreams of Home

**By
Donald Skiff**

A collection of essays on Community

1990 – 2000

Dreams of Home

“ . . . And indeed, we might eventually discover that the new paradigm is nothing but the quest itself; that the only constant is the search; that Being, as Hegel said, is simply the process of its own becoming. When a famous Zen Master was asked the meaning and nature of absolute reality, he replied only; ‘Walk on.’”

--Ken Wilber, in *Eye to Eye*

© Copyright Donald E. Skiff
All rights reserved.

Acknowledgments

A community, by definition, contains more than one person. This book is the result of years of community, and the result of deep interactions with many people. To be fair, I need to acknowledge *all of them*, from the relatives and friends who gave me my first taste in childhood, to my dear friends in the Northern Hills Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship who made me aware of the value of belonging, and the members of the Toronto TORI Community who helped me to understand just what it was that I was experiencing, to the participants of *Expressions* in Ann Arbor, who enabled me to remove my “training wheels.”

There’s a cliché that community is not possible on-line, that the lack of physical presence prevents real trust and intimacy. And yet I count as some of my most intense experiences of community those encounters I’ve had through email, with the mailing list community Mv2spk (“moved to speak”) and especially with the little group in Share, a private circle that has seen me through many emotional times both difficult and joyous.

So to you, Les and Bob and Susanna and Brian and Shannon and Sandra and Pat, and to Walter and Sue, and to Laura and Fran and Suzanne and Tom and Marilyn and Roy and Marty and MerriAngela, I thank you for teaching me what community is.

Dreams of Home

And to my family, Cynthia and Phil and Shirley and Debra, for whom I'm ever grateful to have in my life and my blood.

And finally, to my love and my partner and my wife Judith, who truly makes my sun rise every morning, thank you for being part of who I am.

I love you.

Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	10
<i>Part One Early Attempts to Describe my Community Experience</i>	12
<i>Trust And Community</i>	14
<i>Messiah, Seeking Salvation</i>	29
<i>Part Two Editorials from the Toronto TORI Community Newsletter Dear Friends . . .</i>	79
<i>The Dream</i>	80
<i>Community—The Infinite Game</i>	84
<i>T O R R I (?)</i>	93
<i>Valentine TORI</i>	97
<i>Let It Be a Dance</i>	100
<i>What Draws Us?</i>	104
<i>What Draws Us? A Survey</i>	106
<i>What Draws Us? Habits of the Heart</i>	108
<i>What Draws Us? Some Research</i>	109
<i>What Draws Us? More than Personal</i>	111
<i>David Goff Revisited</i>	113
<i>What Draws Us? Do We Need Theory?</i>	118
<i>What Draws Us? Intimacy</i>	119
<i>What Draws Us? Who Speaks for Us?</i>	121
<i>What Draws Us? Virtual Community</i>	125
<i>What Draws Us? Two Communities</i>	127
<i>What Draws Us? Being Here</i>	128
<i>What Draws Us? Another Version</i>	130
<i>What Draws Us? Activism</i>	132
<i>What Draws Us? Transcendence</i>	134
<i>What Draws Us? Being Connected</i>	136
<i>What Draws Us? Meaning of Community</i>	138

Dreams of Home

Part Three My Essays on E-mail	141
Part Four My Essays on the Web	155
<i>Looking down through a hole in the clouds, . . .</i>	156
<i>Community and Love</i>	162
<i>Individualism and Community</i>	164
<i>Buddhism and Community</i>	168
<i>Keith Jarrett on Community</i>	170
<i>Community Building as Personal Growth</i>	173
<i>Community On-Line</i>	178
<i>I'm Into Something Important For Me . . .</i>	184
<i>Community: Getting to that "We Are One" Feeling</i>	188
<i>Community, Feeling and Spirit</i>	191
<i>What Draws Us?</i>	194
<i>Communities—Religious and Otherwise</i>	198
<i>A Crisis in My Sense of Community</i>	203
<i>Community as an Emergent Consciousness</i>	207
<i>How Did I Get Here?</i>	209
<i>Community, Emptying and Mindfulness</i>	215
<i>Another look at T.O.R.I.</i>	218
<i>Community and Insight Revisited</i>	222
<i>Bodily Sensations and "Community"</i>	225
<i>The "Magic" in Community</i>	229
<i>Coping with the Magic</i>	232
<i>Community as a Jam Session</i>	235
<i>The Group Self</i>	239
<i>Robert Persig and Community Process</i>	242
<i>Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis: the Shift to Community</i>	246
<i>Resisting Community</i>	249
<i>Community Building as Personal Growth – Another Look</i>	251
<i>A View of TORI Groups as Socio-Religious Communities</i>	255
<i>If There's Not Enough Time . . .</i>	261
<i>Dreams of Home (Part A)</i>	264

<i>Dreams of Home (Part B)</i>	269
References	274
<i>Appendix: In The Words of Jack Gibb</i>	276

Introduction

“Community” means different things to different people. It has even meant different things to me, over the past twenty years. What I’m trying to get across, in these pages, is a meaning for the word that touches the human soul; an inner meaning that I believe exists in all of us.

The title of this book is one meaning, one that *itself* has had more than one meaning since it came to me several years ago. Rather than try to describe these, I’d rather let you discern them as you read this journal (for it’s really that, a record of my own journey). My hope is that it might help you illuminate your own journey as we travel this life together.

The book is in sections: The first section includes some of my early writings as I struggled to become clear on this profound experience I seemed to be enmeshed in. Following that is a collection of editorials I wrote for the newsletter of the Toronto TORI Community between 1994 and 1998. The third section includes some e-mail messages I wrote, essays, really, on community. Part 4 is a collection of essays on community that I posted on my Web site from 1997 to 2000. (A couple were begun with the idea of posting them, but not finished, and so did not make it to the Web.)

While there are overlaps, redundancies and inconsistencies in these essays, I chose to leave them pretty much as I wrote them to give a picture of the

Introduction

changes I felt through those years. As the search for community is obviously a process, my struggle with it suggests to me that perhaps community itself, when it manifests, is also a process in the same sense that any relationship is. There's no fixed end point, and maybe no fixed guideposts, either. It occurred to me some time ago that what I was trying to put into words might lend itself more clearly to poetry rather than prose. Alas, I'm no poet.

So please read the following pages as thoughts "on the fly," at best a finger pointing in a direction, none too accurately at that. It's the journey—your journey—that matters.

A suggestion: Since I wrote these essays over a period of ten years, weeks and sometimes months went by between individual essays. They might make more sense to you if you don't read them as you might a novel, in gulps of time, stopping wherever you happen to be and coming back to the same page later. Most are short and self-contained, even though they all relate to one subject. If you put some time in between the reading of individual essays, their redundancies and discontinuities might not be so jarring.

February 16, 2000

Part One

Early Attempts to Describe my Community Experience

When I first became involved with the Toronto TORI Community, my delight attempted to express itself in writing, and I tried to describe “community” in words on paper. Once, I showed a TORI friend what I had written, and in return had received the impression that my words were far from the mark. “Damning with faint praise” came to mind. I finally gave up the project and turned my attention to “being there” instead of writing about it. What could I write? Everything is so individual, even private, how could anyone generalize about it?

Eventually, I offered to take my discovery back to Cincinnati, to a little Unitarian fellowship I had once belonged to. My years with that group had given me my first taste of “community,” and I thought I might be able to convey the power of TORI to my former friends. Not being much at extemporaneous talk, I wrote out the whole thing beforehand. Whatever the effect it had on the Fellowship, it enabled me to finally put it all into words that felt satisfying to me.

Then, about five years later, I experienced some insights into my personal psyche in relation to a man who attended TORI for a short time, and I wrote about the

Introduction

experience as an exercise to clarify it to myself. In the process, I managed to describe, I think, some of the TORI experience itself.

Those two pieces have been taken up and dusted off to add some different colors to this book.

Trust And Community

(This was an address I gave at the Northern Hills Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship, Cincinnati, Ohio, May 6, 1990)¹

Recorded Prelude: "I Am a Rock" by Paul Simon, copyright 1965

A winter's day, in a deep and dark December,

I am alone, gazing from my window to the streets below on a freshly fallen silent shroud of snow. I am a rock, I am an island.

I build walls, a fortress deep and mighty, that none may penetrate. I have no need of friendship - friendship causes pain. Its laughter and its loving I disdain. I am a rock, I am an island.

Don't talk of love, well, I've heard the word before. It's sleeping in my memory. I won't disturb the slumber of feelings that have died.

If I'd never loved I never would have cried. I am a rock, I am an island.

¹ It might help, for those unacquainted with U-U fellowships, to say that many small congregations cannot support full-time ministers, and so take communal responsibility for their programs. In the 1960s and 1970s, this was a great experience in "experimental religion" for some of us, leading to wonderful discoveries within us and among us.

Trust and Community

I have my books, and my poetry to protect me.

*I am shielded in my armor. Hiding in my room, safe
within my womb, I touch no one and no one touches
me. I am a rock, I am an island.*

And a rock feels no pain, and an island never cries.

About twenty years ago (it seems like a hundred, sometimes) I gave a program here at Northern Hills Fellowship on Marshall McLuhan. (Remember him? He was the one who coined the expression “the medium is the message”). Only, the talk wasn’t so much about McLuhan as it was about Community, about the Fellowship as the medium for our interaction, for our being a kind of extended family. Then I went off to grad school, but I didn’t forget the Fellowship, and returned a few years later. This group had become an important part of my life. In 1976 I gave another program, mourning the decline of “the greening of America” and my dimming hope for a larger feeling of community.

Since then, I have discovered that the “new age” promised in the “Greening of America” has not died, but is alive and even thriving in some places (perhaps in spite of its inevitable commercialization). One of these places is in a small part-time community in Toronto, based on some principles put forth by psychologist Jack R. Gibb in a book entitled *TRUST: A New View of Personal and Organizational Development*. His hope was to give a theoretical foundation to new kinds of communities, and he

Dreams of Home

sponsored a number of weekend workshops around the continent in the 1970s. Ongoing communities sprang up in the wake of his efforts, and a few of them are still going.

Of these, I know only about the Toronto group. Existing continuously for 16 years, it has developed into a mature and integrated demonstration of Gibb's "trust theory", and is an impressive source of support and caring for its participants. Although it is not a religious group, its fervent adherence to trust, openness, realization and interdependence (Gibb's basic trust theory variables) reinforces spiritual and humanistic values that U-U's can readily identify with.

I have often thought I'd like to do another program at Northern Hills, on the same general theme as the other two. And as I have experienced the profound feeling of "home" (whatever that is) at TORIs, I've wanted to share it with you.

TORI (spelled T-O-R-I) is an acronym for Gibb's variables: Trust, Openness, Realization and Interdependence.

The Toronto TORI community is a model for what I consider an ideal community, with a minimum of structure and rules and the most possible interaction, dynamic and fluid, caring and supportive. Made up of families, couples, singles, single parents with their children, people of all ages; it's virtually a cross section of society. Of course it is unique; its character comes from the hundred or so individuals that keep it alive. There's no membership or dues, just a mailing list of over three

Trust and Community

hundred interested people who receive a newsletter every month or so.

On the surface, its purpose is as simple as friendship: to bring people together. Many of its regulars maintain their connections between TORI weekends, and there's a telephone tree to keep them informed about spur-of-the-moment activities and important events. It's more than a social club, however. It is the manifestation of an Idea about relationships and how people can interact and at the same time enhance their individuality. Rather than requiring conformity to some preconfigured plan, TORI encourages participants to feel and express their own real natures. Men, women and children all testify to its transformative power, without resorting to the jargon of mysticism or omniscience.

Many of us there have expressed the frustration at trying to communicate just what TORI is. So I'll simply relate my introduction to it.

I moved to Michigan about ten years ago, to take a new job. That first winter in Ann Arbor, I remember sitting in my apartment, thinking that if I died, nobody would even miss me for weeks. I did a lot of driving back and forth to Cincinnati.

Something I learned in those lonely months is that "home" has a feeling. I guess it's a link to roots, to people who have cared. It's a gut feeling of worth because I belong, somehow, to people, even those I've left. I suppose, at some level, I knew that, in 1967, when I talked

Dreams of Home

here about the Fellowship being the vehicle for something besides a collection place for shared religious values. For some people, “family” conjures up the same feeling. Maybe it depends upon what kinds of experiences one had as a child.

That’s what community does for me; it gives me a self. It doesn’t define me, in the sense that I don’t know what or who I am aside from my group. But in my deepest parts, the places in my psyche that tell me whether I’m a worthwhile human being—whether I count—somehow community provides that assurance. I can risk being me if I have that not-always-conscious confidence that “me” is acceptable to people I identify with.

But I didn’t get it in Ann Arbor; I got it here, in this room. What I learned up there in Toronto, and since then even in Michigan, was that community is not something you just have or you don’t have, like the family you were born into, a lucky accident. You can create it, you can set it up so it happens. It doesn’t have to take a lifetime, either; if you’re lucky it can be done in a weekend.

An On-Going Search

And I learned that a lot of people have thought about community and tried to fabricate it, tried to find that key to feeling that “I belong.” Scott Peck discovered the yearning in people as he traveled around giving talks after writing his books like *The Road Less Traveled*. Jack Gibb looked at it from an organizational viewpoint, searching for a “formula” for effective interaction. (I’ve been

Trust and Community

assured that Gibb didn't emphasize the academic aspects in his workshops, however—they were very experiential and personal.)

Mine was a personal thing. It was a long time before it became an objective. When I moved to Ann Arbor, the first place I went to was the Unitarian church. They had an active singles group called Singletarians, and there were meetings for coffee and conversation, brunches, parties, dances, and outings. I'm not an easy mixer, and I hung around on the periphery for a while.

There was also an independent group who met in the church, called Expressions. Mostly singles, many of them were the same people who participated in Singletarians. They had a discussion format every two weeks (I believe there was a similar group here in Cincinnati, called Interaction), a hundred or so people, breaking up into small groups for an hour of discussion, then mixing and dancing. I hung around there, too, helping out with the chores and gradually meeting people. These were a little bit like communities.

I had a satisfying job, and I gradually began to feel at home. But something was missing. I was still pretty lonely. I had left people back here in Cincinnati who were not easily replaced. I finally started my own support group, and that really helped. Most of the people I knew were single, divorced, and most were as lonely as I. The support group went on for several years, and gradually broke up as the changing needs of the members left us

Dreams of Home

with less and less common purpose. I left when it seemed the group had become nothing more than a social club.

A friend introduced me to the TORI group in Toronto, at a small gathering in someone's home one February weekend. I tried hard to feel at home, and people were friendly enough. But they all knew each other, and I was just another new face. At least that's how I felt. They hugged a lot and talked about feelings and relationships and seemed very close. It's hard to go into an existing group. Anyway, I felt isolated and lonely as I usually do under such circumstances. The trouble was, a weekend doesn't give you time to wait for someone to befriend you. I finally got so tense that I went for a walk, and came very close to just walking away, walking down to the train station to go back to Ann Arbor alone. Nobody seemed to care whether I was there or not.

But I didn't. I'm not sure why. I went back into the group, and got up the courage to tell someone how I was feeling. And a miracle happened.

People listened, and asked me what I wanted. What I really wanted was to be held and rocked, feeling like a poor lonely four-year-old who missed his mother. What I managed to articulate was that I felt outside the group and wanted in, somehow. Someone suggested a "people pile", with me in the middle. Surrounded by warm bodies and warm words, my isolation evaporated. The rest of the weekend I was euphoric.

Trust and Community

Since then, I've experienced the full range of emotions in those weekends. I seldom miss a TORI, even though Toronto is a five-hour drive from Ann Arbor. Even though I see those people only about ten times a year, they are more like family to me than I have ever experienced in my adult life. I've opened myself up in those gatherings in ways I didn't know I could. I've comforted people in pain and I've celebrated their joys.

I've found, though, that I can't go there expecting anything. When I do I'm disappointed. Expectations somehow get in the way of experiencing what is there. I'm not the most spontaneous person you'll ever meet. But when TORI works for me, it's because I flow with it.

I was drawn in by warmth, but that wouldn't have sustained my enthusiasm. There is a foundation there, a deep sense of what we all need from a group and so often seek in vain.

How to Describe it?

I've tried in the past to describe just what TORI is, but somehow the words don't do justice to the experience. We don't have time this morning for you to really experience it. But I'll give you a framework. It's all based on Gibb's four variables.

Trust is the big one. It's easy to explain, but not always easy to do. I go into the group trusting myself, mostly. I can handle whatever happens. Me, who is terrified of conflict and tongue-tied in confrontation. Groups are the

Dreams of Home

hardest experience for me that I can imagine. In most groups I seldom speak. I think my mind moves too slowly, or I rehearse what I'm going to say, and miss the moment to say it, or something. But in the TORI group somehow my guard is down, and I feel (usually) that I can be me.

Trust means also trusting others with my feelings. If I'm really open, I'm vulnerable to attack, to criticism (my great fear), and to rejection. I have to decide that whatever happens, I can handle it. I may suffer, but I will survive. The risk is there, but the possible reward is immeasurable.

All of this would be fantasy stuff, except for one more aspect of trust. I have to trust the process. In the simplest terms, it works. You can take a group of people and put them together for a weekend and if they can let go of their private agendas, whether they know what they are doing or not, they will become a community. (I'll say more about that later.)

The next variable in Jack Gibb's theory is *openness*. To the extent that the individuals really share themselves with each other, they will connect. To the extent that they go from ideas to feelings, they will connect. To the extent that they really listen to each other, they will connect. There is nothing in all this that says they have to be alike.

Realization is the next variable. That means, "becoming real", or authentic. It means dropping the facade. It also means realizing one's potential, becoming what I have in me to be. "Finding oneself" might be another way of

Trust and Community

putting it. To the extent that I allow myself to be real, I can touch others. To the extent that I allow them to be real, I can know them.

And the final ingredient necessary for community is *interdependence*. I must let go some, and allow others to do part of what there is to be done. I have to take up my share, assume responsibility for myself as I tune into my needs. I can't make the group go in my direction, either. People who are accustomed to making things happen in other groups often feel frustrated in a TORI group, until they learn to let go.

That goes for parents, too. Several parents and older children have said that they feel much closer to each other at TORI than they do at home, because there is less acting in roles, and more relating as people.

Without Rules

In a TORI, there are no rules ahead of time. Nobody is assigned any task. We shop for groceries, we cook and serve meals and we clean up after ourselves as we individually are motivated to do it.

Talk about trust! For someone who is accustomed to eating at regular times, who likes his space reasonably neat and who gets very uneasy when things are not planned, TORI is an experience in trust. The fact is, we eat very well, most of the time. A few people will go out to the market on Saturday morning and buy food for an unknown number of people for the weekend. There are

Dreams of Home

no reservations. We depend upon our experience with the group to come up with a cost for the weekend that will pay our rent and our food. If someone comes who can't pay as much, or for that matter, can't pay anything, they are welcomed. And we trust the process.

That's not to say that nothing ever goes wrong. I've been to TORI's where in the final minutes of our being together, the person who volunteered to collect the money announces that we don't have enough to pay the rent. So those who can, come up with enough so that we can leave the place with our reputation intact.

I've seen a Thanksgiving afternoon when somebody suddenly mentions that nobody has done anything with the five turkeys yet, and the kids are getting hungry. We became a very busy group.

Fortunately, the group has built up a small cushion of funds so that we can cope with financial crises such as, for example, when only seven people show up for a weekend and we have a contract with the owners of the retreat center for at least twenty. This happened one snowy weekend in February.

The crucial thing, I've decided, is acceptance. There's a state that can exist between people that goes beyond affection, beyond physical or emotional attraction. I used to place acceptance on a scale between love and enmity, maybe just above tolerance. Now I think it's on another plane, another dimension. It has to do with respect, with

Trust and Community

reserving judgment, and (if I can use a word I have a lot of trouble with) spirituality.

In Transactional Analysis they used to describe the state of mind most successful in living with other people as "I'm OK, you're OK." That's acceptance.

The process I'm talking about here is never finished. A community never becomes finished, either. It's important to remember that. It takes trust to get through the inevitable rough places.

My central question about this is: if a group of people, without any kind of formal structure, no membership, no dues, no "commitment" that anyone on the outside could perceive, if this group can thrive and feel as good as I feel about us, why can't any group that already shares ethical and moral values, a building, a reputation, and a history, have that kind of mutual trust, openness, realization and interdependence?

A Different Path

I recently attended one of Scott Peck's community building workshops in Lansing. It was three days long, and we were told we would learn how to make a community. The first two days they told us only that they expected us to discover how to do it by the end of the second day. We had been given a one-page description of the process, but some of us hadn't even read it. And when we asked theoretical questions, we were gently put off. The facilitators did tell us that they'd give us some

Dreams of Home

feedback now and then, but they wouldn't tell us how to do what we had come there to do.

Scott Peck describes the process as beginning with "pseudo community", when people are polite. Sometimes it feels very good, but if you've felt the real thing, there's something missing. At some point, the politeness wears thin, and "chaos" sets in. People try to convince others, change others, teach, preach, attack, sulk, withdraw and otherwise erect barriers without listening, without really respecting. Tension rises, even active hostility. Then, when it seems the whole thing is coming apart, first one person then someone else, and gradually most of the group begins to "empty" themselves of their defenses and their judgments. No one has explained that very well. What it feels like at first is fatigue, and then an immense sadness, as though we've begun to recognize how far we are from each other, and how meaningless our discord really is. At that point, community happens.

It's as though there has to be a crisis before the community itself can come into existence. And it can't be forced, or contrived, or planned. In the group I attended, a half-hour before our quitting time, I don't think anyone in the group thought we'd make it. Tension got so high it felt as though we'd explode. People were angry, crying, and pleading with the facilitators to help us. And then it just happened. One young woman described it as an orgasm. "You can't make it happen," she said, "you have to just let it." The release was so powerful many of us were in tears, tears of a different kind.

Trust and Community

The third day we processed. There were planned activities to help us reconstruct some of what we had gone through and understand what we had experienced, individually and as a group.

What I experienced in that workshop was very much like TORI. In fact, the reason I went was because I recognized the process in Peck's book *A Different Drum*.

Peck admits that sometimes it doesn't happen. Sometimes the mix of the group or some other factor interferes enough that it just doesn't work, at least in the time allotted. Jack Gibb, on the other hand, is more optimistic, although he isn't so specific about what community is. He simply says that a community will emerge from whatever mix there is.

The Bottom Line

Sometimes I think we're all daydreaming teenagers, we're all lonely and isolated when we don't have our family close enough to notice if we drop dead. Why do the holidays make so many of us sad?. What's that string connected to our gut, stretching out into the past so far we can't even see the other end? Family is more than a defined bunch of people, it's who we are inside. if we don't belong, somehow we don't have a right to exist.

I've been away from Cincinnati for almost ten years, and I've fallen in love and fallen out of love, I've gotten jobs and I've lost jobs, I've bought new cars and I've watched them rust away to junk. And still I feel that string

Dreams of Home

stretching back ten years to “my people”, some of whom I haven’t talked to all that time, yet with whom I feel a bond that’s somehow tied to who I am.

So what did I learn—or rather, what am I learning—that I didn’t know before? That I have grown up with a longing for connection with people, a longing that feels fundamental to me as a human being. I’ve learned that I’m not alone in feeling this longing that others have written about it and others respond to my expression of it with the same kind of wistfulness. I’ve learned, too, that the longing can be satisfied at times by being with people in an atmosphere of trust and open sharing. I’ve learned that it’s possible to create that atmosphere, to set up the conditions under which it can flourish, without resorting to contrivance or manipulation.

And from these kinds of experiences I’m learning how to interpret what goes on inside me. The feelings have always been there. I’m trying hard to understand myself, because understanding puts it into perspective, lets me make peace with it. I’m getting a little anxious about how little time I have left, and how much there is for me to make peace with. And at the same time I recognize that, as the young woman said, “You can’t make it happen,” she said, “you have to just let it.”

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

A Story

I felt instant dislike, distrust, and probably fear, the first time I saw him. The three of them showed up at the TORI gathering in black leather, bursting through the door from the wintry cold, catching everyone's attention from the start. He was the most noticeable, with sunglasses perched on top of his head, his *very* long, streaky blond hair tied back but then lying sensuously over his shoulder in a dramatic gesture of—what?—some kind of defiance? The people in the room looked up, surprised and at a loss. Except Sandra, who rushed to greet the newcomers with great hugs and effusive welcomes, her English accent giving the whole scene the flavor of Masterpiece Theater.

Arriving at a TORI involves first locating a place to sleep, and then making perhaps several trips from the car to bring in clothing and bedding, returning to the car to clear it from the driveway. Then, usually, one can stop to look around, greet other people, and check out the food situation. If nothing else, TORI is a gathering of friends, some very long-time friends, some old lovers, some rather chilly, "Oh, yes, Phil. Long time. Good to see you again." The first few hours are like the beginnings of a party—hesitant, a little anxious ("*Am I going to have a good time?*"), eyeing each new arrival for signs of comfort, of

Dreams of Home

completeness. The “stars” sweep in like first-night celebrities at a New York play, greeted on all sides, smiling, bustling through without stopping, bestowing the largess of hearty waves. It raises your spirits a little, allows you to come out of your shell and look around more, share a piece of bread and jam or a cup of coffee with other early birds. Eventually, it settles down, and the nervousness goes away, and the general mood lifts to something more like reunion.

Strangers in this situation think *they* are the only ones who are uncomfortable. No familiar faces, sometimes not even seeing the person who might have invited them to the gathering, for whom they look at each new footfall on the stairway. The “what am I doing here?” misgivings are not restricted to those who come for the first time.

Strangers, of course, offer opportunities for the experienced early arrivers. One can greet strangers, give them information about the facilities and offer encouragement that this, indeed, is the place. Showing someone else that you’re “one of the group” reassures you, as well as them. Expressing enthusiasm to the stranger quiets your own fears of not (really) fitting in. Welcoming the stranger is saying, “welcome” to yourself, no less.

But once the scene is set, once enough people that you feel good about have arrived and your anxiety begins to be replaced with the warmth of being among friends, strangers sometimes intrude. Not their fault, of course.

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

Just happens. It's my stuff. I am beginning to relax in a warm bath of kindred souls, and the door opens to a cold blast of winter again, and I huddle down a little in my chair by the fireplace and hope someone else will do the welcoming bit.

So he had a couple of strikes against him from the start. There has to be that period of tail-sniffing and circling, warily watching for clues to "what's with these people?" The motorcycle boots and pony tail ("*Now that goes too far!*") make a statement—too strong a statement. Among all these friends, of course, one doesn't have to roll over and bare one's belly as a gesture of "peace, stranger!" In the Old West barroom, most people just quietly turned back to their drinks and conversations, and hoped the brash stranger didn't mean trouble for them.

Whether Sandra was aware of all this or not, she didn't show it. Laughter was in her voice as she introduced the strangers around, then took them in hand to show them where to drop their gear. The boots clunked solidly on the wooden floors. Nearly everyone else in the place was in stocking feet or, at most, slippers.

Funny, I didn't really see the other two. One was a woman, young, somewhat attractive, quiet and almost demure. The other man didn't register with me at all. As they disappeared into the dorm area, the room quieted again, and a gay conversation resumed among a group at a table.

Dreams of Home

He was 'way too dramatic, and his sexual energy stuck out in front of him, drawing the eyes of women (*"Oh, my!"*) and men (*"Phony."*) alike. A whiff of new scent from one's own armpit. Civilization a thin, pasted-on veneer that barely hides the primitive protective impulses. Drop the arm. Some relief, then, later, when he stayed aloof. He carried a book under his arm everywhere he went, and when he wasn't engaged in conversation with someone, he sat alone in a corner, reading. (*"It's a front. He's no reader. He's phony."*) At the first community meeting, he stayed on the periphery, silent. One could relax a little, but you didn't let him out of your sight. The meeting eventually dissolved, as many do, without fanfare, people just getting up and leaving the circle for the kitchen or the bathroom.

TORI community meetings make many people nervous. There is, first of all, no structure. Someone—anyone—might call a meeting, moving through the dorm hallways, announcing, "Community meeting in ten minutes." There's no set time for them, and attendance isn't compulsory. After an announcement, people begin drifting into the meeting space, chatting with others or simply sitting quietly, waiting. When those present feel the community is adequately represented, the meeting begins. Late comers slip in quietly wherever there's room. Some lie on the floor in the center of the circle of chairs and couches, others pull up chairs behind the circle. A favorite spot is sitting on a cushion, leaning against

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

someone's chair, getting a shoulder rub or the hair played with.

If the person who called the meeting has some particular topic he or she wants discussed, that makes itself known. Otherwise, people will usually fall silent for a while, waiting for a level of comfort before speaking. The topic can be anything—a concern, an observation about the gathering, a personal revelation of some kind, whatever seems relevant at the moment. At its best, a TORI community meeting is an intimate connecting-place, a delightful process of easing down into a hot-tub of intimacy and warm feelings and mutual stroking. Experienced participants talk of “making it” or “that magic” that sometimes happens, when the group really comes together in spirit and feeling.

Indeed, there's a mythology about the “magic.” A debatable mythology. It's difficult to describe to one who hasn't experienced it. And not everybody in a particular meeting will agree that it had actually occurred. “It” seems to need some kind of emotional crisis, which involves at least most of the people, and which eventually gets resolved. Without the crisis, the intensity level seldom gets high enough for people to be aware of it, and without the intensity, the release isn't felt, either. Like an *coitus interruptus*. A pleasant dalliance, perhaps, but not “it.”

The crisis might be a conflict of some kind between people in the meeting, or an emotional sharing by someone about

Dreams of Home

some difficulty they have been having in or outside the group. As the group gets involved in the emotion, it often feeds upon the complex interactions as different people “get their buttons pushed.”

There aren't supposed to be any rules, but of course there are. It's just that they are usually unspoken, and assumed (not uniformly) by the more experienced participants. And everything is negotiable, as far as the whole group is concerned. I suppose that physical violence is uniformly condemned. Individuals are expected to have their own limits, and to take responsibility for them.

Each person participates to a degree of their own choosing. I've attended—participated in, really—a lot of community meetings during which I did not say a word. Even if I'm not saying anything, I'm seldom “out kite flying.” (But, according to the rules, that would be okay, too.) Almost never have I been asked to contribute to a discussion. On the other hand, if someone is perceived to be monopolizing a meeting, usually someone else will interject an opinion to that effect sooner or later, and the group will deal with the issue. If a participant is bored, they may either interrupt the process or leave the group. If they choose to stay but simply seethe in resentment, that's their problem. Everyone has the same right to push the group in the direction they want.

Some of the unspoken rules have to do with interaction among the participants. For example, I'm responsible for my feelings, even though they may seem to be the direct

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

result of another person's actions or statements. I may report my feeling, but I need to *own* it; that is, I shouldn't blame the other person or accuse them of causing my discomfort. That's a judgment, and expressing judgments is considered bad form. Each person may hold his or her own values without risk of censure. (This is not an absolute right, of course, as we see shortly.) However, if I have and express a very strong emotional reaction to something someone else says or does, it may have the effect of castigating that person—but then, catch-22, that person isn't allowed to blame *their* reaction on me.

So the safest way to speak is to begin with "I'm feeling..." I have a right to whatever feeling I experience. If I don't like the feeling, I need to look inside for a solution. It's not okay to say something like, "I feel what you said is unjust toward..." It's the feeling I need to address, not the external trigger. And I might (or might not) get support for myself when I report a feeling. That depends upon how other people feel.

Obviously, in a conflict situation, the sympathy of the group may be swayed one way or another, or may be split, even splintered. The expectation is that everyone reveals their own feelings to the extent they are able, and what each person says will affect others, and eventually, if the process works well, some kind of consensus is arrived at. An actual decision may not be required, but to the extent that the participants are honest and caring for each other, the conflict may be clarified enough that each

Dreams of Home

person is satisfied that they are heard (and not judged) and the dialog can continue.

My responsibility to the group is another assumption that almost never gets articulated. I'm supposed to have the right to whatever feelings and opinions I hold. If they cause someone else any discomfort, it's up to them to confront their own reactions. But obviously, if everyone is so self-centered, there's not much hope for the "magic" to happen. And that hope is what draws people to community. The feeling of belonging, of being accepted, however one blunders in expressing oneself, however different one's point of view. In order for that feeling to occur, most of the group has to give a little. My negative remark, however authentic, has a depressing effect on others. I have to wrap it in a warm blanket of some kind, let people know that I affirm the process we are in. I have to imply, at least, that I carry the hope.

That's where "phony" comes in. Some of us, when we're unsure of our acceptance by the group, may revert to kindergarten-level manipulations that rely on people being polite, rather than caring. I may want genuine approval from the group, but I will settle for superficial, if that's all I know how to arouse. That doesn't work with everyone, of course, and may instead trigger some strong negative reactions. It's incredible how subtle is our sensing of people, sometimes. The inflection of a single word can tilt the response to what a person says. A person's flair for the dramatic can seem delightfully—or disgustingly—outrageous, especially to strangers. On the

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

other hand, the observer's initial attraction to someone (almost always having to do with one's own experiences and fantasies) can mitigate or aggravate one's response to a stranger. It's a dangerous game to play, in a group that professes to value authenticity.

Another expectation is that each person will respond in a timely manner. If you say something that I have feelings about, it is to the group's benefit that I respond right away, if I can. If I don't, I may carry some resentment toward you, and I will not participate freely and caringly. The undercurrent will inevitably damage the group process. Naturally, it isn't always possible for everyone to speak up when they're affected by someone else. Sometimes, people will have to think through an issue by themselves, or with someone they trust, before they have the courage to speak in the group. There's no penalty for that. We are all allowed to struggle, or simply to be weak, as well.

All this may sound like an old-fashioned encounter group; every person for himself or herself—don't blame me for your pain, no matter what I said. But there is a rationale. TORI theory describes four aspects to group process. At the "good" end of these continua are Trust, Openness, Realization and Interdependence (hence the acronym TORI). Opposite to trust is fear. Opposite to openness is, obviously, closedness. Opposite to Realization (in the sense of *making real*) is role-playing or politicking. Opposite to interdependence is separation or dependency. At the root of this theory is a faith that people are, at heart,

Dreams of Home

good and caring. They will treat each other well if they do not have to defend themselves. Encounter groups grew out of some group process research in the 1950s, in which Jack Gibb, author of Trust Theory, was a major participant. Unfortunately, perhaps, the technique spread more widely than the faith, and by the 1970s Carl Rogers expressed serious misgivings about the movement. Experienced “groupers” sometimes inflicted great suffering on those less prepared for this kind of experience, for they knew the rules of play.

Even in TORI, this can be a risk. I can trust the process if I know what the possible results are. I have to be able to trust my own ability to retain (or at least regain) my self-confidence. Confrontations can sometimes become very heated. I need to know the rules of combat, what resources I have to help me. No matter that TORI is founded on faith, it is not about avoiding conflict—but resolving it. The more I experience it, the more realistic my expectations, and the better I become at dealing with my own feelings.

This particular meeting was low-key. There were not many people there yet, and we spent most of the time getting acquainted—some for the first time, others catching up on each other after some months apart. It was a mellow group, and the newcomers said little, other than introducing themselves. An informal exercise called “snapshots” enabled everyone to speak for a couple of minutes about what was going on in their lives, or what they were dealing with at the moment. The fireplace was

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

just beginning to throw out a lot of heat by the time people began to drift away.

“What are you reading?” Sooner or later, you have to break the ice. After all, you’re *one of the group*, and you want to be gracious. He simply turned the book over so I could read the cover. “Existential Psychotherapy.” He marked a place two-thirds of the way through the book, and looked up.

“Where do you know Sandra from?” I asked him.

“SLI workshops.”

I knew about the Sex, Love & Intimacy workshops from several people, mostly connected with TORI. A series of weekend gatherings sponsored by the Human Awareness Institute, I understood them to include training exercises to get one more comfortable with himself or herself, particularly in relating with others in intimacy. The structure of the workshops both intrigued me and put me off. Often, I have wished for some kind of deliberate structure in TORI, especially when we spend an entire weekend without anything significant (to me) happening. On the other hand, the idea of a whole roomful of people going through some kind of exercise that has been designed to achieve some kind of inner change arouses my skeptical side. I had attended one of Scott Peck’s Community Building Workshops, and that seemed to involve just about the right amount of structure and manipulation. One of the appealing things about TORI is

Dreams of Home

that no one is making any money from it, other than the facilities we rent for our gatherings.

“What part of Michigan are you from?” I was just making conversation—I had heard Sandra clearly during her introductions when he arrived.

With an extended finger, he pulled his long pony tail back off his shoulder, a gesture I’ve admired countless times—in women. It disturbed me. Partly, I decided, because his hair was so incongruous with the rest of him. He had a day’s growth of dark beard, and he certainly wasn’t *pretty*. The sunglasses were obviously for effect—the dim gray light in the room, coming through windows partly fogged up in the Ontario winter, didn’t call for anything like sunglasses.

His voice was resonant, even though he spoke quietly. “Detroit area.” He gestured toward his traveling companions, who sat in a group of people at another table. “All of us.”

“I’m from Ann Arbor,” I said. “Been coming up here for ten years. It’s a great place for me.”

“You came up today?”

“Yes, we got here just before you did. It’s a long drive.” Laughter came from the other table, where his companions seemed to be comfortably fitting in. We both looked over.

“I’m, like, a group junkie,” he said. “I sign up for every group that comes along.”

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

"I used to do that. Now, TORI is about my only group thing."

He opened his book again after a moment of silence, so I eased away. A couple of friends had just appeared at the door from the dorm area, and I walked over to talk to them.

After dinner and dishes had been cleared away, another meeting began to form. Nobody called it; people simply began to congregate in front of the fireplace. Someone was lying in the center of the circle getting a back massage.

He took a large chair in the circle, and resumed his reading. (*"He's pretty aloof."*) I noticed his boots had been replaced by those thick socks with treads on the bottom. I was wearing a pair, myself. A woman sitting next to him engaged him in a low conversation. There was something sensuous about his mouth when he talked. I situated myself on the floor between someone's knees, and was promptly rewarded with fingers running through my hair. I lost interest in him.

One of the things that keeps me returning to TORI is the easy expression of affection among the people. I've heard that in the early days of the community, sexual activity was bold and obvious. There's little of that now—it's more family oriented, and discretion usually prevails. But there's a lot of touching and casual familiarity. Hugs are frequent and generous. I leaned back into the lap of the hair stroker.

Dreams of Home

A few years ago, there was a serious—and long—community meeting on the subject of hugging. Someone brought up her concern about being grabbed from behind. She said she enjoyed hugging as much as anyone else, but someone (unnamed) had surprised her from behind, pinning her arms, and she felt a moment of fear. Other women agreed with her, and the meeting finally wound up with a consensus: everyone has the right to choose whether to be hugged or not. Naturally, it was mostly women who expressed concern, but one man made the point that men, too, must have that right. “Of course!” came the echo. I had never been refused, myself, although I’ll admit to using some caution around certain younger females.

The group was larger now. The center of the circle, padded with mattresses from the dorm, was solid with bodies, heads propped on other bodies, legs and arms intertwined. It seemed that everyone was touching everyone else. A general buzz of separate conversations filled the area until someone spoke up, “I’d like us to begin.” The buzz tapered off to near silence. A very polite group, or else we were all ready for this.

Gretta, who always spoke with her lower jaw extended slightly, as though she were trying not to drool on her chin, was welcoming “the newcomers.” She spoke graciously, but without much warmth. Another woman made a gentle joke about the obvious familiarity of the people sprawled on the floor, and people laughed easily.

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

He spoke now. "I'm a kind of group junkie," he began. "I get in just about every group I hear about. I'm just trying to find out, like, what it's all about, you know?"

People nodded, attentive. ("*Okay, give 'im a chance.*")

"I've been into everything – booze, dope, you name it, I've done it. I've been, like, down as far as there is to go. Right now, I'm trying to figure it all out, like, what's it all mean?" He was looking down at his hands. After a moment of silence ("*He knows they'll wait for him. He's dangling us on the end of his string.*"), he continued, "A couple years ago, I killed my girl friend. I – caused – her – death." He paused, ever so slightly between words, and my stomach tightened. "I was driving my van, and she was sitting alongside me. It was at night, in the winter, and she unbuckled her seat belt, and moved over to sit on this milk crate that was in between the seats, she moved over to kiss me –" His voice broke, and he hesitated. The room was silent.

"I hit this patch of ice, and we went off the road and flipped over." He was forcing his words out, now, struggling to finish. "They all said it wasn't my fault. The cops didn't even cite me. But, like, I can't forgive myself." He sobbed silently into his hands.

I felt a moment of sympathy. He was obviously suffering. A woman sitting near him put a hand on his arm, and spoke softly, "How awful."

"I killed my best friend," he moaned, still covering his face.

Dreams of Home

Nobody knew what to say. I noticed that I was annoyed, somehow. I looked around the circle. Every face was turned toward him except Barry, who stared down at his own hands. Two other women moved over to where they could touch him, and Patrick, in the chair next to him, laid a hand on his arm.

The woman who had come with him sat in a chair behind him, looking at him, tears streaming down her face.

The room was still for at least fifteen minutes. The grouping of people around him, touching him, looking at him, reminded me somehow of da Vinci's Last Supper—no, another old painting, of Jesus with people on the ground around him, reaching toward him.

Barry got up quietly and left the circle.

Gretta spoke. "You must be in great pain." The sound broke the spell, and people began to stir. He remained in his grieving position. One of the women who had been motionless at his feet eased her hand away from him and stiffly exercised her arm. Someone on the floor rearranged the tangle of legs. It was still quiet. He lifted his head, and someone handed him a tissue.

"My parents never prepared me for death," he said finally, wiping his eyes. "They were so terrified of it, they could never talk about it."

"Mmmm," Gretta said.

Someone else spoke so quietly I couldn't hear what she said. She seemed to be telling of her own experience, but

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

she was sitting close to him and talking directly to him, as though in a private conversation.

Someone else stood up and stretched, then made their way through the maze of bodies on the floor and out toward the kitchen. The legs that had been my support moved, and I sat up, pressed a fist into my sore back, and looked at the clock over the kitchen door. We had been sitting there for over an hour, and he was the only one who had shared. The meeting was breaking up, and I felt cheated. As I stood up and left the circle, I glanced at several of the faces still there. They were all blank, frozen.

In the kitchen, I made myself a peanut butter sandwich and poured a glass of milk. Barry stood there, eating an apple. "I am so angry," he said in a loud whisper. "He was manipulating us!"

"Yeah," I agreed, a little uneasy. My feelings were mixed, between annoyance (and jealousy?) and sympathy for the young man.

In the big room, people were talking again, and moving around. A cluster remained around him, though—all women, I noticed. He was certainly getting a lot of attention.

Late community meetings often go on past midnight. It was about eleven-thirty, my usual bedtime, and I was tired. But I felt frustrated that we had not done much, and the community had obviously broken up. There are always people who linger, having their private conversations about what happened in the meeting, or

Dreams of Home

just catching up with each other's lives. I found my wife Judith and told her I was turning in.

I went to sleep without my mood lifting.

I don't sleep well at TORIs. Strange beds, people moving around in the building, sometimes faint music or voices in the other rooms. I wake up often, and struggle to go back to sleep. Without my glasses, I can't tell what time it is. When I awoke and saw that it was light outside, I figured it was time to get up. My discomfort had dissipated, and by the time I had showered I was looking forward to the day.

Breakfast at TORI is informal. You're on your own. Usually, there's cereal, and bread for toast. Some people make porridge, or scramble eggs with leftover vegetables. Bob has established a tradition of apple pancakes on Sunday morning, whenever he's there. He spends a couple hours, chopping apples, mixing and grilling. But other times, everyone pretty much serves themselves. Breakfast ordinarily lasts from about eight o'clock until nearly noon. People hang around, drinking coffee and eating and talking. There's usually a table of people engaged in lively discussions on almost any topic. It's a noisy room when there are a lot of people. I often wish for a cozy little breakfast nook, where a few people can really connect. I always feel separate here, except for brief moments when I can talk one-on-one. Those times are always brief, however, for inevitably someone joins us,

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

and the *tête á tête* becomes a “discussion,” in which I get lost.

I didn't hear anything more about him, and he hadn't appeared from the dorm by the time I left for a walk in the woods with Shirley.

It's a regular thing between Shirley and me, at least one long walk at every TORI, if it isn't raining or unbearably cold. We talk about our separate lives, and how we've been feeling since the last gathering. I love that woman—she's my fantasy sister. Our words to each other always seem to carry respect, intellectual equality, and sincere caring. We've had our differences, in the past (mostly regarding, as I recall, my romantic adventures), and there have been times of painful distance between us. But I feel I can say just about anything to her, and would accept anything at all from her without judgment. My own sisters and I have grown apart over the years, and although we share affection, we don't seem to have much in common. I think they don't know me, at all. In twelve years, Shirley and I have become the best of friends. We've agreed that we love each other, and that sex would not be good for our relationship with each other (to say nothing about our significant others). We've gone through spells of writing long letters to each other, mine rambling stream-of-consciousness things, and hers full of thoughts and feelings about her life.

On that morning, I talked about some of the feelings I'd been having about *him*. She listened, and said something

Dreams of Home

astute, and we left it at that. I was a little troubled by what I judged was jealousy I was feeling toward him.

He attracted female attention; that was certain. And I have always had this streak of neediness regarding women. I solicit their approval in every devious way I can imagine. That, of course, embarrasses me. When I first began to feel at home at TORI, I sought out women pretty openly – not for sex, but for their special kind of nurturing. I made a number of close friends, almost all women. When I was in pain over the breakup of a relationship, I arranged to get a *lot* of comforting at TORI. Anyway, I suppose I saw him as some kind of competition, for from my point of view he did exactly the same thing. And he was so damned good looking!

The other aspect of my feelings was even less comfortable for me. I felt attracted to him. I've always had a thing for long hair – maybe that's it. I was certainly aware of his hair, and of a vague incongruity about it. There was nothing sexual that I could identify. I think I identified with him, with the little kid that seemed to be under the surface, seeking approval from women.

As Shirley and I returned from our walk, people were unloading groceries from a car – somebody, bless their hearts, had made a food run. We helped carry the bags of groceries up to the kitchen. Inside, the bustle of people unbagging, sorting and storing food changed my mood.

We eat well at TORI, in spite of the total lack of organization around meals. No, that's not correct – there

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

is organization, but it is ad hoc, made up at the moment by those who happen to be or who chose to be present and counted. Several people, having some experience with meal planning for groups, will huddle together to make up a shopping list. Particular requests are usually honored, even if they include a jug of wine or some chocolate ice cream (youngsters catch on to this quickly). Some people bring their own food for dishes they want to prepare for the group. At mealtime, volunteerism reigns. Whoever wants to cook, can. Whoever wants to help, chops or stirs or does dishes. Nobody has to. People fix their favorites, or things they've become good at. And we eat well.

Vegetarians nearly always get represented. Sometimes whole meals are vegetarian, and there are few complaints. Turkey and chicken predominate as meat dishes. Lots of vegetables. Even before I stopped eating meat myself, I thought this was a caring gesture to people's feelings. A community thing.

A small cluster of kids swarmed around the counter, where a bag of cookies had been opened. I cut off a wedge of cheese for myself, and returned to my room to change clothes. Judith was sitting on the floor, talking with Sandra. "Scuse me," I said, dropping my coat in the corner and backing out of the door.

"It's not private," said Judith. "You can stay."

Dreams of Home

“No, it’s okay.” I closed the door. I wasn’t sure of how I was feeling, and I didn’t know what Sandra’s stake was in the guy.

He was sitting off to one side of the big room, chair tilted back against the wall, reading. I joined a group of people talking at a table. The other man of the black-leather trio was there, laughing and talking easily. He said he was new to the group thing, but expressed appreciation for the easy intimacy. His marriage had broken up recently, and he was recovering from a serious loss of self-esteem. A lot of newcomers to TORI seem to be in that situation. Tired, or afraid, of the “singles’ scene,” they want to belong, to feel acceptable, to value themselves again after a personal disaster. They’re vulnerable, too, and often ready to be honest about themselves if they don’t have to defend themselves.

TORI is usually good for those people. The community responds well to the vulnerability and the honesty, and offers a lot of support and caring, and very little judgment—exactly what they need. After a while, they become “family.”

TORI can be a place to meet someone new, as well. Sometimes, a person will “discover” TORI at just the right time in their life, and participate gratefully until a special relationship develops with another member of the group. Then they may simply disappear, their need to belong being absorbed into their new love. Then, as these things happen, one day they may reappear, again unattached, to

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

participate in the community. A few people have stayed, over the years, even during several primary relationships, bringing their loves to the group, for better or worse. It is a family, then, offering support and encouragement and continuity. Once I had become really committed to the community, I promised myself that if I were to be approaching a serious relationship with anybody, they would have to fit into TORI, or I wouldn't consider a long-term commitment to them. Partly it was because I had seen how TORI often became threatening to one half of a partnership, when both partners were not enthusiastic about the group. Partly, I wanted to feel free to attend the gatherings, without having to choose between TORI and some other event my partner might favor. But mostly, I think, it was because TORI was a test for a potential partner. If someone couldn't participate in TORI, I thought they might not have the emotional traits I wanted in a partner. I had never before set up specifications for a relationship, and I was a little uneasy about this. I know I am capable of a good relationship with any number of women, and I don't think of myself as picky. It's possible that that aspect of my personality has led me into some relationships that I would have been better off not pursuing. It's also possible that my being accommodating has opened me up to some less-than-beneficial relationship experiences. Nevertheless, TORI has been my inspiration for how people can interact for many years, as well as giving me a sense of belonging to a "family" of my own choosing — the best kind.

Dreams of Home

I've suggested here that TORI used to be an occasion for romantic and sexual experimentation. In the 1970s, when genital herpes was fairly rare, and AIDS all but unknown, TORI was not all that unusual as a place for casual sex. In recent years, it has become more conservative. Families have come to participate, and committed couples, and sexual escapades have become less blatant, at least. My own TORI experience began as a result of a serious relationship (she was applying the "TORI test" to me), and that experience convinced me, as well, that I had made a good choice. A number of close friendships, and perhaps one or two sexual "near misses" led to a continuing feeling that I could acknowledge my sexuality without performance expectations and without threatening my primary relationship. Of course, I wasn't a twenty-year-old in this candy store of female availability. I don't want to guess what might have happened to me or my relationships if I'd discovered TORI thirty years sooner. A couple of years ago I heard of one father of a seventeen-year-old being asked for permission to seduce his son. It's that kind of caring community.

The black leather trio left a day early, saying that they had commitments back in Michigan. I wasn't sad to see them leave. For me, they – and especially *he* – had disrupted the closeness and warmth of the weekend. But not the intensity. At each community meeting, I sat there with a hard lump in my gut, feeling resentment but without the courage to express it. The guy was clearly playing the group for sympathy, pretending to be a tough-on-the-

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

outside-but-a-hurt-little-boy-on-the-inside. And the women were taking the bait. Several times while he was there, I saw him in intimate conversation with some nurturing woman. The woman he came with sat alone a lot, reading or staring out the window. I wished I had the nerve to go over to her and begin a conversation.

One of the things I like about TORI is that role expectations are nearly nonexistent. I have always been shy in approaching women, and I've always been tremendously surprised when someone tells me that she has been afraid to approach *me* because I seemed so self-assured and self-contained. Nothing, as I tell people readily, is further from the truth. At a July TORI, once, a community meeting was in progress out on the lawn, and I was sitting almost directly behind a young woman who, at some point in the meeting, admitted feelings of inadequacy about something. I don't remember what it was all about, but she started to cry, and I simply reached over and stroked her back for a while. It wasn't a big thing—such touching is pretty common and unthreatening in TORI. She wasn't someone I knew particularly well. We had exchanged pleasantries at times, and hugged each other at the beginnings or endings of TORIs, also a common TORI gesture. I found her attractive, rather regal in her quiet manner and speech. But I was completely surprised that day, after I had been rubbing her back for a moment, when she leaned back into my arms and sobbed into my shoulder. This woman, whom I had admired from a safe distance because I

Dreams of Home

thought she was completely out of my class, felt like a cherished child in my arms, and I stroked and comforted her for some time, until she had recovered her composure. Wiping her face on my handkerchief, she squeezed my hand, murmured her thanks, and sat back up in her place in the circle. In the meantime, of course, the meeting had gone on around us, but I had no idea what was being said. Later that day, she found me sitting alone reading, and began a conversation. We took a long walk in the woods, and I found out that she had always thought I was unapproachable. I usually say little in groups, and it seems that some people see that as evidence of *strength*, of all things!

My initial reserve toward her was replaced with a warm intimacy. Although our relationship never became sexual, we maintained a strong friendship that lasted for several years. She eventually became involved with someone she met at TORI, and then seldom attended our gatherings. Even then, when we encountered each other on occasion, there was a warmth and a sense of closeness between us that I value a lot. From that, I learned—at least my head learned—that my shyness often robs me of opportunities to connect with people, not only because I am paralyzed to approach people, but also because it is sometimes interpreted as its complete opposite. Without actually counting, I estimate that ninety-five percent of the friendships I've had, particularly with women, have developed because they have approached me. In spite of countless discussion groups I've been in, in which women

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

insist that they are emotionally incapable of initiating contact with a man.

Remembering my youth, when my shyness was at least occasionally overcome (not to say *overwhelmed*) by my lust, I suppose that without testosterone, the human race would have long ago become extinct.

Anyway, even though this stranger sitting over by the window pretending to be absorbed in the snow outside didn't seem unapproachable—on the contrary, I could *feel* just how alone she was feeling—I just couldn't make that start, that little push, that gets my body going where my head thinks it should go. It had to do with *him*, of course. She was with him, and I saw her crying at his shoulder when he was telling his story. If I were to begin to talk with her, he would be there, in between us, in my head. And I couldn't deal with him yet.

I can't remember the rest of the TORI, after they left. I faintly remember some discussion of him, and of feeling frustrated that I never had the nerve to confront—not him, but *me* about him. I was pretty sure we'd never see him again. The other fellow who had come with him, maybe. He seemed to get something he needed from the weekend and from the group.

Then, about a year later, the Jesus-fellow returned. (*"Why do I think of him that way?"*) There had been enough time in between that I had pretty much lost whatever feelings I had about him, and when I saw him drive up to the lodge, I was only curious.

Dreams of Home

People remembered him, of course, so he was warmly greeted as he dropped his gear inside the entrance before pulling off his boots. He saw me and waved, then later came over and gave me a hug. I was surprised, because I didn't think he'd even remember me. Then I remembered that we had, indeed, had a conversation at that last gathering, just before he left, and I remembered saying something to him about feeling that there was something that we had in common. It was embarrassing to think of, actually. What had I actually said to him?

I noticed that he talked more at this TORI, in between community meetings. Several times I heard him in discussions with different people, talking about psychology or motorcycles or something equally impersonal. He seemed pretty serious—I never saw him laugh. I felt my stomach knot up a little now and then when I overheard him spouting off about some subject as though he knew what he was talking about. (*“He’s just like me. He wants to impress people, and instead he just makes a fool of himself.”*)

In most of the community meetings, he held back and didn't say much. I noticed that he wasn't wearing sunglasses, on his face or on top of his head. Most of the time his pony tail stayed behind him, although I noticed that when he was sitting back in an easy chair, he pulled it over his shoulder. (*“Oh, it probably gets caught when he leans back, so he pulls it out of the way.”*) His face was strong looking, just a little angular. I supposed women thought he was attractive, but I didn't see it. Even though his hair

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

was light—kind of streaked blond—his beard was dark, and he nearly always had a five-o'clock shadow. I wondered how often he shaved. Some men have to shave twice a day, or more, to look presentable. During my early years, when I shaved, I usually waited until after work, so my face would be smooth in the evening. I thought it didn't look too bad in the morning, and nobody was going to get their neck scraped at that time of day. When I did my mid-life crisis thing, I let my beard grow out. After the first month, during which it drove me crazy, I grew to like it. Especially not having to shave. I was about forty, and it grew out with two white streaks at the sides of my chin. Someone asked me if I bleached it like that, that it looked distinguished. So I kept it. Eventually, of course, the white streaks spread throughout my face, but it happened slowly, and I seldom consider cutting it off. It still beats shaving.

My beard and his ponytail are probably equivalent, in some way. They set us apart, making a statement that we do not want to be like everybody else. No, not quite that. We don't want to *appear to be* like everybody else. Occasionally, when I'm in my "professional writer" role, dealing with clients in my business suit, I feel just a little bit seedy. The suit doesn't quite make up for the beard. I used to think it did, that the beard and the suit together said "academic" or something. When I first got out of grad school, I got a job in San Francisco working for an old-fashioned entrepreneur, the head of a printing company, who read my resume wrong, and introduced

Dreams of Home

me to one of his clients as “Dr. Skiff.” I had never passed myself off as having a Ph.D., but that’s what he read, and I didn’t want to embarrass him in front of his client. I always wanted to set the record straight, but somehow after that it didn’t seem important. I was his ego trip—he had a Ph.D. communications consultant on his staff. He sure didn’t pay me a Ph.D. salary.

A ponytail—a long, blond ponytail—makes some kind of statement, but I’m not sure what. Except that what it says to me is a confusion of things. A short, unobtrusive pony tail, that little tuft that some men wear tied up with a rubber band at the back of their collar, says to me that this person is not up-tight, maybe a little bit of a rebel, but not arrogantly so. A musician, perhaps. Or a *Matré de* in a nice restaurant. I’ve seen one on an over-the-road trucker. Really long hair on a man suggests either a completely wild man or one who isn’t sure what he is. Yes, I realize that my stereotypes are not any more valid than anybody else’s. But we’re talking about how I was reacting to this Jesus-guy.

I couldn’t make him out. He made me uncomfortable, so I knew that he had some of my own traits, things I try not to think about too much. He hit me as some kind of rival, in this environment, anyway. I wanted the kind of attention I saw him getting. (*“And the more I want it, the less able I am to go after it.”*)

No, I didn’t, either. I am twice this guy’s age, and I’ve had all the romantic experiences I need in my life. People, men

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

and women, respect me and like me. When I keep the little kid inside me under control, I can carry on a reasonable conversation, and people listen. A lot of people have told me that they don't mind that I don't talk much, because when I do speak, I usually have something very cogent to say, and people listen. I don't lack for friends, especially in TORI.

At one of the community meetings, he made some reference to his accident, and someone (a woman) who had not been at the previous TORI asked him about it. So he told the story all over again, and he cried all over again, and women rushed to comfort him, and Barry got up and left. I nursed my knot.

Six months later, just before another TORI, he phoned me and asked if we had room in our car so he and a friend could ride to Toronto with us. He said they could drive, but it's more fun to have the company on the long trip. I told him I didn't know if we would have room, because we hadn't begun to make plans. But I promised to call him back after I discussed it with Judith.

Toronto is five hours away. I've been driving there six or eight times a year for twelve years. The 401, the only highway between Detroit and Toronto, is a fine—and boring—highway. It's almost as bad as I-75 going toward Cincinnati, although it's much better maintained. The speed limit is 100 km per hour, which is 62 mph, but everyone goes between 70 and 80 mph. I've seen cars pulled over by the Ontario Provincial Police, but I've

Dreams of Home

never been stopped myself. On the trip there, we're usually reasonably fresh, so it's only the last hour that really drags. And the closer to Toronto you get, the heavier the traffic is. Trying to traverse Toronto itself on the 401 on a holiday weekend Friday afternoon is as slow as I've ever experienced, even in San Francisco rush hours. When we finally pull into the retreat center, we are all completely bushed. (Of course, there are people who drive to TORI from Grand Rapids and Holland—three hours farther. TORI must be wonderful.) The idea of making that drive with someone you don't like doesn't sound like fun.

The trip back is different. So much happens in TORI, that the long drive back is a time for decompression, a chance to think about and talk about what happened and how things felt. The intensity lifts gradually, and as one approaches home, the head just naturally begins to acclimate to reality again. But the feelings need to be worked through. I've often told people who live in Toronto that they miss out on something important when they drive a half-hour and they're right back in the real world. And they especially miss out when they take advantage of the closeness of home to slip away from the community to run errands or go on a date or something. There's something very important, in my thinking, about the commitment to be in community for the whole time. I always feel cheated when I have to arrive late or leave early. But the trip back, especially with someone who understands what it has been during the weekend, who

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

joins with you in putting all those feelings and experiences together somehow, finding the keys that explain it to you, lets you return home having lived something that makes sense—usually that makes more sense than the “real world.” A successful TORI is not always enjoyable. A successful TORI often leaves one a little disoriented for several days, trying to integrate the honesty and openness, the trust and the love between people there with the shallowness and defensiveness and game-playing of everyday life. A five-hour space between those different worlds is a great benefit to fragile souls.

I wasn't sure I wanted to share that time with someone I disliked, someone I couldn't figure out. With most people, it would be a chance to get to know them, an extended mini-community meeting, where the superficialities can be gotten through and real connections can be made. But this would be a real ordeal for me. I hoped that Judith would agree that “we didn't have room.” As it turned out, she did at first, but in the course of our discussion, we agreed that we should try. After all, this was somebody reaching out to us. How could we turn our backs? (*“More of my wimpy inability to be assertive, claim ownership of my space, and ask for what I want.”*)

So I called him and warned him that we had some extra gear—we were the current keepers of the “TORI Basket,” a collection of staples and leftovers from previous gatherings that go home each time with a volunteer, to return to the next gathering. He agreed that if we couldn't

Dreams of Home

get everything in the one car, we could split up at his place, and just caravan to Toronto.

As it turned out, there was just enough room. The friend who was accompanying him was not the woman who had gone to the first TORI. She seemed outgoing and pleasant. We loaded up and headed for the Ambassador Bridge. They had a bag of trail mix and some fruit, and Judith had made some sandwiches before we left. By the time we reached the bridge and the Canadian border, everyone seemed relaxed. (I was still a little tense, actually, but that's the way I always start long trips.) I coached them about Canadian customs. "We just say we're going to Toronto to spend the weekend with friends. If you say 'TORI' or anything about a meeting or a community, they might want a lot more information."

I've never been stopped at the Canadian border, although a lot of people I know have. I've carried wine and liquor across without declaring it, and a woman I was with one time told me, just as we pulled away from the booth, that she had two joints in her shirt pocket. One friend, a young fellow with a dark beard and an old van, was stopped nearly every time he went across. Once, I was carrying a friend to TORI, and he had become car sick on the bus to Detroit where I picked him up, and was heavily sedated. Sleepily, he joked with me about telling Customs that I had doped him and was kidnapping him. I sweat a little, because I wasn't sure whether he was groggy enough to actually do it. But he simply nodded when the agent

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

asked if he was also a citizen of the U.S., and there was no incident.

We stopped at the hospitality centre and exchanged money for Canadian dollars. You really don't need Canadian money very much, because all of the roadside places and even most stores and restaurants in Toronto give a good rate of exchange for U.S. dollars. But it's easier to deal with the finances at TORI if you have Canadian money. They collect money to go grocery shopping, and fussing with a combination of Canadian and American money at the checkout line would be a bother.

As we drove, we talked about TORI and about some of our experiences. The woman was interested in what TORI is all about, how it started and what its philosophy is. That's always difficult to answer.

Jack Gibb wrote a book, *Trust: A New View Of Personal And Organizational Development*, published in 1978, at the time he was most involved in putting on workshops—TORI gatherings—around the country. These were singular events, intended to give people an experience of being together in completely unplanned and practically undirected gatherings. TORI, as I have mentioned, is an acronym for *Trust, Openness, Realization and Interdependence*. Gibb called these four concepts *processes* toward achieving community.

Community, of course, is a word with a lot of different meanings. What Gibb and Scott Peck mean by the word is

Dreams of Home

an emotional connectedness, a cohesive feeling that may or may not occur within geographic or situational communities. The feeling seems to defy description, however and, like love, often eludes the most determined pursuer. Many people relate it to *family*, even though most people acknowledge that the feeling is none too common within biological family units. Perhaps it's an ideal of family, a sense of belonging to some group, membership that cannot easily be taken away, that does not much depend upon what one does.

Belonging has been a vital possession to people throughout history. Certain groups in the world even today use the need for belonging to ensure acceptable behavior. Outcasts are often seen as the most unfortunate segment of a society. Shunning used to be a devastating sentence to serve. In some primitive societies, outcasts are literally unseen and unheard, disconnected completely, considered dead, even as they continue to walk among their former relatives and neighbors.

Deliberately seeking that sense of belonging in the abstract, attempting to conjure it through exercises, such as in Scott Peck's workshops, or less formally and more intuitively, as in those of Jack Gibb, may be a recent thing. But the effort to create a sense of community has been a part of the institutions of the human race all along. Often it is considered an incidental part of an institution, a bonus, but its effect is nonetheless powerful in the maintenance of institutional integrity.

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

So when one asks, "What is TORI all about?" it's not always a meaningful answer one gets. You have to start from the recognition that the feeling is important, before the idea of seeking it makes any sense. There are probably people who have no use for love, and for whom the pursuit of love is absurd. But in our culture, that idea is so ubiquitous that everyone knows what is meant. People talk a lot these days about the need for community, but the concept hasn't solidified into a clearly universal notion. In community *a la* Gibb and Peck, the word begins to take on a sentimental quality, as "love in bloom" did a century or so ago. In the 1970s, smoking pot and sampling other chemical paths to feeling was an experimental thing, too. "Getting high" and "bad trip" were readily recognized as possible outcomes, but one was hard-pressed to describe either of them in words.

Perhaps, after all, the feeling of community is just another "high." When it is pursued for its own sake, how it happens is related more to technique than to the resulting event. The feeling is individual, even private, in spite of its dependency on others to be achieved. Blaming someone, as I had, for interfering with my achieving a "community high," points up the private objectives of the process.

That high feeling has often been compared to orgasm. Maybe that's an apt comparison, since sexual feeling has both private and shared aspects, and our society tends to value the communal aspect more, since it is the most useful to the society itself. That it becomes blurred with

Dreams of Home

what we called love is probably not an accident, from the viewpoint of the society.

The *feeling* of community is obviously what perpetuates the physical community. A generation ago, words like loyalty and patriotism were used to encourage those whose emotional connections might tend to weaken. The Pledge of Allegiance and martial music stirred feelings of belonging.

As I tried to say some of these things to her, I felt lost myself, as though not being able to articulate what TORI is all about robs me of the experience itself. How could I get it across to her? Of course, the fact that we were a hundred miles into Canada, on our way to the actual thing, meant that whatever I said to her, she would experience it herself soon enough. And one of the things I told her was that each person experiences it differently.

But I was troubled, and grateful that others took over the effort of maintaining the conversation. I looked out at the flat, fertile Ontario farmland. A hawk sat in the top of a little tree near the freeway, waiting for a break in the line of cars so it could investigate a dark spot on the pavement. Twists of clouds lay in parallel rows across the sky, like the brown plowed fields below them.

Hormones ensure the continuation of the race. They create the feeling of desire, before the fact, as well as the feeling of satisfaction afterward. There's really no hormone that I know of that creates the desire for community. Like marijuana, it doesn't call to one. Once one has experienced

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

it in all its multicolored and multifaceted richness, though, it's something that one needs to feel again. If you've been there, you don't need to ask. If you haven't, I don't know how to describe it.

Some people respond to it more than others, also like marijuana. I think I must have experienced something in my childhood that causes me to yearn for it. That's my theory, anyway. I've never found out just what that experience was. Perhaps one of those things that others were unaware of at the time—like, I got left out on the porch for a few minutes at a year old, safely tied in my jump seat, and I *knew* I was abandoned. The accepted treatment of babies in those days was more Spartan than it is now. Pick up a crying child too soon, and you'd spoil him. He'd want to be picked up *all the time*. We still train dogs to fit into our lives using the same psychological weapons.

So my old fear of abandonment could translate into the hunger to belong, the hormone for desiring community. I don't know. It's just an idea.

Why do other people come to TORI? We tell people that TORI is an intentional community—it exists so people can get together. No other purpose, no other promises. That may explain why it's there, but it doesn't explain why people go for the first time. Some, like *him*, are group junkies. They are curious, and they gradually learn the techniques for getting what they want. But I guess that doesn't answer the question. Some, probably, attend

Dreams of Home

because they've been invited by a friend. Or they have been wounded, perhaps by a failed relationship, so they seek out groups of people to get some of the personal affirmations they need. If there is a generalized reason, that's probably it—there's a hope that I will get stroked there, that I will feel valued by others.

The ideal trust community, according to Jack Gibb, is open to all. He doesn't suggest that only certain people are TORI material. But within the continuing community, there is defensiveness. Several years ago we had a discussion about whether to advertise, in order to attract more people (our numbers had been dwindling even then). Some people felt strongly that we should not, because we might attract the *wrong kind of people*, men on the make, people who feed on other people's vulnerabilities. We should rely on word-of-mouth, presuming that our own people would invite other people like us, with our values, our higher sense of ethics, our caring for each other.

The "TORI Test" again—one invites only those who one thinks will fit in and add to the good feelings, and maybe at the same time judging the same person for acceptability in a closer relationship based upon how well they do fit into TORI.

The selection process isn't perfect, judging from the occasional misfit we encounter. I suspect it shouldn't be— if the only people who came were exactly like us, we

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

would surely lose some of the qualities that we like to think are part of the community.

We stopped at a service area just before London. I needed some coffee, because driving tends to hypnotize me, and Judith loves to eat junk food on long trips. The gas gauge still showed a half tank left, so I didn't fill up. Gas is so much more expensive in Canada that we try to make the trip on two Canadian fillups.

Shortly before Mississauga, we had to stop again, and this time filled the tank. The women disappeared into the MacDonald's. As I filled the tank, he walked over to the edge of the pavement and lit a cigarette. I noticed that he was always very considerate with his smoking, carefully disposing of the butts instead of simply stepping on them and walking away, as many smokers do.

I paid for the gas, and the two of us stood talking over the top of the car as we waited for the others, who were just then coming around the corner of the restaurant. He was saying something about TORI and his feelings that I didn't quite catch, something that sounded surprisingly real, but before I could ask him to repeat it, we were interrupted by Judith and his friend, gaily chattering as they arrived. Back on the road, I didn't feel comfortable broaching it in front of the others.

Even before we reached Mississauga, traffic began to slow down. Three lanes became four, then five, and all of them were full of vehicles. Soon, individual lanes slowed more than others, and cars began switching, lurching into

Dreams of Home

adjoining lanes whenever there was a space between speeding cars. All one could do, otherwise, was relax, try to keep up with the car ahead without crashing into it when it suddenly slowed or stopped. If you left any space at all in front of you, a car from another lane would cut in. A twelve-year-old boy couldn't think of a more exciting video game. An adult couldn't think of a more punishing hell.

It took an hour to go the last fifteen miles across the top of Toronto, from the airport to the Don Valley. Somehow, it's always my job to drive that stretch. It must be a throwback to my thirties, when I thought I was responsible for everything.

By the time we drove into the conference center grounds, off the pavement and up the winding, single-track drive through the woods, I thought of only one thing—to get out of the car and lie on my back and listen to the voices around me of people I love. A beer would have been perfect.

An ordeal is like a prolonged crisis. The difference is that in an ordeal, you hunker down and keep doing what you have to do until it's over; in a crisis you don't know what to do. But afterward they have the same effect on the mind: you're left numb, intellectually and emotionally. Things that might have upset you normally, just slide through your consciousness.

Judith was in high spirits. She found me lying on the floor and announced that she had found us a good room. I

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

labored to my feet and helped her carry our gear from the doorway to our room. As usual, we pulled two mattresses off the bunk beds and laid them side-by-side on the floor. The beds in this place were comfortable enough (they had replaced the old lumpy mattresses a couple of years ago), but not wide enough for the two of us, and we didn't like sleeping separately. Since there were three bunks in each room, our arrangement meant some inconvenience for the third person, if there was one. Often, we had the room to ourselves. We went out to see who else had arrived.

Our traveling companions had found their own space, and the door to their room was shut. In the other wing, the centre was gradually coming alive with people. A small group in the kitchen was already busily making a hearty soup, and others were sitting around a table, drinking tea and coffee and talking. It felt like reunion.

I thought about him, again, and wondered if he and his friend had found us inhospitable on the drive. I hadn't been very open. I tried to recall what he had said as we stood there talking over the top of the car. I thought it was something about needing to come to terms with death. At the time, I had related it to his story, that we had heard several times, about his girl friend getting killed in his van. In the community he had said it felt very important that he learn how to pay attention to *this moment*, because death is always standing so close by.

I was aware, at that moment, that I was seeing him differently. He seemed more real, more approachable. He

Dreams of Home

had revealed something about himself to me, something I didn't hear clearly, but which nevertheless communicated his humanity.

My judgments of people are so often based on impressions that have more to do with me than with them. One of the important things about TORI is the mental set I put on, like a pair of glasses through which people seem different from my impressions in other situations. Maybe it's trust. I go into community expecting to trust. (Jack Gibb stressed the conscious decision to trust, rather than the passive kind of trust that comes to us after sufficient demonstrations by others that trust is appropriate.) As I thought about him, I felt regret—even shame—that I had not seen him through my TORI glasses. I had responded to my own fear, instead. In my head I had been beating him for my own shortcomings.

But I knew I wasn't finished. Somehow, I had to resolve things—my own feelings—with him. It was important to me that I open myself up to him. At that thought, my mind closed down. I looked around the table where I sat at the people I had come to cherish in the past ten years. My community, my family. The ones I felt closest to were the ones to whom I had bared my soul. The ones I had revealed myself to, cried with, clung to. The ones who knew me, with all my warts, and still accepted me and touched me and showed themselves to me.

After our “stone soup” supper, at the first community meeting, he spoke little. The group never got very intense,

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

anyway, and most of the time we “discussed things.” I was tired from the trip, and didn’t mind the superficial stuff. We finally got around to doing snapshots, though, and while several people confided that they were going through some “heavy stuff,” the tone of the group stayed just warm and friendly. When he spoke, all he said was that after the last TORI, he came to a very heavy realization, and it took him several days to get his head back on straight. He didn’t say what the realization was.

I was again curious, but I didn’t ask. That’s very hard for me, to probe someone’s thoughts. I just can’t seem to press anyone for information. It has cost me, over the years. Once in San Francisco, I was interviewing hitchhikers for a public television producer, and there was this young woman who made an indirect reference to a very bad experience she had had a few months before. She didn’t offer any details, and I didn’t ask. But it was exactly what the program we were working on was to be all about—the risks of hitchhiking. When I played my tape of the conversation for the producer, he got furious. He said I had it in my hand, and I blew it! I didn’t get any more assignments.

The rest of the weekend, he stayed a bit aloof, but I kept thinking about him. Finally, I approached him as he sat in a corner reading.

“Hey, sometime before the end of the TORI, could we get together for a little while?”

Dreams of Home

He looked up, a little quizzically. "Sure. Any time in particular? Today? Tomorrow?"

"Whenever. I'd just like to chat for a few minutes." I turned and walked away. ("*Shit! Now, he's going to think there's some big deal, just because I was so nonchalant.*")

And later, I realized that because I didn't suggest a definite time, I was leaving it up to him. But I didn't exactly say so, so I could assume that he was probably waiting for me to get back to him. Still, I kept waiting. And hating myself for my indecisiveness.

On Sunday, as the community was cleaning up the conference centre in preparation for ending the TORI, I caught up with him walking down the hall with a vacuum cleaner. "When you finish with that," I asked, annoyed that I sounded breathless, "think we could find a quiet corner somewhere to talk?"

"I was just taking this back. Now's as good a time as any."

He left the machine in the closet and we walked back down the hall. One of the sleeping rooms was empty, its occupants already gone. I went in and sat on the edge of a bunk.

"This is no big deal," I said. "I heard you say something in the community meeting Friday, and I was curious."

He pulled a chair over and sat down, waiting for me to continue. I didn't know what he was thinking, whether he wanted to be here or not. I wished I were someplace else. *Why did I have to do this?*

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

"You said something about going through some stuff after the last TORI, but you didn't explain. I was just curious. You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to." I felt completely stupid.

"Well, like," he began, looking at his hands, "I came to TORI thinking I'd get something I was looking for, but I finally figured out that I'm not going to get it here. I have to do it myself." His voice didn't betray any impatience. He was speaking normally, without any of the drama I had reacted to so strongly at the previous TORIs. He was searching for words, moving his hands in a little gesture, as though trying to grasp smoke.

"What *were* you looking for when you first came?" My confidence was returning a little. This was straightforward. I was asking somebody for information about himself. ("*Why is this so goddamn important to me?*")

"It was like," and he paused. "It was like I wanted to find a group where I could just do a mental meltdown, like, just melt together."

"I don't know what you mean—'meltdown.'"

"You know, like Mister Spock, you know, in Star Trek? He puts his hands on somebody's head, like this—" He demonstrated by holding his head. "And he *becomes* that other person, and the other person becomes him. They have total access to each other's minds."

I nodded, but I was a little panicky. He had a way of talking sometimes that was totally mysterious to me.

Dreams of Home

When he did that in a group, I could just let it go. But what do I say to that? “You mean, you thought you could just merge with the group, become a piece of it?”

“Yeah, like, there wouldn’t be any difference between us. But I found out it won’t work. I have to do that by myself.”

“Yes, I guess I see,” I said, leaning over on my elbow on the striped mattress cover. (*“Is he saying what I think he’s saying? That he just wants to belong?”*)

I had rehearsed in my head how I would just open up to him, tell him all the shit I had been going through. Somehow I knew that was the only way I could get the monkey off my back. So when I said it, I didn’t even think. “You know, at first you scared the shit out of me. I don’t know why, except maybe I was jealous of how you got so much attention, and I didn’t know how, and at the same time I could see something in you that I recognized in myself, that I didn’t want to deal with. Like, I think that inside we both have this little kid who wants attention, especially from women.”

I had been looking down at my hands as I spoke, and I looked up suddenly. “I know, I don’t know anything about you—it’s all inside me, I know.”

He smiled a little, but said nothing. I kept on, feeling like I’d dug myself into a hole and didn’t know how to get out. “A part of me was attracted to you, and I didn’t want to feel that, and so I hated you. I was afraid of you.”

Messiah, Seeking Salvation

I shrugged my one free shoulder, feeling ridiculous. “And now I don’t anymore.”

He didn’t say anything, but he looked open, and he had this little smile on his face.

“I guess I agree with you,” I said, “that you’re not going to find that melting of minds, not very easily, anyway. But the same thing draws me. I need to feel like I belong somewhere, and this group has given me that feeling. It’s like it’s okay to be me here. I know that I’m pretty careful about sticking my neck out in community meetings. I haven’t conquered my old fear of rejection—abandonment, really. That’s something in me, probably from my early childhood, though I don’t remember, and nobody else in my family does, either. But I’m a lot better handling it than I used to be.”

He still didn’t say much, but he was nodding slowly, as though it made sense to him. Finally, he said, “You know, when you asked me if we could talk, I thought you were going to chew me out for something I’d done wrong.” We both laughed.

I felt a lot better. We stood up and hugged each other, and said we liked each other. I told him I hoped he’d keep coming to TORI, and he said he would.

People were scurrying past the door, carrying sleeping bags and boots and luggage toward the front entrance. We joined the traffic in the hall just as Judith walked by, so I turned away from him and caught up with her. She gave

Dreams of Home

me a questioning look as I took her hand, but said nothing.

Later, she wanted to know all the details of my talk with him. I felt relaxed and satisfied, but not elated, as I had expected to. It didn't feel like any kind of victory, but the tension was gone. I still didn't know him, and I wasn't sure I'd always feel good about him. But I did feel better about myself. I felt as though I could deal with him, even confront him, if necessary. My fear was gone, at least for now.

I had my TORI back.

March, 1995

Part Two
Editorials from the Toronto
TORI Community
Newsletter Dear Friends . . .

For about four years, from 1994 to 1998, I edited and largely wrote the newsletter for the TORI community. I wanted the newsletter to make a difference in the community, not simply announce past and future events. It's seldom difficult for me to express my opinions in writing, and the following editorials reveal a lot of what community in general, and TORI in particular, meant to me.

About the time I turned the newsletter over to others in the community, I began writing essays for my Web site. So there's a continuity through Part II and Part IV of this book, with some overlap.

The editorials are in chronological order over the four-year period, but are individually undated here. They begin with an allegory . . .

The Dream

He woke with a start. The room was bright, the sun already slipping in through cracks in the blinds. He felt groggy and confused. It was an awful dream, the kind that comes when you oversleep, leaving you feeling troubled and vaguely hopeless. His body seemed too heavy to get out of bed, and he lay there for a few minutes, thinking about the dream.

His wife was gone. She had just disappeared, walked out of his life. Twenty years of marriage, and she had just walked away. He felt bewildered. He should be feeling betrayed, but somehow it was his fault, and he knew it. He should have told her how important she was to him. He should have stood up and told the world, "This is my wife. This is the person I cherish most in the world. This is the one who feeds my soul when it hungers for affirmation. This is the one who rescues the scared little kid inside me when he crashes on the rocks of reality. This is the haven who takes me in, just as I am, and waits patiently while I heal. This is the standard I use to tell me I'm okay. This is the one who is always there." And she was gone. As softly as she had come into his life, she had left. Why?

He turned and looked at her, still sleeping, her back to him, a mound of blanket with a few wisps of gray hair showing on the pillow. She wasn't gone. But the dream was still terribly real in his head. An emptiness that felt as though it could never be filled. All the holes that eventually get crowded out by the ordinary, day-to-day

The Dream

stuff of life. Holes that ought to be cherished, precious memories that he wanted to preserve, somehow, fence off from the gray world, plant flowers around, and on quiet evenings sit and hold.

Long ago it had been wonderful. They were two kids, full of joy and passion, learning how to really live. They'd thrown off all the rules, let them drop from their minds as their clothes had dropped from their bodies. They had started over, trusting themselves and each other, trusting the process of living. They agreed to be open with each other and with the world. "What do we have to fear?" they asked the wind. "Who says we have to protect ourselves—we can survive any threat, because we know ourselves. We can love ourselves unconditionally, as we love each other." Trust was an elixir, an aphrodisiac. They could let go of all the armor people hide behind, and dance through life, free. They could experience life as it should be.

They could become all that they dreamed. Limitless realization of all their potentials was not only possible, it was assured, and they inspired each other with their enthusiasm. Each one cheered the other on, without fear of being left behind. Their power was as real as their trust. And, at the same time, they felt the strength in their connection. They didn't have to *always* be strong, for the other was there for them, steadying, filling in when confidence flagged, holding them when all seemed lost.

Holly Near's words haunted him—

Dreams of Home

*Please sit with me through the night
Tell me it's all right to fall apart with you
'Cause I'm so tired and I'm so scared
I need to grieve and weep and scream and moan
And sometimes I feel I can't defend myself, my life, or my
home*

He felt the sadness even more. Was it all gone? That trust, that they had voiced so often to themselves and to each other, was it just a mantra gone stale, an empty sound?

*But you know tomorrow, I'll be back on my feet
It's not in me, my friend, to accept defeat
But won't you please sit with me through the night
And tell me it's all right to fall apart
With you...*

The old openness, the emotional nakedness that allowed the breeze to caress the soul, that told each other of their defenseless strength, that assured them that all was well. The courage to make themselves real, to allow each other to *be*. The independence that came from interdependence, standing strong and separate and still close enough to lean, at times.

Right now his mouth was as dry as his soul. How long had it been since they were *really* close? How many years had they let go by, allowing the soil that sustained them to dry up, leaves growing yellow from neglect? How long had it been since he proclaimed his love to her? Since he trusted her with his vulnerability, his fear? How long since he paid close attention when she spoke of herself?

The Dream

How much did he know her now, after all these years? The litany of trust had become blurred and thin and ultimately meaningless. Two people, once vital and real to each other, had become shadows.

Tears welled in his eyes. He looked again at the mound on the other side of the bed. The mound swelled ever-so-slightly then retreated, rhythmically, softly assuring.

"Taurie," he said gently. A faint, sleepy response. "Taurie, are you awake? I need to talk."



Note: When I wrote this, I thought my use of the name "Taurie" would make obvious my intention that the relationship in question was actually TORI, and that if a reader hadn't made the connection earlier, the last paragraph would certainly prompt him or her to go back and read it again. Prior to the writing of this piece, the community had been struggling to maintain the spirit we once took for granted, but no one seemed prepared to bring it up for discussion within the group. As happens in many relationships, everyone did not grasp my "obvious" point. Someone even asked me (quietly) if Judith and I were having "difficulties."

Community—The Infinite Game

A Sort of Book Review

I bought a new book last week, William Polowniak's *On Creating a Community*². Polowniak is a student and associate of Jack Gibb, and has been immersed in "Trust Theory" for many years. Here he offers what the cover calls a "guide for organizations, personal productivity, and international peace." I had been grateful that someone besides Jack Gibb had written about trust communities. I've been involved in the Toronto TORI Community for more than ten years and the basic ideas are no longer new. Yet there are still aspects of TORI that seem fuzzy to me, incompletely developed. So I eagerly plunged into reading. But by the time I had finished, I was frustrated. *So much promise*. He says repeatedly that he will provide the formula for community, and that true community provides the secret to those things listed on the cover. But something is still missing; something is still unfinished.

As I read this book on community, I kept being reminded of *Finite and Infinite Games*, by James P. Carse. That book's been out since 1986, and I've read it three times before, but I decided there was something about these two books

² These books are included in the References in the back of the book.

Community—The Infinite Game

that is related. Both are prescriptions for behavior. Polowniak is straightforward about it: “here’s how to do it.” Carse, on the other hand, simply describes two ways of being, and allows you to choose the one you prefer. It’s clear, however, which one he thinks you will (and should) choose.

Simplicity, Polowniak says, is an essential ingredient in true community. It is by making relationships complicated that we keep each other at a distance, defend ourselves against other people’s complexities. In another place, he calls space, time and commitment the “angels of community.” But the real core of it is trust. To experience community, I must trust the process. As he says, “When people are allowed to be in the same environment with minimal constraint or interference from others, a natural process of becoming a community *always evolves.*” (italics his) This is the same assertion I’ve read in Jack Gibb’s book *Trust*, and to me no more convincing. Polowniak goes even further: “The laws and forces controlling organizations and nations are the same in health and in sickness, in peace and in war, and their actions are *always for the same purpose*: harmony, betterment, improvement.” (italics mine) And even another remarkable generalization: “All individuals, organizations and nations are moving toward fullness and maturity.” Well, this is certainly a prescription for trusting the process. *I can hear Humphrey Bogart, his words forming off the sides of his tongue, assuring Katherine Hepburn, “Relax, Miss, it’ll be okay.”*

Dreams of Home

I must trust myself, though, first of all. All is not necessarily sweetness and light in a community, and sometimes I have to make tough decisions (“tough trust” he calls it). “Trust, but be responsible about it.” “Don’t be gullible.” “Premature trust can be a mistake.” “There are some things one should never trust another with.” My problem is that, from what he writes, I don’t know how to *know* when it’s all right to trust. And doesn’t that mean I start by not trusting? At another point, he does say that we shouldn’t become dependent on leaders—maybe my question simply reveals my own dependency, and I should look to my inner resources to determine what I should do. He also gives some examples of situations in which he had to trust himself *not* to trust someone else in the community. His caveats didn’t leave me much confidence in Trust.

Generally, he says, community is possible if people trust each other enough to let their hair down, reveal their fears, show their *authentic* selves. It doesn’t mean they’ll always be accepted or revered—sometimes my authentic self is pretty antisocial. But then I have to have it together enough to handle the reactions of others. Trouble is, my authentic, sometimes antisocial, self is at those times most vulnerable, least able to withstand criticism. While Polowniak cautions against *reacting* to others, what if it’s my authentic self reacting to their reactions? Somewhere under my shirt I must keep a semblance of armor. Like my precinct sergeant used to say, “*Let’s be careful out there!*”

Community—The Infinite Game

The joys of true community are undisputed, at least by me. Some of the most profoundly satisfying moments of my life have been in community meetings at TORI. There is nothing quite like the *magic* of being surrounded by a group of people who are fully attuned to each other, and who accept you as you are—whatever stupid thing you might say, whatever *faux pas* you might commit. Who could not respond in kind to that? That's love.

Polowniak refers repeatedly to "Trust Level Theory," but I never found out just what the theory is. There's a table of attributes, a series of dimensions, one end of each representing an aspect of non-community and the other of ideal community. Calling these "the seven secrets of community building," he refers to the "bad" ends of the continua as "Creating Fear and Defensiveness" and the "good" ends as "Creating Trust and Productivity." For example, *Reaction* is opposed to *Proactive Behavior*; *Control and Hierarchy* are opposed to *Organic Flow*; and *Intervention and Training* are opposed to *Discovery and Searching*. *Competition and Segmentation* are at the opposite end from *Collaboration and Wholeness*, reminding me of Marshall McLuhan's contrasting *Analytic, Linear Thinking* with *All-at Once, Intuitive Thinking*. "The medium is the message," McLuhan used to say, and I suppose now he would add, "Trust is the medium for community." A trusting environment allows me to be myself, intuitive and spontaneous. If I have to defend myself against possible attack, I'll be analytic and cautious.

Dreams of Home

Speaking of defense and attack, these are features of what James Carse calls “Finite Games.” This kind of game has winners and losers. One plays a finite game to win. Wars, elections—often even courtship—look much like a Tigers baseball game in this context. There are rules, and there is agreement among the contestants on what constitutes winning. The game aspect of some activities may be very subtle, but everyone involved knows when a game’s been won or lost. In an encounter between two people in a group, for example, as soon as the game is revealed, it’s clear that if the game is played out, one will win and one will lose. A draw is always unsatisfying to both.

An “Infinite Game,” however, is played for the purpose of continuing the game. Flirting between two evenly matched people can be this kind of game. And that brings up another feature of an infinite game—respect for the other side, a presumption of basic equality. In the best kind of community, there is respect for the variety of feelings, views and lifestyles of the participants, and that same presumption of equality. And every act, in true community, furthers the process, continues the game.

The flyleaf of Carse’s book contains this series of distinctions:

The rules of a finite game may not change; the rules of an infinite game must change.

Finite players play within boundaries; infinite players play with boundaries.

Community—The Infinite Game

Finite players are serious; infinite games are playful.

A finite player plays to be powerful; an infinite player plays with strength.

A finite player consumes time; an infinite player generates time.

The finite player aims for eternal life; the infinite player aims for eternal birth.

Doesn't that sound a lot like the community that Polowniak and Gibb talk about? Or, how about this?

"The rules of an infinite game...are like the grammar of a living language, where those of a finite game are like the rules of a debate."

Carse explains the label "game" that he uses in terms of choice. In both kinds of game, the players are free to play or not. In a finite game such as war, the players may feel that they have no choice but to play. Even though the consequences of not playing may be very high—even life threatening—if they play they play by choice. "In [this] one respect," he says, "... an infinite game is identical to a finite game. Of infinite players we can also say that ... if they *must* play, they cannot *play*." Much of the book details the differences in meaning of the word "play" within the contexts of the two types of game. Playing in a soccer game is how we ordinarily understand the word. Playing in an infinite game is more like the games children make up as they go.

Dreams of Home

“We are playful when we engage others at the level of choice, when there is no telling in advance where our relationship with them will come out—when, in fact, no one has an outcome to be imposed on the relationship, apart from the decision to continue it.

“To be playful is not to be trivial or frivolous, or to act as if nothing of consequence will happen. On the contrary, when we are playful with each other we relate as free persons, and the relationship is open to surprise; *everything* that happens is of consequence. It is, in fact, seriousness that closes itself to consequence, for seriousness is a dread of the unpredictable outcome of open possibility. To be serious is to press for a specified conclusion. To be playful is to allow for possibility whatever the cost to oneself.”

“Because infinite players prepare themselves to be surprised by the future, they play in complete openness. It is not an openness as in *candor*, but an openness as in *vulnerability*. It is not a matter of exposing one’s unchanging identity, the true self that has always been, but a way of exposing one’s ceaseless growth, the dynamic self that has yet to be. The infinite player does not expect only to be amused by surprise, but to be transformed by it ...”

“The finite play for life is serious; the infinite play of life is joyous. Infinite play resounds throughout with a kind of laughter. It is not a laughter at others who have come to an unexpected end, having thought they were going

Community—The Infinite Game

somewhere else. It is a laughter *with* others with whom we have discovered that the end we thought we were coming to has unexpectedly opened. We laugh not at what has surprisingly come to be impossible for others, but over what has surprisingly come to be possible with others.”

All of this feels to me like the way I’ve always wanted to be in community. The richness of experiencing other people free of fear and pretense is intoxicating to me. Even conflict, when it is open and honest and caring, furthers the adventure.

If Polowniak provided more specifics, if he better fulfilled his promise to tell us how to do it, I could wholeheartedly recommend the book to all my friends. On the other hand, if a “cookbook” simply contradicts the whole point of Trust, then I’d settle for inspiration. Poetry might be a better vehicle. Because what we’re talking about are feelings and relationships, things of the spirit, experiencing that ultimate connection we have with the universe.

What community is all about is not feeling alone.

I’ve not always returned fulfilled from TORI. I keep coming back, though. Maybe it’s for the same reason a lot of people go to church—to get their “fix” of reassurance that, in spite of the reality they face every day, all is not lost. Imperfect as life is, there is still hope. Maybe that’s the value of books like *On Creating a Community* and *Finite and Infinite Games*. Maybe even, that’s the value of this New Age “movement.” With our ever-expanding

Dreams of Home

awareness of all the terrible things that happen (that have always happened) in the world, we need at least a straw of hope.

T O R R I (?)

Eavesdropping on a conversation at the New Year's TORI got me to thinking. The talk was about early difficulties some people had remembering what the *R* in *TORI* stood for. Someone said that he thought for a time that the *R* stood for *Responsibility*.

That makes sense, I thought. We are expected to take responsibility for ourselves and our feelings, are we not? If each of us takes responsibility for our own stuff, then others don't have to worry about whether *their* stuff will somehow conflict with ours. Our task becomes more one of sorting things out.

To function well in community, one has to make himself or herself known, as well as to trust the process. And before I can open myself to you, don't I have to know myself? That's certainly a responsibility I have to myself. And to the community.

Realization, on the other hand, is always hard to figure out. I have to stop and think—I know the benefits of making myself real, but how do I facilitate *your* realization? Seems like that should be your responsibility. If you are real, then I'm dealing with something substantial, rather than some old stuff that you could have left at home.

Well, for the sake of tradition, let's say that we keep *Realization*, but to make things more realistic (sorry), add *Responsibility*. The community will definitely benefit from

Dreams of Home

that one small addition. And when I tell people what *TORRI* stands for, at least they'll get four out of five.

However...

Jack Gibb used to state: If you put a number of people in a place, and give them some time, they *WILL*, sooner or later, form themselves into a community. To me, that sounds like a statement of faith, a faith upon which his whole Trust Theory depends. People, *as they are*, can create community.

Trusting, Opening, Realizing and Interdepending are processes that facilitate and enhance community, but he doesn't say that one must have training in order to be part of a community.

Are there any prerequisites to participating in a TORI gathering? I have trouble accepting that there may be. I want TORI to be open to all. I want the TORI experience to benefit others as it has benefited me, and the ones who would benefit the most may be the very ones who don't know how to "do it." Back in the 70s, Carl Rogers criticized the encounter group phenomenon for its tendency to allow neophytes to be hurt in confrontations with experienced (and unsympathetic) group members. Just because the rules of play are not made explicit doesn't mean there aren't any. It does, however, place the newcomer at a serious disadvantage.

Jack Gibb also was against setting down rules prior to gathering. He said rules must emerge from the group

TORRI(?)

itself. That might be easier to do if each gathering were made up of strangers. There, the assumption would be (one hopes, anyway) that we all start out equal. But in an ongoing group, relationships form and carry over to subsequent gatherings. There, the non-relationships of strangers become different, and separate. The gathering is—through no fault of anybody—lopsided. (The alternative, obviously, is a closed group.) Existing relationships carry with them certain understandings, even *rules*. (“*She gets very upset if someone interrupts her, so I will make sure she has finished what she is saying before I respond.*”) Such rules or understandings don’t always make much sense, because they are often unspoken, much less negotiated. Chances are, a newcomer to the group will violate a number of rules without even knowing it, before becoming acclimated. With luck (and—*skill?*), the ensuing conflict will get clarified and resolved quickly, allowing everyone to start over in the complex process of building community.

Where does *responsibility* fit into this? Do we have a responsibility to know how to do it?

It seems to me that community is not about how to do it, even though we give a lot of effort to the process. It is about relationships. It is about belonging.

Jack Gibb’s four processes, *trust*, *openness*, *realization*, and *interdependence*, can be expressed as verbs, but their essence is a state of being, not an activity. And each of them is about relationships.

Dreams of Home

Responsibility is different. It affects my relationships, true enough. It's in the same category as *commitment*. These are both control words—exactly opposite to acceptance words like *trust* and *openness*. If I come into a group and feel *responsibility* and *commitment*, I am put off, rather than taken in. I have to guard my words. I am constrained to measure my feelings against what I perceive is appropriate. Instead of discovering myself and other people, I am *fitting in*.

Responsibility (and commitment, for that matter) may follow from my feeling of belonging, but it doesn't touch the depth of my soul, where those other things feel like *home*.

Valentine TORI

The four of us walked out the end door of the long, one-floor building into the bright sunlight. The gravel driveway glistened with melting snow and growing puddles of clear water. Debra turned her face up toward the sun, smiling, her eyes closed.. “It’s a good place for a TORI,” she said.

“It’s a good place for a TORI,” agreed Judith, swinging her bag into the trunk of her car.

We were the last to leave. While the two of them and Sean loaded their gear into their cars, I tossed my bags into my trunk and looked up the gentle slope toward the trees at the far side of the property. The snow was melting fast in the sunshine, and bits of grass and weeds were visible here and there. I couldn’t resist. Waving to the others, I walked through the snow and water up the slope.

A hundred yards away, I stopped and turned. The Emrich Center looked a little like a cluster of red farm buildings, except for the white trim—and the little cross at the peak of the chapel.

I felt just the breath of a breeze. The blue sky drew at me like the smell of fresh bread. I could launch my model airplane easily here, I thought. I wished it had occurred to me before the weekend, when I might have charged my flight batteries and stowed the plane into the car. It had

Dreams of Home

been months since I had been able to fly. Oh, well, maybe next time.

It occurred to me that I was feeling very mellow for the end of a TORI. Usually, I am very depressed and rushed, anticipating the arduous six-hour drive.

The other two cars were making their way carefully out through the ruts and puddles of the drive, lurching gently like old-fashioned carriages.

As I started back to my own car, I remembered bits of the weekend: the entire community on Friday evening meeting around the big dining table, discussing a topic Karen was writing an article about, “what is mental health?” in a good-natured exploration of how we experience our society and ourselves.

So often, such questions eventually become mere academic exercises, with the most knowledgeable person present rendering the final “correct” answer. Not here. No one was proved wrong. Instead, light was shed here, about the participants as much as about the topic.

Latecomers arrived and pulled up chairs to join the group. Chris and Jennifer and Russ from Grand Rapids, and Dave and Bethanie from Detroit. Debra came in, lugging a computer and a filing box of work she could not let go of, even for a TORI weekend. By eleven, I gave in to fatigue and went to bed. Before I fell asleep, I heard Bob Garrison’s rich voice, sounding fresh despite his six-hour drive from Toronto. Then Debra’s, leaving to pick up Sean at midnight back in Detroit.

Valentine **TORI**

The TORI had started small, with only three of us before dinnertime. Les, Mark and I had sat and talked, read and snoozed, then went out for groceries before others began to arrive.

It continued to be a laid-back weekend. There were about a dozen of us, altogether, with a couple of almost-new people fitting comfortably in to the group. The air outside was chilly, but most people managed to get out for walks in the sun (and mud). Inside the bright dining room, the sun was hot on backs and faces as we sprawled on mattresses strewn on the floor in our community space.

Saturday evening, we ate early (!), and our community meeting began by seven, because Dick had to leave for Kalamazoo so he could get up to go to work early Sunday morning. Sharing was rich and open, and the response was warm and supporting. There is nothing quite like that feeling of being in a group that is holding someone in its gentle embrace, silent and caring, waiting for tears of pain and relief to subside.

And that place, with all of our activities (save walks outside) contained in a single building, where the sleeping space is separated enough from the community space that one can choose at any time between solitude and community, that place that contains memories of many gatherings from many years, treated us well. I felt that community was *there*, always.

In that first promise of coming spring, I walked back to my car to leave. It was a good TORI.

Let It Be a Dance

Opinion - Don Skiff

Rick Maston, a Unitarian-Universalist minister and troubadour back around 1970, wrote a song called “Let it Be a Dance,” about the ways we are together. It’s just as relevant today, in our community, as it was to the flower children. The lyrics lose something on paper—Maston was a performer, most of all. But the theme of the song has stuck with me for twenty-five years. It’s an invitation to the dance—of life.

A dance is not without form, even the do-your-own-thing styles of dance popular for the past forty years. When you dance with someone, the way you move communicates how you feel the music. And it communicates something about the relationship. Like any communication, it is made up of a combination of redundancy and new information. Repetition and spontaneity. Repetition states the form, the rules of the communication, that enable the other person to understand the new information, the spontaneity.

Even a friendly conversation frequently resembles a dance. “*Some weather, eh?*” “*Yeah, really!*” “*Traffic bad coming in?*” “*Unbelievable.*” Small talk, mostly redundant and safe, sets up a pattern for the following give and take. The really important stuff, the new information, can be

Let it Be A Dance

presented when the tone, the form—the context—is agreed upon. Otherwise, one thinks, *“I don’t know what this guy’s talking about!”*

How we are in community is also a subtle blend of spontaneity and form. I often say that the whole point of community for me is that I feel accepted. No matter what I do, no matter how skillful or bumbling I am in expressing myself, I am confident that others will not turn me out. Point out my abrasive behavior, yes, but reject me, no. I belong. Now, I know that’s not absolutely true. No group will tolerate behavior that is too much beyond its norm, and no group will continue to welcome a person who violates the (usually unspoken) rules by which it plays. Those of us who come into an existing community must learn the ground rules as quickly as we can. If we’re lucky, those rules are not too foreign to us. If we try to change the rules, or impose our own on the group before we’ve been fully accepted, we risk being ignored, or even asked to leave.

The trouble is, the norms are seldom explicit, they are expressed differently by different people, and they change. Like Kafka’s protagonists, we can sometimes feel as though we’re in a dream, and we can’t make sense of anything. A new person coming into a group will often feel this, even if the existing members of the group think *“we don’t have any rules.”* If the new person happens to be burdened by a lack of self-confidence, she or he may wait a long time before taking any risks.

Dreams of Home

TORI community, like dancing, is an activity that is engaged in for its own sake—or, more accurately, for the feelings that are engendered. For it to work, the relationships involved have to be based upon mutual respect and a sense of common purpose. Jack Gibb's process terms, *Trust*, *Openness*, *Realization* and *Interdependence* apply equally to dance and to community. It may be easier to see the importance of these in considering the act of dancing (not that many people think much about theory when dancing) if we ask, "How do we want to be together?" If we don't ask that question of each other, even implicitly, we have a hard time getting to that elusive state of trust.

When I get tangled up in my conflicting needs and feelings about community, somehow it seems clearer when I remember Rick Maston's raspy voice singing "Let it Be a Dance."

Silence

. . . I read something in *Utne Reader* that reminded me of the last community meeting I attended on Sunday:

Silence ... could be said to be the ultimate province of trust: It is the place where we trust ourselves to be alone; where we trust others to understand the things we do not say. ... We babble with strangers; with intimates we can be silent. We "make conversation" when we are at a loss; we unmake it when we are alone, or with others so close to us that we can afford to be alone with them.

(Pico Iyer, in *Time*, 1/25/93)

What Draws Us?

Last night I watched a program on Public Television called "The Human Quest," in which the biological roots of social behavior were examined. The program attempts to describe "human nature" in the most universal sense, that which comes to us through our genes, rather than through our cultures.

They said that our evolutionary heritage was formed while we were still hunter-gatherers, when populations were small. Communities then were probably smaller than 150 persons, a number that allows face-to-face communication and individual assessment of our situations relative to others.

Because today we find ourselves in "societies" much larger than that, we no longer have the biologically determined skills for judging our safety and well-being. So we have, in the past few thousand years, begun to rely on cultural skills rather than biological skills. Sophistication, caution and even deception help us to cope with the dangers of the modern world.

It occurred to me that our yearning for "community" is perhaps a yearning for the *old* safety, the old sense of security that comes from "belonging" to a body of people whom we can trust because they are like us. The more we determine from the behavior of others that they share our values, the more we can trust them, and the more secure we feel.

What Draws Us?

When we go into a social situation and deliberately “trust” without first checking it out, we are ignoring our cultural training, and depending upon our old biological training. When it works, as it often does in TORI, we are rewarded by feelings of security that go far beyond those more tentative satisfactions we get from successfully navigating the dangerous maze of modern living.

Maybe the feeling of “belonging” that we speak of getting from a nurturing community experience touches something deep in our biology. No wonder we keep coming back.

And maybe that helps explain why even some of us who are no longer able to attend our gatherings still want to “keep in touch.”

Maybe, in a profound and ancient way, it's *home*.

What Draws Us? *A Survey*

In the last *Dear Friends...*, I put forward an idea about a possible biological basis for the yearning for community that many people report. For me, it was an interesting idea that might help explain the attraction of TORI. I won't claim it was thoroughly worked out as a hypothesis.

I've wondered since then what people would say about their own reasons for coming to TORI—both for their first time, and as they return.

As I've written before in this newsletter, TORI has pulled at me since about midway in my first TORI experience. Like others in their first contact, early in that weekend I felt totally isolated in the midst of what I perceived as a bunch of warm, wonderful people. It was only when I opened my own protective shell enough to admit how I was feeling that my crisis seemed to dissolve. The acceptance I felt afterward was one of the peak experiences in my life. That was over twelve years ago, and the echoes of that experience have made TORI feel like *home* to me. I can tell about that experience, and describe some of the people and some of the highlights of gatherings over the years, but the truth is that I don't

What Draws Us?

know exactly what it is that makes TORI so special in my life.

And I've wondered why some people *don't* come back. There are a number of people I've talked with who have good memories of their experiences at TORI over the past twenty years or so, but they seldom attend these days. Often there are always other things they want to do, or other obligations that make TORI a lower priority in their lives.

And I suspect that there are some who have that same yearning to belong that draws me, but who were not as fortunate as I in breaking through their own defenses, and so never experienced the acceptance. TORI may be that connection they want, yet they feel unable to risk possible rejection. Or perhaps they did, and somehow it didn't turn out well.

What are your reactions to this? Why do you come? Why don't you come? I'd like to hear from you, by any means and to any extent you're comfortable with (or not). In future newsletters, I'll compile the responses as it seems appropriate. I promise I'll respect your desire for anonymity, if you request it.

Don

What Draws Us?
Habits of the Heart

The end of May, I was talking with a friend about these questions I've been pondering lately about Community and TORI. He'd never heard of TORI, but he is deeply committed to some of the same ideals we try to live in our gatherings. He showed me a book, *Habits of the Heart*, published in the mid-Eighties by a group of people who studied our culture as it relates to the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville, a Frenchman who looked at America with a remarkably astute eye 150 years ago. There's not room in these pages to review the book, but I was struck by how much it addresses the questions I've been asking. I can't resist a quote that seems bursting with levels of meaning:

"We will need to remember that we did not create ourselves, that we owe what we are to the communities that formed us, and to what Paul Tillich called 'the structure of grace in history' that made such communities possible."

Even the title, which was a quote from Tocqueville, struck me as describing something I've recognized in TORI. If you are interested in the subject of *how we are to be together*, I recommend the book to you. It was published by Harper & Row.

What Draws Us?

Some Research

In the last *Dear Friends...*, I passed on an e-mail message from Kay Vogt, via William Polowniak, concerning some research she did on the psychological sense of community emerging in a TLC gathering in San Diego last winter.

I contacted Kay, and she agreed to share her dissertation with me. She also helped me reach David Goff in Palo Alto, who had done a similar study of participants of Community Building Workshops put on by a foundation started by Scott Peck and others. David, too, sent me a copy of his dissertation and an anthology of essays on community. I'm eager to dig into them, probably (I don't pretend to be objective about community) to see if they support my own ideas about what happens to us in community.

In his introduction to *Communitas: An Exploratory Study of the Existential and Transpersonal Dimensions of a Psychological Sense of Community as Found in the Community Building Workshop*, David Goff told of his impetus for the research:

"In 1987 I participated in a Community Building Workshop sponsored by the Foundation for Community Encouragement (FCE). During that workshop I experienced a palpable sense of unity with the other participants of the workshop. Remarkably, this occurred despite the fact that few of the participants knew each other or shared much more in common than a desire for

Dreams of Home

community in their lives. As a student of psychology I sensed that this experience had important implications. As a human being, I knew that I had been touched by a rare moment of grace which aroused in me a profound sense of peace and hope.

“Later, in the days, weeks, and months that followed I found it difficult to hold onto the experience, to replicate it in my day-to-day life, and to describe it to my friends, family and associates. This led to frustration and a longing to better understand the nature of this experience. Little did I know at the time that my desire to understand and sustain this experience would result in a three-year research project that would involve over 250 other people.”

Anybody who has been to TORI who doesn't know those feelings?

Something else I found interesting in a brochure David sent me: he defines “interdependence” as “a mutual dependence upon the quality of the synergy that is created through our interactions.” For me, that raises the “I” in TORI to something considerably more intriguing than my previous perception of it, which I think was more like, *well, yes, there's Interdependence, too.*

Clink. Something else just fell into place.

I haven't been this aroused by anything since the first time I made a perfect take-off with my radio-controlled seaplane.

If you have anything you want to share about all this, you can call, write or e-mail me.

What Draws Us?
More than Personal

I've read David Goff's dissertation (see the previous Dear Friends...), and I was impressed by how closely the personal effects of Community Building Workshops, as described by his respondents, match what I have felt at TORI. Mostly, it confirms to me that there is something that happens in a group, sometimes, that goes beyond the individual responses each of us experiences through our particular filters of the moment.

I hope that makes sense. I know that my state of mind and my expectations affect strongly how I experience TORI. I assume it's true for each of us. What I get from this research is that there's something more, something not only shared by the members of a group but created by the interactions.

So, you may say, of course—I've known that for years. What's new about that?

Well, maybe it's because I am easily swayed by people and events that reinforce *what I want to believe*. And I've been disappointed many times when my "discoveries" turn out to be naïve inferences (like falling in love with a totally wrong person). So I try to keep my guard up (my "healthy skepticism") and demand that my experiences be checked out against something more objective. (And yes, I

Dreams of Home

know that I probably limit, thereby, the amount of joy in my life—but that’s another story.)

For years I’ve accepted my TORI experience pretty much at face value. At the same time (or, rather, in between times), I’ve wanted to integrate what I’ve felt with a reality I have more confidence in—what makes sense after the feelings fade. David Goff, in the introduction to his dissertation, wrote of the frustration of trying to hang onto the emotional knowledge of a community experience, and trying to communicate it to others. We’ve probably all known that frustration. David did something about it, and I’m grateful.

I recognize that I don’t know a factor analysis from a standard deviation, so I hope his work stimulates some “healthy skepticism” by others who do. Research results need confirmation by replication. It’s a lot easier to write about “truth” when it doesn’t have to be tested. My left brain needs nourishment, too.

In the meantime, I’ll savor this. If you have anything you want to share about all this, please call, write or e-mail me.

David Goff Revisited

*by Les Beach*³

In “Dear Friends...” for September and October, Don Skiff made references to David Goff’s dissertation based on a study of participants of Community Building Workshops sponsored by the Foundation for Community Encouragement (Scott Peck, founder). Don mentioned that the reported personal effects of these workshops seemed to match closely what he has felt at TORI.

I agree with Don that such a study needs replication, and I hope someone or FCE may do that. And actually I find it hard to believe that some of the Astron and Omicron interns and disciples of Jack Gibb and TORI theory have not done some study similar to Goff’s on TORI Community participants. Maybe they have, but I don’t know of any such study. Any serious research on community is of great interest to me.

Before giving my reading on Goff’s findings, we should describe briefly his method of research: factor analysis. It is a highly sophisticated research technique for “shaking down” the responses of many people to many

³ I’ve included in this book a few pieces written by others in order to expand on or explain something that seems relevant to what I’m trying to convey. This, as well as the others, is used with the writer’s permission.

Dreams of Home

questionnaire items in order to identify the major, non-overlapping variables (or characteristics) measured by those many items.

By analyzing the correlations among the many responses, items/questions which cluster around a common theme are identified. Each succeeding factor analytic run through the data determines the “next most significant” variable. Each time, the cluster of survey items is then examined and a descriptive name assigned for that “factor.” The result is a short list of “pure,” independent descriptors of whatever it is the entire survey has produced

So this is what Goff did, querying Community Building Workshop participants about their Workshop experience and the subsequent impact the Workshop had upon their feelings and attitudes. His factor analysis of the responses of 234 Community Building Workshop participants to 98 questions yielded the following 6 primary Factors:

Factor 1: SENSE OF COMMUNITY; i.e., feelings of kindness and compassion among participants, a sense of oneness with others, a sense of sacredness, a strong sense of emotional connection, and a sense of identification with others which extended to humanity as a whole.

Factor 2: THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHERNESS; i.e., recognition of separateness and difference from others that was characterized by alienation, distrust, judgment, and feelings of vulnerability. (Goff concluded that these “negative” feelings actually “played an important

David Goff Revisited

catalytic role during the workshop.” They may be related to the stage in community building which Scott Peck refers to as “chaos.”)

Factor 3: SENSE OF THE HUMAN EXISTENTIAL DILEMMA; i.e., an experience of human limitations and uncertainty, a realization of how preconceptions separate people, recognition of how complex and paradoxical reality is for limited and imperfect beings, and feelings of vulnerability, compassion and kindness.

Factor 4: SENSE OF ENGAGEMENT; i.e., engagement with others and with the community building process, yet experiencing an amalgam of resentment and regard for others. [A somewhat perplexing, puzzling Factor. -lb]

Factor 5: SENSE OF PERSONAL EXISTENTIAL DILEMMA; i.e., an experience of personal uncertainty and an awareness of weakness and limitations, feelings of vulnerability and distrust, an uneasiness that catalyzes involvement with the process.

Factor 6: SENSE OF A DIFFICULT EXPERIENCE; e.g., accepting the fragility of the human condition, experiencing reticence and ambivalence but taking responsibility for the pain and disruption caused by our desire to avoid encounters, encountering the confounding existence of multiple competing realities.

We should note that the *proportion* of the total questionnaire’s variance attributable to any Factor, *drops* as succeeding Factors are sorted out. Factor 1 accounted for 27% of the variance; Factor 2 accounted for 12%; Factor

Dreams of Home

3, 6%; Factor 4, 4%, Factor 5, less than 4%, and Factor 6, only 3%.

Note also that Goff is describing Factors related to “a psychological sense of community,” Factors which, in his words “contribute to an emotional sense of connection.” Respondents are reporting what they experience in the process of community building. He is not describing community itself; nor is he seeking to identify the elements of (true) community, such as T, O R, and I.

So what do Goff’s findings mean? In summing up some of the implications of his study, Goff writes: “The experience of community apparently provides the individual access to a degree of wholeness exceeding the boundaries of the usual identification with the ego. The findings suggest that individuals have access to a greater sense of self in collective states.” Goff did have some special interest in exploring transpersonal and existential dimensions of the community building experience. Are these dimensions of the TORI experience we might wish to explore further, also?

An even broader implication of the study is offered by Goff: “[It is] the struggle to renew the sense of connection inherent in community which is so relevant to today’s need. The problems we face today are problems generated by the lack of human relatedness, to self, other, and the cosmos. In short, the way we relate to each other defines the way we relate to the environment and to other human cultures.”

David Goff Revisited

I agree. I'd only add: would that we could learn to base that relating on TRUST, OPENNESS, REALIZATION, AND INTERDEPENDENCE!

Les

What Draws Us?
Do We Need Theory?

I felt complete after the New Year's TORI was over, and on the long drive home Judith and I discussed how different the gatherings are sometimes. Later, we heard that events during the weekend had generated some feelings that had not been dealt with in community. That's too bad, because the opportunity for resolution may not come again. Even bringing it up at the next gathering might not help, because each gathering is made up of a different mix of people, and the interim only allows feelings to ferment. My understanding of TORI is that a group can resolve almost anything if the members trust enough to be open with their feelings.

Someone has suggested that we try some "TORI Theory" sessions at upcoming gatherings, not to "teach" but to attend consciously to the process and share with each other ways that we've learned how to get what we need from a community gathering. Sometimes I need to be reminded of what I know works but can't always seem to achieve.

One thing seems certain: if *we*, collectively, don't do it, it won't get done. There is no "they" in TORI, only "we."

What Draws Us?
Intimacy

One of the inestimable benefits of having dropped out of the rat race⁴ (busy as I remain) is that I can read what I want. The *Utne Reader*, coming every other month, is a continual delight and spiritual stimulant to me. This compilation of the “best of the alternative media” is a Reader’s Digest of the truly worthwhile, and furnishes me with mountains of ideas from which to soar. If it has an axe to grind, it’s the idea that “we’re all in this together.”

In the latest issue, it pulls together some thoughts from twenty current “visionaries” who, in their own ways, are working to make a better world. Jon Spayde, the editor of this compilation, writes in his introduction:

“The new thinkers are coming to see ‘knowledge as intimacy rather than power.’ It’s a perfect explanation of the sensibility I felt again and again as I spoke with the contributors to this section. When Larry Dossey calls for a science that will invite nature to share its secrets like a friend; when Margo Anand bases social health on happy, exalted physical love; when William ‘Upski’ Wimsatt, following Plato, defines justice as friendship, it’s clear that intimacy is taking on new powers of explanation and inspiration. Intimate knowledge, whether it is of a butterfly, a neighborhood, a human, or an era of history,

⁴ I retired from my usual work about that time.

Dreams of Home

refuses to objectify, to enslave, to torture the one known into giving the knower what he or she wants to know; it is tactful, mutual, good humored, the knowledge of the wonderer, the muser, the lover. It is dynamic and revisable. It fits into no corporate report or five-year plan."

Lately it seems that I relate everything to community, to TORI. But this description of the extensions of intimacy reminds me of feelings I expressed so often in my early TORI days, that *we are* the real world—and the chaos of competitiveness, fear and guarded relationships outside is the part that is screwed up and unreal. Like that first explosion of wonder and delight in a new love, I never want to forget those feelings.

What Draws Us?
Who Speaks for Us?

At the Easter TORI, we struggled with the effort to come to a consensus about our future—whether and how to attempt to increase our numbers, whether to continue committing ourselves to the level of rent at Woodland Trails, how to continue our community in a form that works for us. At the end, it was difficult for me to say conclusively, “Here’s what we decided.”

Late in the night Saturday, after our hard work on some of these issues, someone asked, “What if someone were to take it on themselves to, say, print up and distribute some flyers in health food stores?” The response was something like, “That’s up to them to decide. They may, however, face some consequences in the response of other members of the community.”

After turning this over in my mind since the weekend, I come to some feeling of clarity *for me*. It addresses not only the actions of individuals who might choose to publicize our gathering, but those of a group from the community asking someone to stay away for a time, as well as my own decisions regarding what to put into the newsletter. It seems to me that this is a matter crucial to our community and how we as individuals relate to it.

We differ from other communities that I know about in that the right of the individual is almost sacred. I can choose when and how to participate—to speak in

Dreams of Home

community (or not), to compile a two-page newsletter or a six-page tome, to help with dishes or meal preparation—whatever. I have written some editorials in this newsletter about my view of the responsibility community members have (and, in moments of discouragement, not written some even stronger ones). But now I have a new feeling about it.

Who has the “right” to speak for the community? I think I’ve concluded in the past that a gathering is by definition a quorum, no matter how few the participants. Where do we go for the next gathering? How do we handle an on-going conflict? When do we ask someone to leave? It seems the only workable way for an ever-changing community to continue. Still, it’s troubled me. I’ve suggested that we might look for an alternative, at least regarding our on-going aspect (for example, who signs checks or the contracts with facilities). We have what seemed to me a schizophrenic community—autonomous weekend gatherings and a continuing institution, each with different needs.

I’d like to have some dialog with you about an alternative: *when it is possible, the individual prerogative reigns*. For example, nobody can “speak for” the entire community unless the entire community is present for discussion and consensus. I can do dishes my way, and you are free to suggest another (or follow along after me with your own supportive or corrective technique). I can approach someone on the street and suggest that they attend our gathering. *In doing so, however, I must be clear that the action*

What Draws Us?

I take is my own. It's up to me to give thought to the consequences. If I think that a person is dangerous or destructive to the community, I can approach that person and express my personal point of view.

All of that is consistent with what we do in our community meetings. We defend the right of everyone to his or her opinion and way of expressing it, while at the same time defending the right of others to take exception to what is said. We respect the individual, even while we may ask for gentleness or tact or a different use of words. I may feel that you are attacking someone, but I'll try very hard to express it in a way that owns my own feelings and words, and does not presume any other authority.

I admit I hedged a little in my proposed "principle." *When it is possible* allows for what I feel should be very rare situations in which some one or some number of individuals must be considered as representing the entire community. How we would determine those situations is not clear to me.

There is (even though we often have difficulty verbalizing it) a distinct philosophy implied in TORI. There may not really be a "TORI Theory," in the sense that I understand the word *theory*, but the way we do things together is characteristic of something unique, something that I think is wonderful and important to our whole society.

That unique quality has to do with the relationship of the individual to the community. The words *leaderless* and *leaderful*, the two sides of a single coin, express something

Dreams of Home

that I believe is more profound than I sometimes give it credit for. It may not be the most efficient way to get things done. It may violate many people's need for group accountability. It may be frustrating when I think I see a situation with more clarity than I think you do. But with practice and mutual encouragement, we just might have something.

What I'm proposing here is that we look more closely at this relationship, and that we talk about it so that the core of our truth can emerge. Maybe then we can answer someone who asks, "What is TORI?"

What Draws Us?
Virtual Community

Judith and I haven't made it to Toronto this summer, and I've missed it. Various family things have come up each time. This has happened before, and I've felt cut off from my TORI family. As the months go by without getting my reassuring TORI hugs, I begin to forget what it feels like. And my relationships there seem somehow distant.

This year, it's not been so bad in that respect. (I almost feel as though I need to apologize for the following.) Almost every day, there's a message or two from TORI people waiting for me on Compuserve. Over the weeks, I don't feel so cut off from people. No, it's not the same as sitting in the midst of you all and feeling the good vibes and sometimes-intense emotions of the group. But it's better than sitting here watching the images in my memory slowly fade. I could telephone, but that's not something I do easily, even when I want to—sometimes, *especially* when I want to. I've read about some of the things that happened at the in-town gatherings, and of course I wish I had been there.

What I've noticed is that "virtual community," as some have labeled this online connection, has something to say for it. Maybe it's second-best, when compared with a physical gathering, but it has for me a special value.

I used to write letters a lot more than I have recently, and I especially enjoyed taking a few minutes to read the replies

Dreams of Home

after the letter carrier made his rounds. There's a thoughtfulness, perhaps, inherent in letter writing and reading. I feel an intimacy that I seldom get even in TORI gatherings, maybe because with all the people, it's harder to focus on one person at a time (slow walks with someone in the woods at Woodland Trails are often the best moments for me).

Participating in the TORI list server, where all the messages are distributed to everyone else, is much like a community meeting, except very drawn out in time. Sometimes people reveal deep and important things about themselves, and wait anxiously for responses. I've felt awe at the courage it must have taken to be so vulnerable in a "community" one can't see.

And we're still experimenting. Because of the differences between this kind of community gathering and the kind we've experienced in the past, it's hard to know quite how to do it. I've also been participating in another community list at the same time, and many of the same things come up. (One would think these were TORI people!) But it's clear that human intimacy is possible even if the participants are scattered all over the world. I'm in awe, sometimes, at the intensity shared.

Even though it's not the same as being there, what amazes me is that like-minded people can connect so profoundly when the desire is there, and the trusting, the opening, the realizing, and the interdepending.

What Draws Us?
Two Communities

For a long time, I've been aware that there are two Toronto TORI Communities—one being the unique experience of a gathering, where community is re-created anew out of the people who are there, and the other our ongoing community that allows us to relate to something that's always *there* for us in our hearts, and to know each other in more depth through the years.

Each time we gather, I learn more about someone I had thought I knew before, and this picture in my head when I think of them changes, sometimes subtly and sometimes remarkably.

So I experienced both during the Labour Day TORI, learning about people I didn't know before, and learning more about people I've already come to care for. And knowing that ours is not a one-night stand, I come away comfortable that I'm likely to have more opportunities to develop from what may have been a brief opening volley of a friendship, or the discovery of a new facet on the jewel of a warm and rewarding relationship.

What Draws Us? Being Here

I was digging through hundreds of hours of video tape last week, searching for a segment of Richard singing and playing “Today” – you remember the song, “*Today, while the blossoms still cling to the vine...*” I found it impossible to simply fast forward through all those scenes of TORIs past, so the search took a long time. Talk about nostalgia. It’s interesting to me how insistent I was for a time to record those experiences, hold onto them somehow (one shot of a New Year’s fireplace went on for over six minutes). I remember feeling back then how fragile are the best experiences, how easily lost or never had, through inattention or the ever-present clutter in my mind. Last week I was grateful for the pictures and enjoyed all over again those TORIs.

Since then, I’ve been thinking about that, and realizing that I don’t take my camcorder to TORI anymore, and seldom take a camera. It’s not that TORI is any less important to me now. I’d like to think that it’s because I want to be *present* more, be more involved in what’s going on, rather than hiding behind a camera. I’ve never tried to video a community meeting – it’s always been obvious to me how much of what’s important to me I’d miss in the process. For community meetings are still the part of TORI that I keep coming back for. And I know that I can’t

What Draws Us?

capture on tape the depth that is the essence of a community meeting.

Much as I enjoy being around you all, relaxed and unhurried, sharing conversations, music, eating together or playing, it is in our coming together in community that I value most. That is where I can really see into you, when you're able to let me, and that is where I am most apt to feel safe in revealing myself to you. Oh, I do one-to-one pretty well, with a few people. Trust is usually easy with proven friends. But it's only when we're all together, paying close attention to one another without the distraction of *doing*, that I can practice Trust.

Even the intense community meetings, or maybe especially those, get past the superficial gloss and reveal who we are deep inside. *That's* the part I love. If there are issues between us, it's at that deepest level that we can recognize the humanness that connects us, and resolve our issues from positions of respect and love. *That's* where the magic happens.

Photographs, even moving pictures with sound, can't reach that depth of us, individually or as a community. So the next time you see me peering at you through the lens of a camera, ask me what I *really* want.

What Draws Us?

Another Version

I was in Atlanta a couple of weeks ago to spend the weekend with some folks I met through a community-oriented e-mail list. Almost nobody knew anybody else except through e-mail messages, so it was an interesting experiment. While we held more or less to the FCE style of community building, we had no facilitator, so it was remarkably similar to a TORI gathering.

The big difference was that the whole group agreed to stay in community for the whole time. Since we didn't have to prepare our own meals, we were in community meetings from 9 am to noon and from 1 pm to dinnertime. A couple of evenings we met for "aside" activities. It was very intense.

We observed the usual guidelines about using "I" statements, not trying to "fix" others or giving unasked-for advice, and to speak only when moved to speak (that's a biggie, intended to cut out idle chatting and pastiming). We monitored our progress "toward community" through Scott Peck's four stages of *pseudocommunity*, *chaos*, *emptying* and *community*. We didn't always agree on just where we were in the process, but it was interesting to watch the group change. There were eleven of us, about half of whom had been through one or more Community Building Workshops.

What Draws Us?

At the end, I felt euphoric, not only that the weekend had gone well for me but that I had consciously asserted myself into the process at several points, overcoming my usual passivity. Not everyone came away feeling complete, however. There were some unresolved feelings that surfaced at the last minute (something that happens occasionally at TORI, eh?). We decided to maintain our connection for a limited time by e-mail, to give us an opportunity for closure. Since we all came into the weekend from our e-mail connections, nobody had to be left out of the post-weekend decompression.

Naturally, I did (and am still doing) a lot of comparing in my head between this experience and my TORI experiences. Many of the differences are the differences between a one-time community and an ongoing community. What struck me was the similarity in my feeling, at times, of being intimately connected to other people. Down deep inside, beneath the layers of protective emotions and walls of words, there seems to be a place of stillness, of quiet awareness that we are somehow all the same, all connected. I can be centered and still by myself, but when I'm in that state in the midst of people also there, it's special.

Note: I wrote something else right after that Atlanta gathering – see “Looking Down Through a Hole in the Clouds . . .” on page 156.

What Draws Us?

Activism

I've been reading some literature and correspondence about the Foundation for Ethics and Meaning, an organization started, as I understand, by Michael Learner, editor of *Tikkun*, a magazine in Washington, DC. There's a local chapter in Ann Arbor, and Judith and I attended part of a conference last June. Learner wrote a book, *the Politics of Meaning*, describing his ideas for getting our society back to caring and community. Naturally, I was inclined to be sympathetic to the "movement" (if it can be called that, yet).

But I'm having trouble with the whole thing, just as I had trouble with the Communitarian ideas (spelled out by Amitai Etzioni). What bothers me is that in pursuing their objectives, that have to do *with making people care more for each other*, they emphasize the need for people taking more responsibility for each other and the society. Not that I have a problem with taking responsibility – it's just that it feels like they're going about it backwards. I keep wanting to hear more about how we can learn how to *be* with each other, to respect and trust each other on a personal level. Then, it seems to me, taking responsibility will occur naturally. Am I naïve?

I'm not suggesting it's easy. The struggles we've had in TORI attest to the continuing difficulty people have with

What Draws Us?

acknowledging and honoring each other's differences. Isn't that why TORI exists – to learn how to do just that?

At the other end of the opinion scale, I also remember a book by Lillian White, back around 1950, titled *Now is the Time*, a call for the U.S. Supreme Court to outlaw laws promoting racial segregation (which it eventually did). Ms White argued that the Court had a powerful teaching function, as well as a constitutional function. Making segregation against the law would, she said, influence public opinion and help wake up the citizenry to the injustice—the immorality—of segregation. It's hard to argue against that notion, forty-five years later, after the sweeping changes in our attitudes around race, gender and lifestyle prejudices. I may not agree that my behavior is wrong, but if it is clearly against the law, I will tend to think about it more, and unless I'm completely rabid, I may even come to see the other side.

So if the Communitarians and the Politics of Meaning people can influence the society to be more caring by pointing out our responsibilities to each other, I guess I shouldn't complain about what works. Maybe it's the rebel in me. I don't want to be dragged into caring for others, but if someone were to just show me their humanity and offer me their hand, I'm as easy as our dog Tasha.

What Draws Us?

Transcendence

The universe exists as levels of consciousness—or, perhaps more accurately, as the *process of unfolding* levels of consciousness—according to philosopher Ken Wilber. From physical matter, to the simplest forms of life, to higher forms, to mind, to the psychic, on up to the levels of true spirit, each level incorporates and integrates the lower manifestations that it includes. At some point in its existence, each has the ability to *transcend itself, to reveal yet another level*. Evolution is simply this process, moving from the simpler to the more complex. (Transcendence is not, however, inevitable; something special occurs that cannot be explained in Darwinian terms. But that’s another subject.)

This process applies not only to physical entities but to *everything*. Although Wilber doesn’t address it directly, according to his work it must be that *community itself* is included. If he is correct, then there must be *something* up one step from Trust Theory, from what we experience as TORI. It’s intriguing to wonder what this might look like, and how we might get there.

Far fetched? I suggest you read Ken Wilber’s *Eye to Eye* (at least) before dismissing the idea. He has managed to breach my skeptical walls, even though I have to admit it’s still very new to me. Mysticism has never been a satisfying subject for me. But it was, in fact, my obsession

What Draws Us?

with what I've whimsically called the "magic" that sometimes happens in community that led me to read Wilber's books.

It seems just possible that looking at (especially TORI-style) community from this angle might give us some insight into "What Draws Us" as well as into where Jack Gibb's dream might lead us.

What Draws Us?
Being Connected

I'm hesitant to speak too much in these pages about the on-line part of our community, because it's not available to all of us, and that may create a feeling of separation in those who cannot access the Internet to join with the others of us who are there.

This is an exception, however, because I want to describe a remarkable thing that took place on the TORI list.

On January 22, we read this message from Richard:

Richard Here:

My angina has been getting steadily worse. I've been doing research about angina on the Web and I just read an article in the MERK MANUAL which says that such "unstable angina" is very serious and that some 30 per cent of patients with it will have a heart attack within three months of onset.

Sudden death, the Manual says, is "less common."

My doctor wants me to start setting myself up for an angioplasty, in which they use a balloon on the end of a catheter to ream out one or more of your coronary arteries, then leave a mesh "stent" inside to keep it open. Scares the hell out of me.

I wish I had someone to hold my hand.

Love,
RICHARD

Three days later, Riça reported to us that Richard had checked himself into the hospital, and had called to ask her to let us know.

For the following twelve days, there was a steady stream of messages, from people reporting on phone conversations with Richard or with medical personnel about him, and from well-wishers exchanging thoughts and feelings about this member of our community. Someone ordered a bunch of balloons for him at the hospital. Two of the community drove to Chicago to visit with him, and reported on the experience. His progress was a continuing topic of conversation every day. Someone volunteered to capture messages that were building up in his own email mailbox. Someone else relayed information about him to people on other email lists that he participated in. Richard was in everybody's mind and heart for nearly two weeks.

On February 6, Richard was back home and at his computer, once more reporting to us "live." Collectively, we breathed again.

To me all this speaks not only of the real benefit of the amazing technology we're adopting, but of the "glue" that binds us in personal crises, the actuality of the TORI "community." I felt Richard's presence in my life during that time, and the presence of the whole community.

Dreams of Home

What Draws Us?

Meaning of Community

We've had conversations, both in physical community and online, about where we are as a community, where we're headed, how we may have strayed from some rather ill-defined original path. Some people tire of these questions: TORI is what it is, it is whatever we want it to be, whatever we choose to make it. Those of us who are here, however few, constitute the community, and they are sufficient. Because TORI is about relationships, not institutions.

That's true, of course. I am in a relationship with Judith, and what that relationship looks like to us is important. It doesn't have to conform to some external image of "marriage" or fit someone else's definition of "relationship." The important question is whether it is mutually satisfying and fulfilling to us.

Yet, under the surface, and indeed, under the deep understandings we have about our relationship, lies a shared vision. Not just about the two of us but about how we want to be in the world. My wife and I talk about our separate and shared vision a lot—not formally, but every day, in observations about the things we see and events we read about. We continually fill in the gaps in our understanding of ourselves and each other as we share our thoughts and feelings between us. The process takes our relationship deeper, day-by-day. And most

importantly, *we each gather more and more bits of deep seeing into the nature of being.*

In Buddhism there's a word, *sangha*, that means the community that supports one's practice, one's path toward enlightenment. While the real work of moving toward enlightenment must fall upon the individual, sitting alone on her cushion, the sangha provides an important support and encouragement, and reminds one of what it is one has set out to do. The *vision*.

In TORI, the vision has to do with *how it is possible for people to be together in harmony and trust, for each person to follow her own needs and dreams while having the support and encouragement of others equally encouraged to follow their own hearts.* On one level, the trust comes in that if I do what I need to do, and allow you to do what you need to do, the process will result in our solidifying our relationship so that it helps us continue to fulfill our individual needs.

It's easy to get stuck on that level. As long as what I do doesn't offend you, and you continue to make my life pleasurable, the process seems to work.

There's a deeper level at work in both of us, one that has to do with how we come to perceive our places in Life. The real richness of being alive doesn't come from the breadth of experience, but from the depth. I'm beginning to see that I miss something important in my life if I'm not awake to that depth. If I don't look at my internal experience and try to discover meaning, I'm condemned

Dreams of Home

to seeing only the surface, and will end my life having only half lived. Less than half.

Vision is the outward thrusting of meaning. If the vision of our community is only to spend a pleasurable weekend with friends, however comforting that might be, we are denying ourselves—and those whom we touch—something precious.

Part Three

My Essays on E-mail

Early in 1997 I joined an Internet mailing list that was formed to allow people who had participated in a Community Building Workshop to continue contact with others who sought the community experience.

That participation allowed me to develop a lot of my ideas about community and articulate them. Even though the mailing list was intended to be a forum for dialog rather than a podium for essays, some of my own contributions to the list seemed to amount to the latter, and may reveal some more of the development of my understanding of community.

These messages are selections from my archives of that time.

Dreams of Home

FROM: Donald Skiff, donsiff@compuserve.com
TO: Move to Speak, MV2SPK@LISTS.IO.COM
DATE: 2/7/97 11:56 AM

This is Don,

I've been re-reading some recent posts, and an awareness seemed to seep out from them. "Moved to speak" suggests to me an out-of-balance situation, a need to integrate or even just express something that needs to be integrated inside me. It may be a discomfort, or it may be a swell of feeling that seeks a home. *I need to do something.* This is where my energy comes from. This is the source of my passion. If I am perfectly content, which happens rarely and fleetingly, I have no need to do anything. I can just be.

Part of me thinks that is an ideal state. To lie on my back in a meadow and watch the clouds. Nothing is expected of me, I need nothing. In the real world, this lasts for minutes, at most an hour or two. (Not, of course, in Michigan in February. <s>)

Another part of me recognizes that my brokenness, my just-under-the-surface pain, my fear, my despair, my loneliness, my apprehensions are just as big a part of me as my serenity, and perhaps more important. They are what move me. I know I cannot write unless I am feeling. I say often that writing is *me,* the act that defines me to me. If I write when I'm not moved by

My Essays on E-Mail

something, it comes our drivell. In the presence of others, if I speak without being moved, the words come out as thin and flavorless as skim milk. When others speak or write from that deep place inside, the place that is full of passion and pain and joy, I drink their words and some part of me is nourished. Sometimes I resonate with it. Sometimes it awakens in me a need to respond, sometimes the response is still too deep for me to articulate.

But it's in that resonance that I know I'm alive, and I'm not alone. All my plans and purposes and activities seem superficial, compared to that. If my loneliness moves me to touch someone else, it has value to me. If my fear moves me to support another, it gives me strength, as well. As tortured as I might feel in the darkness, I know that it's not my serenity that makes me human.

Thanks for reminding me...

Don

Dreams of Home

FROM: Donald Skiff, donskiff@compuserve.com
TO: NGCB, INTERNET:NGCB-L@LISTS.IO.COM
DATE: 2/12/97 10:34 AM

Re: NGCB The big issue

This is Don,

Peter, you wrote:

>My current tentative conclusion, based on some >personal experiences and thought, as well as >conversations with others, is that the >workshops are >just a taster of what can be, >but I need a completely different set of tools >and approaches in order to make community work >for me in everyday life. Have others come to >similar, or different, conclusions?

I've been scratching my head a lot lately over this question. It even ties into the question Jerry Hampton raised ("Community and Love," 2/10/97) about ongoing communities that seem to be disintegrating. My phrasing is something like, "How relevant are the tools we learn in community to the 'real world'?" As an ongoing community becomes "the real world," are the (effective) tools different? When the honeymoon is over, how do we then treat each other?

In a weekend workshop, we may agree on some expectations (guidelines?) such as "speak from the 'I', don't give advice unless asked, speak when moved, don't speak

My Essays on E-Mail

judgments, etc." Someone recently quoted Scott Peck as referring to these expectations as manifesting "extraordinary respect." That feels true to me—if I *really* respect those I'm with, these are the ways I can interact with them honestly and with integrity.

One of the obvious differences between a weekend gathering and the outside world is that the task is simply the process. There's no organizational purpose other than the here and now. If I am part of a business, however, I am expected to accomplish things that go beyond the here and now process. I may be required to judge another person's conduct or performance. As a parent in a family, I may have to advise (or more) my child about her or his actions. I can't simply follow verbatim the expectations of the CB model.

But if I have learned from the workshop the value of "extraordinary respect"—and it will take me more than one weekend to learn—I'm apt to do my duties and perform my roles in a different way. I can take away from the workshop some knowledge of how people respond to different ways of communicating, and even some confidence that I can respond to challenges without violating my or someone else's self-respect. What I see me learning in these admittedly "artificial" environments is a new way of dealing with others, one that

Dreams of Home

acknowledges the humanness—the strengths and the weaknesses—of people, including myself. I may even be able to redefine my roles, perhaps not to abandon them completely, but to assess what is required and what is merely habit or unnecessary self-protection.

The rewards are personal. If I don't have to react to others out of fear, I will like myself more. If my behavior is a manifestation of my respect for others, I will respect myself more. If I find that my environment simply will not allow me to change to a more human way of interacting with people, I may decide that I have to change my environment. I know several people who have said, and acted upon, "This isn't the way I want to live any more."

There's a measure of faith here, I know. Utopia eludes me. Anguish is sometimes keen. If I'm wrong, I'll be wrong for a better reason than the old way.

Don

My Essays on E-Mail

FROM: Donald Skiff, donskiff
TO: ("Share" group)
DATE: 2/11/97 3:03 PM

This is Don,

It's so interesting how events in my life seem to coalesce into something meaningful without my effort, often without my noticing. That feeling-sorry-for-myself post yesterday was perhaps an indication of the approach of something. Last night Judith and I were talking about TORI and what importance it has, aside from giving people good feelings. If it disappeared, would the world be poorer, or would the individuals simply find new sources of (what-pleasure? joy? intensity?) whatever keeps them coming back?

I had no ready answer, but as I thought of it, it seemed that TORI gatherings, like Community Building Workshops (and Atlanta⁵) and all the other experiences we sometimes call "community" aren't simply ego massages. I've learned so much about how to be with other people authentically-honestly and openly-so different from what I learned earlier in life, which was how to be polite and nice, how to make people like me not for who I am but for how I made them feel. I had learned to lie, if necessary, to

⁵ A weekend gathering of people from MV2SPK mailing list.

Dreams of Home

protect myself or to protect others' feelings. I wore a mask, and never let people know *really* who I was. In turn, I never knew other people, not really, for what they showed me were *their* masks. And I even hid from myself behind my own. When the chips were down, when the masks got knocked off, the realities that came out were unexpected and frightening. I wasn't able to understand this sudden "stranger" I had thought I knew. Often, I fled. Or they did.

What I'm learning is that it doesn't have to be that way. Putting people in a confined space for a weekend can magnify the little differences and force participants to face the emotional storms that result. I learned that I won't die if I don't do it right. The next person is just as vulnerable inside as I. And when that tender part of us connects, walls tumble. I fled from TORI only once, but fortunately I returned, and found something that felt like home. Like the home in my dreams, where I was accepted and where I learned how to hear negative as well as positive things about myself, and not swallow either of them whole. I grew up in a world of judgment and criticism—a loving home, but not an accepting one. And the world outside was a jungle. If you couldn't compete, you got bashed. I didn't know there was any other way. It's an interesting paradox that now I am stronger

My Essays on E-Mail

than I was when I had to be, because I'm not afraid of being weak.

Share is part of this new feeling I have. Suzanne, your "invitation" prompted this:

>It occurs to me just now, that one of the >things that "works" in SHARE is that we tend >to simply respond to each other, not judge (as >those people in one of your other groups, Don, >apparently did in declaring that you were too >introspective).

>While this attribute might be in some way >seemingly unrealistic (this deserves a lot >more discussion than I am giving it here!!!) >it also has it's peculiar importance in why I >think we are all feeling so great about SHARE, >and how it is "working"...

>Sorry, there I go, diving into a very deep >inviting subject and then jumping back out and >running off dripping wet (to school!)

To me Share is a special place. At times I feel very protective of it, and that may, indeed, be unrealistic. Real honesty can be unsettling sometimes. If it comes out as judgment, it can be destructive. Whenever I feel critical or judgmental, there is always fear or hurt under it. It's when I can dig down to the level of my fear or my pain that I can be really honest without hurting someone else. That's what I'm (slowly) learning how to do. Learning how to trust.

Dreams of Home

The water's fine—c'mon in!

My Essays on E-Mail

TO: mv2spk mv2spk@lists.io.com
SUBJECT: Re: Where are we?
FROM: Donald Skiff 70140,200
DATE: (unknown)

This is Don,

Some years ago I attended a summer assembly of a religious denomination, a weeklong series of lectures, workshops, playing in the sun, talking long into the nights. I came home breathless from the experience, determined to change my life to be more like that week—*feeling* everything, the roller-coaster of emotions, the screaming despair, the chest-bursting joy, the quiet sadness of holding another human being in their pain, the feeling of being connected to everybody and everything. When I spoke of this to another who had been there, they asked, "Why would you want to put yourself through that all the time?" They spoke of the rawness of the tension, the agony of close friends angry with each other, the uncertainty of every moment. They didn't want to go, ever again. "I felt alive," I said.

I feel alive in mv2spk, too. It's not that it isn't important to me whether we "achieve community" or not. It's that I feel how much it means to everyone. I don't handle other people's anger very well, especially if it's directed at me. I have this powerful urge to try to make peace when people I care about are in conflict.

Dreams of Home

What I've been hearing the past few days is not the arguing of people whose values oppose each other, but the grieving of people who want desperately to be understood, to be heard, to feel safe. To me, community is not a state but a process. True, there are times when I want a breathing place, a time to lie back in the warm light of this place, to hear of love and caring and peace. But without the NOISE, as Marilyn wrote a month ago, without feeling the full force of your passions, I might as well be in a mausoleum, and I'd have to feel my pulse to see if even I were still alive.

Love,
Don

My Essays on E-Mail

TO: tori-l@icomm.ca
FROM: Donald Skiff 70140,200
SUBJECT: J_____
DATE: (unknown)

This is Don,

-responding to Jim _____'s message about unsubscribing Toronto_TORI.

I regretfully concur. To me the date is not important. I hope J_____ obtains a different e-mail address and joins us again in TORI-L.

I keep reminding myself that the test of TORI is not in the good times, but the difficult ones. As in any relationship, it's easy to say the right things that solidify us and reinforce our bonds when the sun is shining and it's 25 degrees C. It's when something has us by the short hairs that each word, each gesture is important and, being human, I fumble a lot. I think of TORI as a number of people occupying a very small emotional space. Every move we make affects others much more than in the outside world where we maintain greater space around us. But that's the point, as I perceive it. The joy of feeling close to others carries the risk of jostling, of inadvertently stepping on toes, of being stepped on. It's how I handle that, how much trust and openness I'm willing to risk, and how much compassion I can feel for the others in

Dreams of Home

this space, others who struggle just as hard to understand and be understood as I do, that makes the difference, not only to the group but to me—deep inside me. Jack Gibb's faith in the goodness of people sits up there on a shelf above me, reminding me.

I'd also like to think this time of stress is behind us. I don't want to forget, as I often do, that until we are all at peace there is no peace. If there is still work to do, I'm available.

Love,
Don

Part Four

My Essays on the Web

The World Wide Web opens all kinds of possibilities for those who love to write. One of the simplest, if one has a Web site available through his or her Internet service provider (most seem to offer that), is to just post one's pieces for all the world to see— instant publishing. True, it's not very remunerative that way. But for someone like me who feels that compulsion and isn't dependent upon the monetary fruits to live on, it provides the opportunity to publish what one writes, without the pain and struggle to find someone else who values the work enough to risk conventional publishing.

So these pieces appeared on my Web site, accumulating over several years along with a number of others not related to the subject of community.

The down side of Web publishing is that one doesn't always get much feedback. I don't know how many people read how many of my pieces—I have received confirmation of "several," encouraging enough to continue to write and post.

(Note: A few of these essays never made it to my Web site, for various reasons – space considerations, intention to edit later, or "just forgot.")

Looking down through a hole in the clouds, . . .

*. . . I see a light,
Tiny jewel glowing,
In blackness beneath me,
Edges indistinct.*

*A farm light, no doubt,
Gently asserting itself,
"I am here.
There is life here.
The darkness does not consume us."
And then it disappears again,
Obscured by clouds.*

*I've been leaning my head
Against the window,
And as I pull away,
I see my own reflection
In dim cabin light.*

*I am not alone,
There are people down there,
Beneath those clouds,
Ordinary,
Wonderful souls,*

Looking Down Through a Hole in the Clouds . . .

*And there, for an instant,
Our eyes met
Through the darkness.*

*Flying home,
This Sunday evening,
I'm aware of connection,
Invisible web
That I am part of,
That is part of me.*

*Together for a weekend
A dozen people
From all over the continent,
Nearly all strangers,
No other purpose
Than to be together.
I still feel gripped
By the experience.*

*Another light
Far beneath my airplane,
Drawing me again to the window.
More lights.
A break in the clouds
Revealing a small town,
Pattern of tiny lights,
Mostly concentrated,
But no apparent outline,
No "city limits"*

Dreams of Home

*Marked by sign or fence or wall.
Just lights,
Gradually fewer,
And fewer,
But never ending.*

*There are roads
I can't see,
And power lines
From which each light
Draws its life,
Interconnecting nets
In a winter's darkness.*

*A powerful feeling
Being part of something,
Whose edges are
Beyond my ability
To grasp.*

*We had talked, this weekend,
About "community building"
As though it were a thing,
That we could
Almost
Look at and taste and feel.*

*We touched each other,
Tentatively at first.
We looked into each other's eyes,*

Looking Down Through a Hole in the Clouds . . .

*And we laughed.
And we wept.
But mostly
We talked of ourselves,
Our needs,
Our pain,
Our dreams.*

*The thing that had drawn us there
Was the thing
The hardest thing
To talk about
Directly.*

*Perhaps,
I wonder now,
It was like the loneliness
Of looking up into the night sky
And wondering
About that little light
Moving steadily across the sky,
Appearing and disappearing
Behind the clouds,
Tiny jewel in the blackness,
Carrying a hundred souls
From somewhere to somewhere,
But suspended,
In that moment,
In my night sky.*

Dreams of Home

*Was that why
We were there?
That's all?
Just to be human,
Together?*

*There is no city limit.
I'm in this room
Of plastic and metal,
And roar of engines
And wind past the glass,
Hurting along my way
From somewhere to somewhere,
From love to love,
Never unconnected,
Never really alone.*

*At this moment,
The love of my life,
Is driving back and forth
Among rows of automobiles,
Looking for an empty space,
Thinking about seeing me
At the gate between two worlds.*

*A gossamer strand
That never breaks,
Stretches through night sky
Pulling a hundred tons
Of droning metal*

Looking Down Through a Hole in the Clouds . . .

*And trembling flesh
Back home.
I never really left.*

January, 1997

Note: I wrote this after a gathering in Atlanta of on-line community members, described on page 130. It was originally composed for an invitation to a solstice gathering in which I hoped to stimulate some of the same feelings.

Community and Love

Someone wrote, in connection with difficulties in community building:

Above my desk I have a plaque that says:
Always Remember . . . The Time to Love is Short.

The quotation, and the writer's obviously personal connection to it, touched me deeply. To me it speaks not only about community, but about all relationships. How do I stay aware of the health of the relationship/community? How can I know when it's in need, before its need becomes dire? How do I summon the energy to do something before other(s) begin looking at alternatives?

I've heard people say (and perhaps I've said it myself) that "Well, maybe it's just time for it to end." It seems to me that such resignation is a denial of responsibility, or despair in the face of loss. "The problem is too big for me." I have ended many relationships, both personal and organizational, because I simply did not know how to change them. Perhaps my needs had changed. Perhaps the others' had. When my needs are not being met, my perception of the relationship is affected. I ask, "Where did it go? Where did we go wrong?" I wonder if sometimes the very success of an enterprise may affect my

Community and Love

needs – in Maslow’s hierarchy, I may have climbed a step or two, and now I see farther.

The difference I see between a one-on-one relationship and a community is that there may be others in the community who have not climbed that step or two, and who still need what the community offers. They may not be the guiding lights that gave life to the community. They may not be equipped to keep it alive. The original mission is now but words, an incomprehensible covenant. What attracted them was perhaps not the mission but the effects of the mission upon the strong people in the community, the people who illuminated it and nourished it. If those people have moved on, the light has moved on with them.

In despair, I’ve said, “Well, maybe it’s just time for it to end.” And I simply watch it die, the pieces breaking off and falling into the sea. Somehow, I wish I didn’t have to learn, over and over, how to let go. And to be reminded, too late, ... *The Time to Love is Short.*

February 10, 1997

Individualism and Community

I have been thinking about, and to the extent I have been able to, participating in “community” for thirty years. In the past dozen years, it has been one of my obsessions. Community seemed to me to be a kind of *nirvana*, a replacement of my idealized “home.” I’ve been studying methods by which people can be together authentically and harmoniously. Much of my study has focused on ideas put forth by Jack R. Gibb and M. Scott Peck, both of whom promoted workshop formats to teach people how it can be done and how it feels when they accomplish it. “It” is usually called community.

The implied definition of this kind of community refers to feelings and interpersonal intimacy, not to ongoing collections of people engaged in some common tasks or united in purpose beyond the walls of personal encounter. I decided that my interest lay primarily in the personal rather than the communal, and that was just as valid a focus as social conditions for studying the elements of community. But I’ve had a problem. I tend to be, as they say, a “rugged individualist.” For most of my life I have resisted depending upon others for what I needed. And I can’t say truthfully that I am endowed with a lot of generosity. I volunteer a little, give a little, extend myself to a modest degree for the common good. But my

Individualism and Community

resistance to conforming to any kind of outside standards, particularly moral standards, keeps me at arm's length from most communal institutions. I've preferred to "walk to a different drummer," in good American style. This tendency has caused me to wonder about my "obsession" with community. It has sometimes seemed to me to be a contradiction in values. If I were truly interested in community values (sometimes referred to recently as "family values,") I must give up my insistence on my right to privacy, to set my own standards of conduct, to think for myself.

Jack Gibb, author of *Trust: A New View of Personal and Organizational Development*, proposed that any collection of people, given enough time, would form themselves into a community. He provided four theoretical dimensions: Trusting, Opening, Realizing, and Interdepending as measures of the quality of community. At the opposite ends of these dimensions were qualities such as fearing, role-playing, masking, "oughting," and depending. Behavior that enhanced community was characterized by respect for differences, honesty and openness in expression, and "owning" of one's emotional responses (that is, not blaming others for how I feel). Weekend workshops for demonstrating these ideas were marked by a kind of loving anarchy, where nobody had to do anything they did not want to do, and where every group decision was made by informal consensus. A number of ongoing groups sprang up from these workshops, as well as academic programs and task-oriented groups aimed at

Dreams of Home

encouraging community in the outside world, such as in the workplace.

Scott Peck wrote *The Different Drum*, and drew up a description of the process of creating community through four stages: Pseudocommunity, Chaos, Emptying, and Community. The workshops he instigated, and those developed by the Fellowship for Community Encouragement, of which he was a founding member, were more controlled than those of Jack Gibb, relying on facilitators and guidelines to encourage participants through the stages into a state of community. While the workshops were a bit more structured and anarchy minimized, the behavior that was emphasized was exactly like that described by Gibb. (It might be noted that both Gibb and Peck were involved in the early experimental "T-groups" at M.I.T. back in the 1950s.)

In both of these experiences, the hoped-for end result was a profound feeling of well-being and affection for the other members of the group. While in the Peck workshops the feeling was officially described as "community," the Gibb experiences allowed the participants to use their own words. Once experienced, everyone knew the feelings.

What has struck me, after experiencing both kinds of gatherings, has been the feeling of being "home," of being accepted in my uniqueness, of having no imposed obligations concerning the group, but being allowed to

Individualism and Community

express my individuality almost unconditionally. It's a powerful thing. The result, of course, was a desire to give to the others in kind and to assume my share of whatever tasks presented themselves, to be generous and caring—the characteristics of a fully participating member of a community.

I have observed that Jack Gibb had an extraordinary faith in human nature. Trust, to him, was the key to his whole system. I can develop trust in myself and in others by will and by practice, and that trust will inspire and infect those around me. To me, that's saying not that "it's a jungle out there," but that people are basically good, and what it takes for me to benefit from that goodness is to begin with myself. Not very different from the teachings of Jesus and most other religious teachers. Gibb's faith seems very close to that of Jefferson, populist and full of hope.

What I'm beginning to see is that this kind of community spirit, this feeling of connection to others, inspired by faith in humanity, is not opposed to the individualism that is so strong in my bones. It relies on each person to meet their personal needs while respecting those of others, and cooperating as peers rather than from some kind of hierarchical structure of imposed rules. The feeling of responsibility to a common good emerges from the relationships with others, rather than the other way around. The need for rules comes out of our detachment from each other, our separation in spirit, our loss of faith.

February 22, 1997

Buddhism and Community

As I read through Thich Nhat Hanh's book *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, I'm continually struck by the similarities between what he describes as "Buddhahood" and the qualities and mental states that seem to lead to what we describe as "community."

The practice of "mindfulness" is the key to understanding, love and compassion. Being fully present in the moment is required to "empty" oneself of the distractions that prevent reaching community, and the feelings of closeness and peace that are described as the culmination of the process seem to resemble closely the state Hanh says is the result of true Buddhist practice.

There are a few differences in emphasis, of course. Hanh says that the individual practices to achieve the ideal state for personal reasons, even though the result benefits those around him as well—the seeker of community works to achieve the state that will enable the group to come to community. The resulting feeling in the participants often leads them to see the rest of their experiences differently: personal growth through community.

In MV2SPK, the online community group I've been participating in, we often speak of "community" as a goal, although many people have despaired at our ability to do this considering the open, transient nature of the group. There is no commitment required from participants, and the amount of agreement as to what we are doing varies

Buddhism and Community

from moment to moment (or from message to message). One contributor spoke of his goal being personal growth, rather than a state of "community" among an amorphous group of people he didn't particularly care about in the beginning.

Still, seen in the light of this comparison, we are all there for the same reason, whether we know it or not. In the end, there may be no real distinction between "community" and "nirvana."

On the other hand, it just might be that I am projecting too much. Perhaps it is only my own yearning for "community" that is indistinguishable from my recent attraction to Buddhism. This would at least partially explain the disconcerting fact that as I push more and more for some kind of community answer, I'm finding myself less and less able to *be with* others in groups. I withdraw from groups I am in, even those that are intended to produce the feeling of closeness I say I want. If what I really am seeking is the state of mind Hanh talks about as being the result of practicing mindfulness, then perhaps I am simply seeking it in the wrong place. I need to develop my Buddhahood, rather than focusing on how to acquire community.

It's not a thought I'm very comfortable with, but it is certainly worthy of investigation.

June 15, 1997

Keith Jarrett on Community

In the July-August (1997) edition of the magazine *Utne Reader*, Keith Jarrett, the fabulous improvisational pianist, talks about how he plays his sold-out concerts.

“Once Miles Davis asked me,” he said, “‘How do you play from nothing?’ And I said, ‘You know, you just do it.’ And that is actually the answer. I wish there were a way to make ‘I don’t know’ a positive thing, which it isn’t in our society. We feel that we need to know certain things, and we substitute that quest for the actual experience of things in all its complexity.”

The rest of the article was about how Jarrett prepares for and plays a concert, but part of my mind, as I read, kept substituting “community meeting” for “concert.” And it reminded me how important it is for me to be open to the experience and not impose any kind of intellectual or other distractions on the process. It’s an unnerving thing, for me, to sit down in a room with a group of people and have nothing to say, no agenda, no topic held over from earlier – not even the decision to “go with the flow.” And yet that, I know, is the wellspring of creativity. And creativity is the soul of community.

Keith Jarrett on Community

If I allow myself to think about what I might say, I'm closing my mental door on the group. I'm building something solid that I put between you and me—perhaps a mask, or an artifact. I'm not there with you. I'm here, and you're out there. As Jarrett puts it, "I need to find a way to start the journey without creating the subject matter in my mind. In other words, I cannot have a melody or a motif in my head, because those things will protrude into the fabric. They will be too prominent and make the music seem like a solid object rather than a flowing process. I have to not play what's in my ears, if there's something in my ears. I have to find a way for my hands to start the concert without me."

That's an anxiety-generating idea for me. Even in the best of group situations, where everyone is sensitive to others and the conversation flows effortlessly with plenty of space for entry and without anyone monopolizing, I find myself rehearsing what I want to say, so that I won't say it wrong (which inevitably delays my saying it, usually past the point of relevance). Often I go through entire meetings without saying a word. Sometimes I leave the situation frustrated and impatient with myself.

True, I'm not a soloist in front of a packed auditorium. All eyes are not on me. The meeting is not stalled if I don't say something. I can relax, sometimes, and allow the group to unfold by itself. Occasionally, I can offer a thought or a response without laboring over it.

Dreams of Home

When a community meeting works for me—when a group really gets in touch with its depths, and that underlying fabric that connects us all becomes visible and tangible, I rejoice. That is the experience that seems like magic, for it touches parts of me that are seldom felt. The profound reality of my existence that is so often obscured by day-to-day superficialities. It's an experience that I want more of.

What I have to keep remembering is that it cannot become an objective, except in a very general way. If I pursue it, if I go into a community meeting determined, or even just wanting, that experience, then it's likely that I will not really be there, even if it should happen.

August 20, 1997

Community Building as Personal Growth

Several friends and I visited some “community” friends in another city for the weekend, and things had gone badly. It wasn’t as though we had become engaged in some conflict that was left unresolved, such as a misunderstanding that left us feeling estranged. To the contrary. When we left, everyone hugged and kissed and spoke of the next time we’d be together. Good friends, long-time friends.

What had gone badly were things unspoken. People were polite. Tongues were held. It was just an “okay” weekend. On the drive home, the held-in feelings were finally expressed. With sadness, we realized that we had violated community trust—we had not been honest and open about something unpleasant, and as a result we left feeling resentment and dismay. A chasm had been opened in the relationships within the group, and now it would be difficult to heal the wounds.

The feeling of community is a wondrous, magical thing. The bonds between people, when freely expressed, create such feelings of well-being that the world takes on a special glow, not unlike that experienced by the newly in love. I’ve been participating in an ongoing community for many years, and have felt transformed by the experience.

Dreams of Home

When I first discovered this particular group, I passed through the “initiation” phase rather quickly—the feeling of alienation, of being an “outsider,” of hopelessness. The group didn’t exclude me, I did. The group was just there, doing its thing. I held myself separate, afraid to speak except in banalities, revealing little about myself except superficial facts. I saw others laughing, crying, being with each other, loving and listening and speaking intimate things together, and I watched as through a window, wistfully. When I felt completely hopeless and alone, I was finally able to express how I felt because it seemed I had nothing to lose. I was ready to leave. Then, when I spoke, my voice flat and so soft that some could not even hear me, I was simply enfolded by the others. They knew what I was going through. It is an almost universal experience, that alienation. But they didn’t break the spell of agony, I did, by emptying myself of my pain and loneliness. I didn’t know that’s what I was doing. I had no idea how to get from my aloneness to their togetherness. I stumbled through the door.

I still find myself, sometimes, on the outside of a group. I don’t always overcome my distance. But now I know, and I know I know, how to do it.

The answer to how to be in community is the same, whether I’m encountering a new group that seems to have an impenetrable fence around it, or I’m suddenly feeling estranged from a friend. I must first be honest, with myself and with them. I must admit my deep fear of not

Community Building as Personal Growth

belonging, of losing the connection. I must, in the words of Scott Peck, “empty” myself of my weapons and my walls that don’t really protect me anyway, and become emotionally naked and vulnerable. It’s not the wall I perceive around them that I can’t breach. It’s my own armor that I clutch around me. I may feel defenseless and vulnerable, but the door that is closed is my own fear. I may even strike out in anger at these people, complaining at their lack of welcome, their insensitivity toward newcomers who “don’t yet know the rules” (the rules nearly always being unspoken) or the “correct procedure” for entering the circle. Striking out, of course, is not laying down my weapons but using them—not the best way to get inside the walls.

According to Jack Gibb, psychologist and long-time promoter of Trust Level Theory, says that “Trusting is the key to it all. Life,” he wrote, “is more whole, more fulfilling, and more celebrative when we trust ourselves, each other, our organizations, and the processes of living. Trust is the magic filter that transforms the trusted, but the most powerful immediate effect of trusting, and the factor that makes trusting worth the energy is upon the person doing the trusting. Regardless of the hypothetical nature of the world out there, whether or not it is trustworthy, the process of trusting transforms the world inside the viewer, and serves as a magical chemical that starts the transformation of the person or organization that is trusted.”

Dreams of Home

That's a pretty radical idea. It's not something out of Pollyanna, a turn-the-other-cheek idea to show the other party that you're harmless and not apt to threaten them. It's actually a position of power and confidence, yet does not threaten others. But it does more—it transforms me and changes the way I view the process we are engaged in.

“When the world is seen as dangerous, unfriendly, and harmful, Gibb says, “we see ourselves as needing to be cautious, guarded, reserved, cynical, distrusting and defensive. These attitudes and feelings [come to be] seen as realistic, necessary, appropriate and congruent with the nature of the universe we live in. . . . We do the same irrational things that our large nation does: we prepare for war in order to achieve peace. . . . Distrusting process is not likely to create trust-filled outcomes.”

Deliberately taking on a stance of trusting is giving the benefit of the doubt. It is stretching my limits, taking a risk for the benefit of not only this situation but my own character. It is taking control of my reactions, to the extent I am able and perhaps a little beyond. Gradually, it becomes easier. Gradually, the situations in which I find myself appear less threatening to me. I am learning to be me, instead of what I used to think other people thought I was. The power I assume by choosing to trust becomes my own. I need not wield my power over others; I can feel compassion and love, for I no longer fear.

Community Building as Personal Growth

The chasm that developed in our group was one of mistrust. We did not trust ourselves, the others, or the process—even though all of us knew how to do it. Later, we would confront the issues and repair the damage. Learning doesn't proceed at a steady pace. Still, the rewards are worth the perseverance.

In the traditions of meditation, an almost universal experience for the beginner is difficulty in maintaining focus of attention. One focuses on the breath, for instance, and soon finds that the mind has wandered to other thoughts or feelings. Without blaming oneself or becoming impatient, one simply notes the excursion and returns to the breath. Whenever it happens. Over and over, until the skill is learned.

Deliberately trusting is a way not only to community but a skill one learns, a skill that leads to personal strength of character.

October 2, 1997

Community On-Line

My first experience with communicating with numbers of people via e-mail was by exchanging thoughts with one person, then adding people, one at a time, to the ongoing conversation. Then someone suggested we create an Internet mailing list, to which anyone who was interested might subscribe. The list was open to all those who had in the past participated in our continuing community. The List was a way for us to maintain contact during the time between gatherings of the community. Then I discovered another mailing list, of people who had attended Community Building Workshops put on by the Foundation for Community Encouragement. The tone of this new list was different, probably because the people didn't all know each other beforehand. Rather than an ongoing communication among friends, it resembled more an actual community building experience. It was pointed out in the guidelines to new subscribers that this was an unmoderated group.

There were occasional questions about the purpose of the group, some protesting that "real community" couldn't be achieved online, with people coming and going, some people talking a lot while others simply "lurked" in the background, silent for their own reasons. Yet, with all the difficulties inherent in trying to relate on a personal level with people one had never met and whose online "persona" might be quite different from that which might

Community On-Line

be perceived face-to-face, remarkable levels of intimacy were achieved from time to time, and close bonds were established among at least some of the participants. It seemed to me that these things resulted principally from two factors: first, most of the people who subscribed had some prior interest in the subject of community building, and often had a personal desire to connect with other people in meaningful ways. Also at work, I believe, were the guidelines for being part of the group—adopted directly from those that were offered to participants of Community Building Workshops (CBW).

That's not to say that the flavor of the group's interactions always remained within the guidelines. There were disagreements and conflicts at times, and pontificating and ego-building at others. Quite often, topic threads would overlap as different people expressed different concerns and feelings and ideas. A person would have to wait a day or two, sometimes more, for responses to her or his contributions. Occasionally, no one would respond.

Once, after a protracted discussion had occupied the group's attention for several days, one of the group, who had helped start the mailing list, expressed his inability to relate to the intellectual level of recent sharing. Someone asked him to clarify, and this is what he wrote:

This is _____,

I am absolutely staggered when I reflect on the depth and maturity of this group. There are many people here who have a much longer

Dreams of Home

history and more of a lifetime of accomplishments with community building than I. [The list] has included much of the world, within the artificial limitations of using a single language: Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Hong Kong, South Africa, Israel, France, Belgium, Canada and [now] ... Sweden. Two years ago when I made a similar comment interpreted as dissatisfaction with the group, I was told that if I didn't like it I should leave. Today, I feel very honored and my words respected by the genuinely interested and caring responses I received. What a difference.

My comment centers around my own perceptions that many people join [the list] with the assumption that it should operate like any other Internet list server and that the same dynamics (the same way of being together) should play out. And yet, in my experiences of community building we speak of a longing for "new ways of being together" and not new forums to live out the old ways.

It may be counter-intuitive, but for me, "community", as experienced in a CBW, is not reached by engaging in elaborate discussions ... even with the very honorable intent of seeking to clarify and understand better what's been said. In a CBW, I feel called to speak my truth, without feeling a need to explain or

Community On-Line

defend. In a CBW I do not expect a response, I do not want to be healed or comforted. Just heard and accepted and held ... even in the silence of the group.

I believe the method to the madness is to *listen* with all of our faculties, and to be especially attentive to what is happening within our own selves. To express what is happening within us as "I" language and avoid shifting the focus to "you", "we" or "they". To address the community [the list] and not an individual where others become at best interested observers. And probably most important to speak when "moved to speak" and to remain silent at other times.

I "know" this is a new way of being and I know it's even newer when doing the work in a technologically-defined versus a geographically-defined space. I know this way of being together creates community for large numbers of people in a very short period of time (although not for everyone, not at the same depth, and not always at the same time).

That being said, I often am pulled away from this way of being. I am pulled into my head by esoteric conversations and want to add my own intellectualisms. I am pulled into my heart by the pain of others, and want to comfort and hug. I am pulled into judgment by people that are different than I. I get pulled many different ways and

Dreams of Home

then pop! . . . I become disconnected and I realize I've stopped doing the work and it's time to begin again.

So. That's where I am. Love, _____.

M. Scott Peck described the community building process in four phases: *Pseudocommunity* is that phase, usually at the beginning but often recurring in ongoing groups, in which people are merely polite, superficial and unrevealing of themselves. *Chaos* occurs when people tire of the artificiality of the conversation and begin to reveal their dissatisfaction and underlying tensions. Chaos is part of the total process, and the group can never get to the other side without going all the way through. (Backing up to pseudocommunity, while it sometimes feels nice, only delays the process). *Emptying* begins to occur as people realize the futility of the chaos and recognize the common human needs that are being ignored in the process. *True community* occurs as the group goes through the emptying phase, and real connections begin to be made. Not everyone in the group will necessarily feel it. I can be "in community" all by myself. It's a perception, not an objective state.

That's why getting to community has a lot to do with development of a Self. Peck admonishes us, "Speak your Truth. Be responsible for your feelings." If you can't define your Self . . . if you are emotionally fused with others in the group . . . if you are reacting to other people's

Community On-Line

stuff (instead of your own) . . . then you can't enter into authentic relationship with them.

In an experienced group, these phases may come and go rather quickly; they may be telescoped into one another so that one might not even recognize the process. In the case illustrated above, the writer earlier had objected to the "elaborate discussions" that had left him feeling disconnected from the group. (There had been one or two others who voiced similar detachment.) He had, however, been rather indirect in his objections, wanting to gently point out his concerns but instead causing others to wonder what he was "really trying to say." This message was his response to them.

To me it was an illustration of online community building that is working.

October 3, 1997

*(The contributions of Michael Korgie
to this piece are gratefully acknowledged)*

I'm Into Something Important For Me . . .

. . . I've begun meditating. I tried it before, twenty years ago, but it was then just something new to do, along with everybody else, and I soon lost interest. It's now much more meaningful and purposeful to me. Now, meditation is not a means of relaxing, of dropping out of life for a time, but of learning how to be more engaged.

A few years ago I began to look into Christianity (again—I grew up in a Christian family, but moved away as a young adult) as a way of getting closer to my son, who grew up without it and embraced it when he was a young adult. He thought that if I looked at it again I might see it differently. It didn't work. Everything I read seemed to lead me further away from "getting it."

But in the process, I thought a lot about what I could feel comfortable with—what kind of worldview could make sense to me. My skepticism about things I cannot experience directly prevents me from accepting most of the traditional religious systems. In recent years I've felt a need to find my own way, discover my own "Truth."

Concurrently with all that, I have been intensely interested in "community," from the viewpoint of the individual—what it is that draws people to the experience

I'm Into Something Important for Me . . .

that I have labeled “magic” simply because it seemed beyond my understanding. I know that not everybody feels this magic. But enough people I’ve talked to describe it in very similar ways, so I don’t think it’s something out of my own head. It’s become a passion of mine, to find out what it is and perhaps describe it. I began gathering material for a book with a working title *Dreams of Home*, which seemed to express my deep feeling about it all. This interest grew out of my experiences with an intentional community in Toronto, that started from the ideas of Jack Gibb. He wrote of four principles of community: Trusting, Opening, Realizing (i.e., “making real”) and Interdepending.

I recently discovered Ken Wilber, who describes a way of thinking about everything that for the first time in my life I can read without saying, “Oh, come on, wait a minute, that doesn’t make any sense.” It gives me a window into “spiritual,” a word I’ve had a lot of trouble with all my life. We are part of an evolving process, he says, that goes from the physical to the biological to the mental to the spiritual, each of them transcending but including the previous stages. We can’t use the methods of understanding that work for the earlier stages on those that follow. (You can’t understand a thought by any kind of physical measurement, for example.) The method for accessing the spiritual realm is contemplation. Not thinking, but directly, by becoming aware.

Dreams of Home

Interestingly, this is nothing new to the Buddhists. For 2500 years wise minds have been refining a way to get in touch with the infinite. While there are several traditions that have developed over the centuries, the one that works for me is called Vipassana, or insight meditation. It focuses on “mindfulness,” which can be described as paying full attention to the moment. It doesn’t depend upon faith, the stumbling block for me in Christianity, but upon practice. If I learn to discipline my mind to become totally aware of this moment, I will gradually become aware of my relationship with all things. That, of course, is a gross oversimplification of the tradition and the process.

I don’t see this as choosing Buddhism as my religion. The practice doesn’t depend upon any religious system, nor can it be described, really, as a “faith.” A devout Christian would have no theological problem with the practice, and might find the process useful to his or her own religious ends.

As I said, I’ve just begun. I can’t vouch for the end result yet. But somehow it all makes sense to me, enough so that I am willing to put forth the effort to learn. The part of all this that is exciting to me is that all these elements—my interest in community, my struggle to come to terms with “religion” and “spirituality,” and my sense of seeing a path before me—feel related. How I have come to want to be with others, honest, open and compassionate. How I came to make a decision to not eat meat. How I have been

I'm Into Something Important for Me . . .

searching for some "ultimate truth." How I see my own mortality. Even, how I cannot make generalizations for others. This is my own thing.

It feels good to me. If not complete, then at least in the right direction, after 68 years.

October 20, 1997

Community: Getting to that “We Are One” Feeling

Scott Peck describes it as “emptying,” that stage of letting go of the thoughts and feelings that separate me from you and becoming aware of what connects us. It often comes after a period of “chaos,” of dissension and anger and emotional pain, that becomes intense sadness and despair. The lifting of the despair may not relieve all the sadness, but the sadness that is left is for us, not just for me. The walls that separate us dissolve. Love is revealed.

Ken Wilber, in *A Brief History of Everything* illuminates the difficulty of human inner connection in a society that focuses on external, empirical knowledge. We often know other people only by their surface characteristics, their appearance and their behavior. Not that these characteristics are unimportant, necessarily; they simply do not tell us much about what is going on inside them, what they value, what they have experienced that may profoundly influence their behavior. It is only from their (mostly verbal) expressions that we can interpret the objective surface that we see. A non-communicative person is one to fear, or at least to be cautious with. An angry person seldom reveals the pain and the fear behind the anger. It is when we are allowed to glimpse, through their words and emotional expressions, their inner softness and vulnerability that we can allow our own

Community: Getting to that “We are One” Feeling

defenses to relax. If we think we understand why they behave the way they do, we can relate that to our own experiences, even identify with their processes and feelings. Then we can go deeper with them, to where we feel a human connection.

Words are not our only means of interpreting each other. Body language, often subtle, gives us clues to what is going on inside someone. Facial expressions can provide remarkable amounts of information. Because we depend upon verbal language for so much of our social interaction, some of us manage to build our personal walls out of words. Indeed, in a transaction our words and our body language may give completely opposite messages. We may smile as we threaten.

Ultimately, everything we know about someone comes from external evidence. We cannot see inside another person. Until we have sufficient information about someone, we cannot know them. Nonverbal clues can often provide us with enough to feel safe or threatened, in very general terms. Sometimes this is enough to assure us that we can approach close enough to hear their words. Through empathic resonance we may interpret their behavior as expressing emotions with which we are familiar. But it is ultimately through words that we can truly understand someone. It is only through words that we can compare their experiences and values—their depth—with our own.

Dreams of Home

And, of course, we must listen. Not just hear them. Listen. Words are seldom as direct in communicating meaning as we like to think. We must interpret words from their own context and from the context of the transaction, and our understanding of the other's understanding of the context. We must open to them, let go of our preferences and prejudices so that these do not color our hearing. It isn't easy, but it can be learned. It takes practice.

It takes practice to communicate clearly, as well. We not only have to listen to others, we have to listen to ourselves. We cannot tell someone else what we are feeling if we ourselves do not know. The more we know about ourselves, the better we can interpret what others tell us about themselves. What we don't want to know about ourselves, we can seldom accept in others. Words are our tools, even our keys to perception. Dialog speeds the process. Expression and response allows for clarification and confirmation.

It is when we reach our own depths, and recognize those of the other, that we can truly connect. That we can know, fully, that We Are One.

October 21, 1997

Community, Feeling and Spirit

In *A Brief History of Everything*, Ken Wilber makes the point that the Romantic Revivalist's notion equating a return to earlier values with becoming more spiritual misses a vital distinction between nature and spirit. Just because something is "natural" doesn't mean it is more spiritual. We may experience a deep feeling of connection when we stop to look at a beautiful sunset. We may think that the revelation tells us to return to nature, to a previous stage in which we were "one" with nature. But that idea ignores the fact that we are standing on a vantage point well past that stage, where we are aware of the distinction between mind and nature. An animal beside us looking at the sunset, who is arguably more at one with nature, does not share our wonder. Our awareness of Spirit must integrate all that we currently are, not deny the part of us that thinks. The modern paradigm separates body, mind and spirit, and much of our "knowledge" is in terms of the rational and the empirical. That this paradigm leaves out something important does not mean that the rational mind is less real. We might feel something intensely, but it is no more real or "spiritual" than our thoughts.

No, spiritual awareness is something more than feeling or thinking. It may be that when we have profound insights

Dreams of Home

(and I suspect that most everybody does), we do not have words adequate to describe them. Feelings are sometimes that way, too—especially feelings new to us or at an intensity we've never before experienced. There just aren't words for them. So we may confuse the sunset feeling with the insight.

For a number of years I've struggled to get a handle on what the community experience really means. What is it that I sense when the group I'm in suddenly goes quiet and still? What is that sense of peace and connection among us that is so palpable? Many people have tried to describe it. Researchers have attempted to put it into psychological terms and to measure it. It's elusive. You can't make it happen, although it's easy to break. No group that I've heard of has ever been able to hold onto it for long, although it may come again and again. The struggle that often leads up to it cannot be said to create it. It feels like a letting go of something inside. It's beyond emotion, although some emotion may accompany it. M. Scott Peck describes it as "emptying," the prelude to "true community."

Sometimes powerful emotion, "like falling in love" occurs in a group. I've felt that, too. I somehow feel intense affection for some or all of a group, particularly after I've worked through some other intense emotion like despair or loneliness. That's not the same thing, any more than the intense emotion of the sunset experience. Good as it might feel, it's not a thing of spirit.

Community, Feeling and Spirit

Which I suppose is my point. The thing I've been searching to understand about "community" must be a spiritual experience. It is a profound awareness of the common ground beneath us that connects us and connects all things. We are all manifestations of Spirit, the force behind everything. Even quarreling groups of people, locked in what Peck calls "chaos," or back still further, the "pseudocommunity" of polite and cautious strangers, are likewise manifestations of Spirit. It's the awareness that makes the difference, the sudden insight that puts everything in perspective.

November 7, 1997

What Draws Us?

I've been reading Ken Wilber's *Up From Eden*, where he describes the transcendence of human consciousness (roughly 12,000 years ago) to the symbolate, learning to use symbolic language not only to represent physical objects but to create a new reality. (He uses the word "pride" to exemplify something without referents in the physical world, a concept on a higher plane of consciousness.)

Not only do we have, thereby, a richer medium of communication among those who "understand," we have a symbolic connection with each other that reaches further and deeper than touch or emotion. A human mind is literally a part of a web of consciousness, not metaphorically at all. (He points out that he's not talking about such things as telepathy.) When I talk with you, using symbols that mean something to us both but which go far beyond physical or emotional representation, and you understand my words, we are joined by those symbolic meanings, as surely as we would be physically joined by an embrace, or emotionally joined by mutually shared feelings.

Now, consider going up a level, beyond the mental/language-enabled level of consciousness, to something beyond. This is what Wilber calls the transpersonal, the level of knowing that transcends

What Draws Us?

words; indeed, transcends the mind itself. This is the leap that, even though it is beyond the experience of the average person, recognizably wise people have told us about for millennia. There are enough reports of this experience in our history and traditions to indicate that it is not simply another metaphor or construct of the imagination. These reports come from all traditions and form a part of what he calls the “perennial philosophy,” the accumulated wisdom of humankind.

In this level of consciousness, words are simply inadequate. It is beyond thinking and logic. To know it one must experience it directly. Unfortunately, to most humans, it is beyond our ability or our determination to experience, and therefore to know. We interpret the reports in terms of mental/logical concepts, and since they are to us simply illusory to begin with, all sorts of imaginary things become attached. “Reality” becomes purely subjective. Belief becomes the criteria for individual understanding. We construct gigantic edifices out of ignorance and call them “spiritual.”

Even with all this balderdash cluttering our minds, many people seem at times to intuit the existence of the next level of consciousness. Or, at least, they intuit “something beyond” thinking. It is when they attempt to communicate their experiences to others (or “explain” them to themselves), that words fail. “You have to have been there.” They often try to fit the experiences into their

Dreams of Home

existing world-view, their cultural idiosyncrasies, their traditional belief systems. The result is confusion.

To go beyond the occasional intuition of the transpersonal consciousness takes practice. Extended and disciplined contemplation, Wilber says, is the only path we know of.

Where all of this touches me is in my own intuition of "something" I've experienced in certain groups of people, under extraordinary circumstances. I've called it (whimsically) "magic." A shared stillness among the people, a "knowing" of something that touches us, links us, something beyond words and beyond logic. It often comes as a cessation of interpersonal chaos in the group. Scott Peck calls it "emptying," the precursor to "true community." Many people have reported having this experience. Those who have not cannot seem to really understand it. It is beyond our current cultural definitions.

Having been agnostic most of my life, I had not even considered a "spiritual" explanation to this experience. The groups in which I have experienced it have not been religiously oriented. Even "spiritual" has not been a subject of much attention. I assumed that any acceptable explanation would be social-psychological. Still, I have been intrigued.

Wilber's clear, reasonable description of levels of consciousness brings many loose philosophical ends together for me. Suddenly (it seems), a lot of my life

What Draws Us?

questions appear to have answers. If, as he says (echoing many others), the way to transcend the mind and enter the transpersonal is through contemplation and meditation, then what also seems clear to me is that the “magic” of community might also be developed and extended by some kind of practice. So far, in the groups I know about, the transcendent experience is a hoped-for, “it-may-happen-but-it-may-not” kind of thing. Community building workshops attempt to set up a favorable environment and suggest a process, but they cannot promise nirvana. It is, indeed, still “magic,” and just as elusive to obtain as a successful harvest was to early farmers.

Now, I’m wondering if this might suggest a way for us to begin to make that leap to the next level of human community—and perhaps even to the next level of human consciousness.

November 19, 1997

Communities—Religious and Otherwise

The term “community” means a lot of different things, and if one were to ask a dozen people to define it, surely one would get at least a dozen answers. The meaning I want to address has to do with the interpersonal relationships among the people within a definable group—the glue that holds them together. This glue is the feeling of “belongingness” that they share with one another.

I will hypothesize that there are, in general, two kinds of glue. One is the glue of context. It may be a belief system, such as you would see in a church, or it may be a trade or profession, or a social or recreational organization such as a golf club. What draws participants to these kinds of community is something outside themselves. You belong only if you fit certain criteria. The other kind of glue is that of personal connection. People are held together by feelings of affection among them, or trust, or identification (we’re in this together). Obviously, in most communities there are both kinds of glue. (I can trust her, because she’s also a Presbyterian. We’ve played golf together for fifteen years—he’s just like me.)

Contextual glue is a topic for sociologists and anthropologists and politicians, and institutions. My focus

Communities—Religious and Otherwise

is on the interpersonal relationships of the members of the group—how they feel about the group and its members, and why. Narrowing the focus even more, I want to talk not about the feelings generated when people do things together—play, sing, work, eat, whatever—but about the feelings of relatedness, of affection and caring, of love, that come from a recognition of their mutual humanity, the deep sense of connection that comes from truly knowing each other. Ken Wilber has referred to this as “com-unity.” I like that word. It not only sets itself apart from all the other kinds of “community” for the sake of clarity, it suggests the web of oneness that I believe unites us all at some deep, deep level. The level at which we touch souls (or, if you prefer, at which we touch our common Soul).

“Community building” has become popularized by Scott Peck in his book *The Different Drum* and workshops sponsored by the Foundation for Community Encouragement (FCE). Deliberately attempting to create the glue, not for the sake of external objectives such as the continuation of an institution, but for the sake of the individuals involved, is something that probably developed out of the Human Potential movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Another visionary from those times, Jack Gibb, wrote *TRUST: A New View of Personal and Organizational Development* back in the 1970s, and also conducted workshops based upon the four qualities of Trusting, Opening, Realizing and Interdepending that he said were necessary for true community. In the Trust

Dreams of Home

communities, no one was “expected” to do anything or be any particular way. While Peck’s Community Building Workshops were structured in the sense that there were facilitators and guidelines and an expected process through which the groups were likely to progress, the individual behavior in both types of workshops was expected to emerge from the situations. They took their form from the experimental “T Groups” at M.I.T in the 1950s (both Gibb and Peck participated in those experiments), and from the “encounter groups” popular in the 1960s and 1970s.

These experiences, as well as those from many other “coming together” events throughout recent times, often produced very intense feelings among participants. In religious (particularly Christian) groups, such feelings have been identified with the core beliefs of the participants. “Love” was “God’s love,” spread among the believers, a profound sense of kinship with the faithful. As a matter of fact, these feelings of religious identity and bonding very likely epitomize the community glue I’m talking about here. For it is my thesis that this sense of belongingness is indeed an awareness of spirit, whether it occurs in a church or in a weekend workshop. We are one.

David Goff, in his dissertation *Communitas: An Exploratory Study of the Existential and Transpersonal Dimensions of a Psychological sense of Community as Found in the Community Building Workshop* suggests that these workshops “may be a contemporary example of a collective ‘rite of

Communities—Religious and Otherwise

intensification.' The Community Building Workshop . . . is distinct from other forms of group intensives in that it focuses on the encounter with otherness, and utilizes this encounter to enable an emerging sense of the larger whole. By not emphasizing the individual's experience, and by not encouraging organization as a means of minimizing conflict, the Community Building Workshop allows the existential dilemma to be made explicit. *Thus, it provides participants with the potential for an experience of existential community.*" [Italics mine]

His research looks at the subjective experiences of a number of participants of Community Building Workshops, and compiles their reports into a measure of "community, . . . experienced as a change of consciousness featuring transpersonal elements. These elements are described as 1) strong affect, with feelings of peace, tranquility, tenderness and gentleness; 2) an experience of unity, with a sense of oneness with others and fusion of one's self into a larger whole; 3) a religious quality, expressed as experiencing something sacred and profound and being humbled by it; 4) temporal distortion, experienced as a state of timelessness or a loss of one's usual sense of time; 5) noetic qualities, experienced as increased consciousness and awareness of paradox; and, finally, 6) an ineffable quality indicating that the experience was difficult to describe and to communicate to others."

Dreams of Home

Goff relates this experience to expanded states of consciousness described and discussed in much detail in the literature of transpersonal psychology—even though that literature, he says, “contains a paucity of references to community, or such related topics as group dynamics, collective practices, or interpersonal relations.”

In my personal experience with “community,” I have for years puzzled over the “magic” that I sensed at times—a sense of awe and wonder that I hadn’t obtained in a religious environment since the age of twelve. In adulthood, I moved away from my Christian roots, focusing upon empiricism rather than what I thought of as “religious myths.” Now, it seems I come back around, recognizing in my community experience a sense of something beyond what my mind can grasp.

December 24, 1997

A Crisis in My Sense of Community

In January 1998, I attended a traditional New Year's TORI gathering in Ontario feeling a bit distant, a bit preoccupied by a personal tragedy that had gripped my attention and my feelings for most of the preceding year. I had spoken of it very little to anyone other than Judith. At her urging, I began talking about it in a community meeting.

I discovered very quickly that it was a mistake.

My purpose was to unburden myself at least a little, to reveal my intense feelings and perhaps relieve some of the pressure and anxiety that had kept me deadened for months. That's one of the benefits of community, to be able to share with others things that weigh us down, to ease personal pain by relinquishing some of the privacy that seems to compound it.

I have felt strongly, and written often, about my feeling of acceptance by the group from the very beginning of my association. It had become an ideal family, in which I didn't have to monitor my words to avoid criticism or—at worst—separation. Whatever misunderstandings or disagreements might arise, I was confident, could be resolved by the processes that were built into the community.

Dreams of Home

For the sake of others, I cannot reveal here the content of that discussion. It's enough to say that it was an emotionally charged subject for many people, and soon (it seemed to me, anyway—I have no idea of the amount of time I talked) the group was energized. All of the “ground rules” of community discussion were forgotten. I was given advice, judgment and lecture on what I “should” do and think and feel. I became defensive and unable to articulate. Eventually, I broke down in tears, feeling friendless and abandoned. Some people tried to convince me that they had my interests at heart, that it was because they loved me that they wanted me to see things differently.

I slept little that night, and arose the next morning determined to speak to the group about how I felt treated. That meeting was less chaotic. Some, I'm sure, heard me. A few believed me. The chasm between us did not diminish. I returned home from that gathering with strong doubt about ever attending a gathering of the community again. After a few days, I wrote a letter to those who had been in that community meeting, explaining how I felt betrayed. I didn't send the letter.

I did participate in other gatherings. (Perhaps “participate” is too strong a word.) Gradually, over many months, however, I began to understand some things. For one, I had obviously pushed the group past its limits. The subject matter was beyond the limits of some people to hold their own views and feelings aside in order to hear to my pain. Each of us has those limits, and few people are

A Crisis in My Sense of Community

able to keep their customary compassion foremost when pushed beyond them. So I began to stop blaming others for my feeling of betrayal.

Another thing I learned, during those months following the incident, was that my confidence in my acceptability to the group was not a mature or even a healthy thing. I had attached myself to the community at a four-year-old level (maybe earlier than that). I had an expectation that the group would “always love me like my mother.” (Not that I ever put it in those words.) I basked in the security of that, and until that evening, it had not been tested. It was difficult, afterward, to be comfortable in the knowledge that the group was no longer what I thought it was.

Gradually, I began to see the incident as a necessary if painful lesson for me. I needed to find a new basis for the relationship I had with the community. There were still the intervening fifteen years of wonderful comradeship, of real growth and discovery. I had known love and friendship on a level that I had never experienced before.

And I had become involved in a quest about community and people being together that, even at the time of that traumatic gathering, was beginning to make sense to me as nothing before had done. I was starting to reach toward larger meanings. In the months after that New Year’s TORI, it seemed that the pace of my quest increased. Partly, that may be due to my feeling more alone, as though my emotional dependence on the community had

Dreams of Home

somehow inhibited my inner search. Certainly, at the peak of my infatuation with the group, five or ten years before, I had felt little need to wonder what it all meant. It seemed obvious.

I'm writing this in March, 2000. This essay is located in this place in the book because the events happened at the time of these particular essays, early in 1998. What happened to me here almost certainly affected what I wrote.

At the time, however, I could not have written this.

Community as an Emergent Consciousness

Ken Wilber, in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (p.188), writes of the emerging state of consciousness in our post-modern world as a “vision-logic” level and quotes Jean Gebser, who labeled it the “integral-aperspectival” mind. The characteristics of this new consciousness are that it integrates all lower levels of consciousness (one of Wilber’s primary tenets), including the biosphere and the noosphere, and within the noosphere, the rational—but transcends them. This vision-logic consciousness is described by Wilber as an awareness that no perspective is final (which does not mean that all perspectives are of equal value), and: “. . . is a higher holon that operates upon (and thus transcends) its junior holons, such as simple rationality itself. As such, vision logic can hold in mind contradictions, it can unify opposites, it is dialectical and non-linear, and it weaves together what otherwise appear to be incompatible notions, as long as they relate together in the new and higher holon negated in their partiality but preserved in their positive contributions.”

It seems that this was what Scott Peck was describing as “true community,” the stage in community building that follows emptying, and what Jack Gibb was getting at through his charge for trusting, opening, realizing and interdepending as the ways to and the characteristics of

Dreams of Home

community. It's a longer view of a situation of relationships, without imposing an authority or code on the participants. It respects each member profoundly, and yet recognizes the transcendence of the collective beyond the individuals. Many people have reported "something spiritual" that happens in a group sometimes, and perhaps this is what they sense. We don't yet have many words for the experience, but it seems to fit into what Wilber describes.

I'll no doubt add more to this later . . .

March 7, 1998

How Did I Get Here?

Several people have commented on a recent shift in the way I speak of things “spiritual.” For a lot of my life, the word was not a part of my (willing) vocabulary. As I think back, I can trace the path of change.

When I discovered TORI, it was like “coming home” for me. I had a deep emotional response, something I could identify as being related to my childhood. Because my extended family was pretty closely connected when I was a child, and then gradually disintegrated, I assumed that I was reclaiming in “community” some of the feelings I had lost in “family.” I had experienced some of those feelings earlier than TORI, in the Unitarian Fellowship I was a part of. There, however, I didn’t have words for the experience. Acceptance was the important feeling, being accepted even if I didn’t always conform, even if I were clumsy or inarticulate (“didn’t do it right”).

After a while, I thought and wrote a great deal about the experience of community, particularly the profound sense of “something” occurring when a group seemed really connected. (The Quakers, I believe, have a word for it, too: “gathered.”) Scott Peck simply calls it “true community.” A sudden shift, when the individuals in a group seem not so separate, where mutual affection and sensitivity rises dramatically. A palpable hush comes over the group. Superficiality dissolves, and people share from their

Dreams of Home

depths. I wondered at this experience. It simply didn't fit anything I "understood," yet it was as real as anything I had ever experienced. So I called it "magic," amused at myself for my use of a word that was as alien to me as "spiritual."

In a sense that term, "magic," was completely appropriate for me. Here was an experience that was beyond my grasp. While I didn't set out to construct an elaborate "story" to rationalize what I couldn't understand (at least I don't think I did), I was in the same situation as the person who first watched someone create fire by rubbing sticks together. I began a struggle to describe the experience of "community," even as I acknowledged the impossibility of communicating it to anyone who had never experienced it for themselves. I wasn't alone, of course. Others had made attempts in their own ways to convey the experience. I read one dissertation (David Goff) that attempted to break the experience down into its emotional components, working from survey questions given to a number of participants of community building workshops. I began work on a book of my own writings, with the working title *Dreams of Home*. I participated in several e-mail groups who discussed this experience, with some of them even trying to recreate it on-line. I was sure I was onto something important. Hard as I tried to get a rational handle on it, though, it still seemed like magic.

Then someone mentioned the author Ken Wilber, and shared quotations from his writing. He seemed to have a

How Did I Get Here?

grasp on what appeared to me to be a connection between “fact” and “something beyond.” I looked up his Web site, and read excerpts from his latest book. Impressed, I bought another book and began reading. Wilber, in the dozen or so books he has written, describes a cosmology that I find reasonable, even while it incorporates concepts that I could not have sat still for a few years ago. He says that the universe is a manifestation of “Spirit” that is evolving, and that everything we know is an aspect of that evolution, that unfolding. Evolution, he says, follows a discernible course, not only in living matter, but in everything. Physical matter—atoms, molecules, planets, galaxies—make up a part of this evolutionary process. On top of physical matter, biological life is built, transcending but including the merely physical. Living systems become the basis for further evolutionary development, what he calls the “noosphere,” the mental world. This is built upon the biological world in exactly the same way as the biological world is built upon the physical world.

Where he stretches my mind is in describing an even further evolutionary state beyond the rational, beyond the mind. The “transpersonal” or “transrational” is a level of consciousness that many people have glimpsed, and a relatively few have succeeded in penetrating. Actually, it is not simply a single level, any more than the mental is one level. There are degrees of experience in this realm. For the first time, I’ve been able to accommodate to ideas that go beyond what I have considered “reality.” I find Wilber convincing when he describes the way we

Dreams of Home

accumulate knowledge, and then points to the essential agreements within the contemplative traditions concerning knowledge that goes beyond the mental/logical. It's been an eye-opener.

What I'm beginning to perceive is that this is the "magic" in community that I've been struggling to comprehend. It is, indeed, a transcendent state, where the deep connections among people become clear. One can relate it to epiphanies or to other mystical experiences reported by people through the ages. A sudden clarity of seeing things and people and relationships in a way that encompasses the "real world" but sees beyond. A mystical experience:

mys·ti·cal (mîstî-kel) adjective

1. Of or having a spiritual reality or import not apparent to the intelligence or senses.
2. Of, relating to, or stemming from direct communion with ultimate reality or God: a mystical religion.
3. Of or founded on subjective experience: mystical theories about the securities market.
4. Of or relating to mystic rites or practices.
5. Unintelligible; cryptic.

Of these five definitions, I'm satisfied to use the first. I'm not yet prepared to go beyond that. (Not long ago, I would have rejected the first and considered the last four definitions adequate, and promptly discounted the whole concept as fantasy.) Wilber has convinced me that the rational is not the endpoint of possible experience. That's

How Did I Get Here?

quite a leap for me, to even accept it as a hypothesis. I think it comes from my intense questioning of the community experience. I was ready for it.

It doesn't stop there, however. I have never read any author who provided me with so many answers to so many of my questions—questions I had simply given up on finding answers to. Suddenly, for me, things make sense. I have a place to stand in the universe.

About five years ago, in the summer after my mother died, and after I nearly died during a simple surgical procedure, our pet bird flew away. It was due to my carelessness, and I became extremely distraught and depressed. My reaction was way out of proportion to the loss of a pet bird (I thought), but probably carried a lot of the grief I hadn't finished with over my mother's death. Part of my recovery from that experience involved writing (I use my writing to discover my feelings and deeper thoughts), and I had an experience of "seeing" my relationship to the bird—and to everything—in somehow larger terms. I sensed something about who I was, relative to the universe, and made the decision to not eat meat anymore. Somehow that seemed important. It's been hard to talk about that decision, but I've never wavered.

That experience may also have contributed to Wilber's "making sense" to me. These two insights, about "community" and about who I am in the universe, seem related, and Ken Wilber supplies the vocabulary. I've only

Dreams of Home

just begun, as the song goes, but I have a feeling of direction that I've never experienced before in my life.

Notes:

TORI is an acronym for Trusting, Opening, Realizing and Interdepending. It comes from the writings and instigation of Jack R. Gibb, who developed some ideas about community that he called "Trust Level Theory."

Ken Wilber's Web site is at
<http://www.shambhala.com/wilber/>

Definition from The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition.

March 13, 1998

Community, Emptying and Mindfulness

For years, my passion for community experience has kept me wondering just what was the “magic” I felt sometimes, the stillness and peace when a group came together emotionally. Scott Peck called it *emptying*, the ineffable change in consciousness that precedes “true community.” Participants stopped arguing, stopped trying to change each other, stopped being fearful. A kind of awakening.

Jack Gibb approached it in another way. He described a continuum between trust and fear that we all tread all the time. By striving to trust—ourselves as well as others—in a group, we enhance the environment and the relationships within it. Trusting behavior has a disarming effect on others, and is cumulative within a group. People become more open with one another, more accepting. An ideal community is described by Peck’s four dimensions: *Trusting, Opening, Realizing, and Interdepending*.

In the past year I’ve taken up *vipassana* meditation, the basic technique of Buddhists for centuries. In this kind of meditation, one learns how to simply observe the activity of one’s own mind, remaining aware without attachment to the comings and goings of thoughts and feelings. With practice, one gradually gains insight into the conditioning of our minds by the various things we experience. There’s no dogma attached to this practice. Every person simply

Dreams of Home

watches his or her own mind, and eventually comes to a unique understanding of not only how his or her mind works, but how one is ultimately related to the universe. While teachers may help one move through difficulties, and give one the assurance that the practice is, indeed, working, it's the individual who has to do the work. What is different about vipassana from other forms of meditation is that *mindfulness* is the goal, awareness of the moment, wherever and whenever that might be. Focusing on an object or a thought or a mantra to the exclusion of one's surroundings is not as important as "bare attention" to one's mind processes. Eventually, one comes to this awareness even in ordinary life, away from the meditation cushion. One sees things as they are, which is often different from how we usually perceive them. There's an acceptance of people and events, without grasping for the desirable or avoiding the undesirable.

Even this early in my practice, I see that this state of mindfulness is a lot like Scott Peck's *emptying*. It's also very like Jack Gibb's *high trust* state, in which a group functions at its best. Fear is absent, as are role-playing and the masks that we usually wear in the presence of others. We are authentic and accepting of others. We don't have the need for game playing or manipulation of others to achieve our objectives. We see ourselves and other people as we really are, and that's okay. We're open to the marvelous complexity of human interaction without the fear that keeps us closed and tight. We can dance in the joy of true belonging.

How Did I Get Here?

Community building workshops and ongoing communities that exist for the purpose of achieving this extraordinary state among their participants generally focus on the interactions of people, rather than on the individual development. Community is a state that is arrived at when the members learn the necessary skills. In the workshops, it doesn't always happen. Even when some members feel it, there are often others who do not.

June 15, 1998

Another look at T.O.R.I.

For some time now, I've expressed the sense that I have had, that something happens sometimes in a TORI gathering (as well as in other gatherings) that seems important in a much larger way than the experience of sentiment or affection or friendship or any other ordinary term about relationships. Lacking a vocabulary to describe that something, I (tongue in cheek) called it "magic."

Our vocabularies, of course, are our means of thinking, as well as of describing. I used "magic" because "everybody who knows me would realize that I didn't really mean magic, for there is no such thing." The word I avoided, it's clear to me now, was "spiritual." I didn't really believe that there was such a thing as spiritual, either. It was simply a term to refer to (as distinct from "describe") anything outside our understanding of the real world. Perhaps it still is, but I'm not as hung up on being concrete and "realistic" as I was. I'll admit to still having a fear of being identified with all those vague and imaginative "philosophies" collectively known today as "New Age."

On the other hand, what I'm getting a glimpse of today is that what I could only call "magic" then is a Reality that is not as inaccessible as I thought. Thanks to Ken Wilber, mainly. What he shows me is that a lot of philosophical and religious ideas that have been expressed over the past

Another Look at TORI

two or three thousand years have a common ground of experience, however diverse their vocabularies. They say, simply, that there are levels of consciousness beyond symbolic “thinking” that are not describable in words. And that these levels of consciousness can provide us with understanding that transcends the usual literal, reasonable, rational, analytical “understandings” that I used to be convinced were ultimately – well, ultimate.

Wilber also says that most people on occasion experience insights into these higher levels of consciousness. “Epiphany” is one word used, especially in Christian writings, to describe such insights. And what these insights suggest to us is that there is a Connection among us; indeed, among all things, that we usually tend to ignore. All of the major religions of the world acknowledge and pay lip service to (at least) a higher level of knowing and a discipline for getting there, called “mysticism.” Almost universally, the experience is one of all boundaries, all limitations, all distinctions, falling away.

And that Connection—that Relatedness—is, I’m coming to realize, the “magic” of community. The coming together of a group of people in an awareness of their “oneness” is beyond the descriptive reach of mere language. “True community” is how Scott Peck refers to it. Jack Gibb points to the psychological and sociological components: trusting, opening, realizing and

Dreams of Home

interdepending. It has to be experienced in order to truly know it.

The fact that it happens only sometimes, and only to some people even then, means that is not an inevitable experience. But for those who have experienced it, it is profound and unforgettable. I've heard people insist that it's "like falling in love." Indeed, it might be an incidence of exactly the same phenomenon. Falling in love could very well be something more than "infatuation," with all the implications of that term.

TORI

Being aware (on more than an intellectual level) of the Connection (the "Oneness") between us, we are naturally trusting. If I am you and you are me, trust between us is effortless.

Being open to you—in both directions—makes perfect sense if we are, at some level, One. To hide from you, or to close off to you is a symptom of illness, exactly as it is for me to hide some part of me from myself.

Realizing—in the sense of "making real"—is manifesting the truth that underlies appearances. In true community, each member is dedicated to expressing their deepest self, and to facilitating that process in the others.

Another Look at TORI

Interdepending is both an acknowledging and a manifesting of that very oneness. There is no “they” in true community, only a “we.” And, in reality, only an “I.”

This is not the way our society usually works. Our economy depends upon competition for scarce resources. The illusion that if we all work harder at “getting ours” the world will somehow eventually support us all at the economic standard of living we strive for is a deception by those who want more than anybody else, who see us as “them,” useful to their individual purposes. It’s difficult to keep the awareness of the ultimate oneness of the universe when others insist upon not only the fragmentation of humanity, but the threat of the “Other” and the danger of vulnerability. The walls we usually build between us and them are encouraged and reinforced by the manipulations of the marketplace. “King of the Mountain” is not only a child’s game.

It’s no wonder that the individual’s insight of Community is so rare. That doesn’t make it any less important. On the contrary.

December 28, 1998

Community and Insight Revisited

Reading from the book, *Ken Wilber in Dialog*, in a conversation between Donald Rothberg and Michele McDonald-Smith, she addresses the issue of integrating our ability to deal with interpersonal relationships with our personal growth toward enlightenment.

She says, “. . . The predominant model [in traditional Buddhist practice] is one of solitude. There’s no teaching about how to be mindful or generally how to do spiritual work with your partner or children or parents. Of course, there is the emphasis on *sila* [ethics or morality] and the *paramis* [Perfections; ten qualities that develop and become predominant when on a spiritual path; the powerful causes of all spiritual accomplishment]. But what are the nuts and bolts of doing this, the actual practices to carry out with other people?”

Reading this reminded me of my preoccupation with community, and particularly TORI communities and the Community Building Workshops developed by Scott Peck. There, the emphasis is on interacting, with injunctions such as “speak from the ‘I,’” “don’t ‘fix,’” “honor all honest expression,” and so forth. “TORI” is an acronym for Trusting, Opening, Realizing, and Interdepending. To the extent that one follows each of

Community and Insight Revisited

these standards of conduct and attitude, one furthers the development of a community spirit within the group. Scott Peck described the usual process of community building as containing the stages of pseudocommunity [where people are polite and superficial], chaos [the breakdown of politeness as members get in touch with the lack of authenticity], emptying [the realization of the destructive effects of chaos], and true community [when the group rises above itself to speak authentically and listen fully to each other].

Often in that transition from emptying to true community, there is an awareness of “something” permeating the group—a new level of consciousness, in which trust, openness, realization and interdependence become group values. It’s an awakening to “what is” or “what’s really going on here” or “what we’re here for.” It’s an arising of insight, often throughout the whole group. It may not last (ongoing groups have to go through the four stages again and again), but it’s palpable. It may occur to many or most members of the group, but it is really an individual awareness. Some members may be untouched. But if enough of them are, the process of the group can be changed dramatically.

This shift in consciousness seems to be something that must arise out of the group itself. Trained facilitators can help, but often it’s the struggle that the group goes through, the intensity of conflict, that turns the switch. Perhaps it’s the intolerability of the chaos, the pain of the

Dreams of Home

conflict, that causes members to search for a way out. Yet, that doesn't feel like an adequate explanation of the shift. It doesn't seem to necessarily open the way for the insight. One may experience pain over the conflict and chaos present in the group without gaining a perspective that points to resolution. There has to be, in at least one of the group members, a capacity for that perspective, a readiness to awaken. Often, when reminded by one, others will also see the situation more clearly.

That "readiness to awaken" seems related to the Buddhist *paramis*. It's a spiritual quality, and it can be nurtured in the individual. One might consider that it is composed of all the *paramis*, for, to the extent that one possesses the *paramis*, one is surely ready to awaken to "what is" in the group.

In both Jack Gibb's TORI gatherings and Scott Peck's Community Building Workshops, real Community is possible only when there is a level of awareness among the participants that is beyond the selfish, the individualistic and the suspicious. Gibb assumes that it is present, or at least latent. The guidelines that he wrote for participating in a TORI describe the four dimensions of trusting, opening, realizing and interdepending as means to "community," but say little about the personal qualities that have to underlie their implementation.

February 17, 1999

Bodily Sensations and “Community”

The “magic” experience of community has been criticized as being a simple “feel good” experience, even sloppy sentimentality. True enough, most people experience that coming together feeling as overwhelmingly positive, even if sometimes mixed with sadness, and the bonding that takes place among those present as full of sentiment. Sometimes the criticism is outright rejection of the experience, as though it is something to be avoided. Others, however, lament the inadequacy of the experience to produce a long-lasting sense of community. Following a weekend community gathering, whatever “magic” occurred gradually loses its felt intensity in the reentry into the “real world.”

Perhaps it’s best to acknowledge at the outset that not all group experiences result in the profound feeling of connection and relatedness among the participants. Some people never feel anything more than pleasant enjoyment in being with others (if that). A gathering that provides mutual stroking and complimenting, sharing of common interests, and a lack of conflict is—let’s face it—enjoyable. But it’s not “community,” at least not the kind described by Scott Peck or Jack Gibb or David Goff. In Peck’s terminology it’s pseudocommunity.

Dreams of Home

The levels of awareness reached when a group truly comes together go beyond bodily sensations and emotional effects. While it may be relatively brief, there occurs an awareness of relationship on a higher level than can be put into words easily. Ask someone who has just returned from a retreat or conference overwhelmed, even dazed, by the experience to describe what they experienced. Often they are struck dumb, and the more intense the experience the less they are able to articulate.

“Experience” is not only physical, and “experiential” refers not only to the body, or even only to the body-mind. Sometimes in workshops there is an effort to “get out of the head” in order to feel what’s going on in the body. When they call these “experiential” workshops, they (for good reason) want the participants to stop thinking long enough to feel. If the workshop is supposed to be in some way “spiritual,” there can be the inference that the body is more spiritual than the mind. Ken Wilber clarifies the danger of equating “pre-rational” with “trans-rational” awareness. Transcendence, he says, includes both physical and mental levels of awareness, and simply because something is “non-rational” doesn’t mean it is transcendent. The infant who cannot distinguish “self” from “other” may be “one with the universe,” but it doesn’t know it.

So what’s the place of sensation and emotion in community building? The warmth, the good feelings of comradeship and intimacy help to keep people together

Bodily Sensations and “Community”

and maintain the connection. The spiritual “togetherness” includes such feelings—but transcends them, as well. Perhaps it’s the difference between infatuation, even friendship, and love. Love includes all the rest, but it’s not limited to the comfortable and the sweet.

That difference provides a clue: Our earliest affect is wholly narcissistic—pleasure and pain rule us. We learn how to seek the pleasurable and avoid the painful. Those people who bring us pleasure, we like, and those who bring us pain, we hate. As we begin to be socialized, we learn to recognize that others also experience pleasure and pain, and thus begin the enormously complex process of identifying with others, based not entirely on our own narcissism. We have feelings for those who are close to us, and we learn to care if they are experiencing joy or pain. Our span of caring usually expands as the limits of our personal world expand. Eventually there may come another breakpoint, through which we identify with people we have never even met, people more and more distant from us. This very adult, very mature viewpoint produces feelings in us that may resemble our narcissistic past, but these feelings are attached to abstractions.

If there are higher levels of consciousness than the rational mind (and I think there are), feelings could very easily become attached to such awareness. Many people describe intense feelings connected with insights and epiphanies that they have experienced.

Dreams of Home

The magic of true community might very well include feelings that accompany an awareness of higher-level connection within a group that has transcended itself. But that's not all it is.

(Revised) March 10, 1999

The “Magic” in Community

When I have written before about my discovery of “something” that occurs at times in groups, that deep awareness of connection beyond the ordinary, I began by calling it “magic,” for it seemed just that—mysterious, beyond logic and reason. The word itself I used self-consciously, almost tongue-in-cheek, for I wouldn’t want anybody to think I believed in fairies and elves and incantations and spells. But I had no word for the experience; it seemed beyond the power of language to describe. “You had to have been there,” as the colloquialism expressed it. I’ve heard many people struggle with it. Once experienced, it is seldom forgotten.

Ken Wilber, in *The Atman Project*, reveals that the problem is not limited to my own inadequacy of expression. One of the central themes in that book is the effort to clarify the distinction between “pre” and “trans,” the superficially similar but profoundly different phases of human development prior to language and subsequent to its limits. “Pre-verbal” is a stage one goes through before learning symbolic representations; “trans-verbal” are stages beyond the ability of language to describe. “Pre-personal” describes the mind before it learns to distinguish between “I” and “Not I.” “Trans-personal” experience takes one beyond the distinction, to awareness of the illusion of separation, to “non duality.” Much of traditional psychology in the past century has lumped

Dreams of Home

these non-rational experiences together. Freud considered all non-verbal experience as coming from our more primitive stages of growth. Jung sometimes went to the opposite extreme, considering pre-verbal symbolism as expressing somehow a reality beyond us, larger truths than empirical "facts."

The difference lies in the relative levels of evolutionary development. Each level, Wilber insists, emerges as a transformation from an earlier, less complex level. The self, as it becomes more aware, rises above itself to another level, incorporating the earlier levels but integrating them into a new self. The earliest self is not even aware of a boundary—there is no "other." Gradually, there develops a distinction between "I" and "Not I." Later, the self distinguishes between the body and the mind (the mind becoming the "self" that has a body). Much later, the mind itself becomes an object that the self is aware of, so it is no longer identified with the self.

Perhaps there is a similar progression in our sensing of group. "Family," of course, is a primitive and basic unit of grouping in human society. Even today in many cultures, the family is the unit that counts; individual members are expected to subordinate their identities to that of the family. In modern industrial societies, individualism is rampant. When one is no longer identified by the group, one is free to choose behavior that suits a more anonymous environment. But humankind is a social

The “Magic” in Community

animal, and the advantages of group life pull people into clusters of various kinds. Some of this clustering is practical: economies of living together, or special-interest groupings for the strength of numbers. Some might be called “retrograde,” not in a pejorative sense but as a recognition of the increased opportunity for intimacy, security and affection—the needs of the early being, and the pull of the romantic. Beyond the practical, beyond the rational, many people sense a connection among us all, a connection of spirit, even something beyond mere connection between individuals, between persons, to an identity that encompasses us all. Trans-personal. Full circle.

I believe that something like this is the “magic” I’ve experienced sometimes in a group of people. Arising out of something in the dynamic of the group, often following extreme stress (the “chaos” stage written about by Scott Peck), it seems more than just an awareness; it’s a knowing that whatever divides us is insignificant compared with the reality of the deep and profound oneness we possess with and in each other. Not a denial of differences, nor an agreed-upon set of rules for coping with them, but an integration of all the needs and visions of the members.

The experience of true community.

April 14, 1999

Coping with the Magic

One of the mysteries of this thing called community was, for me, what's really happening when a group of people suddenly seem to change, to take on a glow, to begin to see and hear each other in a special way, and to connect at soul level? I saw it happen, again and again in groups I participated in. Not every time, but often enough for me to recognize it. I kept asking the question, and not being satisfied with anything I thought of for an answer. Then, in a rather independent exploration, I happened on an idea. Just as individuals sometimes have epiphanies or "peak experiences," in which they suddenly are able to see things more clearly, to understand themselves and what's going on around them—perhaps groups can go through the same kind of thing. That clarity opens one up to the moment and to one's relationship with the universe and one's fellow creatures. In a group experience of it there's often a silence, "pregnant," as they say, with meaning.

I'm not talking about the kind of group-mind that happens at a concert or a political rally. It's not the contagious feeling that one gets when everybody else seems to be experiencing some emotion. I think that, like the individual epiphany, it's a thing of spirit. It's a contact with something deep inside oneself, and a recognition of the part that others play in that awareness. It's often—

Coping with the Magic

usually, in my experience—beyond words. Maybe that’s why the silence.

Some people are uneasy with silence, and doubly so with this experience. Unsettled by feelings that can’t be accurately identified, much less described, they laugh or joke, or begin talking about something totally irrelevant. Or they may feel that something *needs* to be said, that if the silence continues it means nobody is noticing what is happening. It takes a lot of restraint to keep from filling up the space.

At a concert I attended recently, the slow movement of Rachmaninoff’s Second Symphony was coming to a close with an exquisite clarinet solo that kept getting softer and softer. The conductor paused at the end, and nobody moved or coughed or (it seemed) even breathed. A couple of seconds of silence was ended with great applause.

Customarily at symphonic concerts, applause is held until the very end of a work. Pauses between movements, if there are any, are considered part of the composer’s intent, to sustaining a mood or provide a breathing space between contrasting passages. It’s as disconcerting to me to have a conductor leave too little space between such movements as it is to hear the audience burst into applause. I suspect that sometimes someone isn’t aware that the pause is just that—a moment of silence as important to the work as a chord or glissando—rather than the end of the work. When one person in an audience begins to clap, others will surely follow. When that

Dreams of Home

happens, a conductor may wait briefly for the applause to end, then almost in passing nod an acknowledgment to the audience and continue the piece.

In the recent concert, the applause stopped the performance for several minutes. It was understandable, considering the sensitive eloquence of the clarinetist. The audience just couldn't contain the emotion generated. But it intruded into the music.

Perhaps the same thing occurs in that transcendent space when community happens. Someone may simply be overwhelmed, without the ability to savor the moment. A more sophisticated group might be able to live with the silence and all it represents, allowing more members to taste the experience more fully.

But that's part of the process. We learn individually and together, and there's nothing to be gained by rushing things.

In the next essay, I look into this some more.

begun May 28, 1999

Community as a Jam Session

cog-ni-tion noun : 1. The mental process or faculty of knowing, including aspects such as awareness, perception, reasoning, and judgment.

I've been reading about cognition, in a little book by Francisco Varela, in which he discusses how our views of cognition are changing from the "computational" model to something *emergent* within the organism. *Ethical Know-How* is a series of three lectures he gave at the University of Bologna, in which he describes the process of ethical decision-making. Actually, he says, we act ethically for the most part *prior to* even our awareness, and any "decision making" comes later, in the form of modification, justification, or generalization. That's why he calls it "ethical know-how" rather than "ethical know-what."

He points out that we can't find a central "self" responsible for this process; it's almost as if parts of our neural networks do their thing independently (in computer jargon, it's a kind of "parallel processing"), influenced by what they've done in the past. The more a network is exercised in a certain way, the more quickly and surely it will respond that way again. And the more likely its "result" will prevail to enter our awareness. So much for habit and conditioning.

Dreams of Home

Last night I watched a documentary on Public Television about the possibility of life on other worlds. It was interesting, but not much that was new to me. But one thing they did gave me a lot to think about. At the end, they showed a large stage, and a bunch of musicians sitting and standing, not organized, beginning to tune their instruments. It sounded like before a concert, with a cacophony of sound but you couldn't pick out anything in particular (like a crowd of people, talking among themselves). The narrator was talking over the sound about the possibility of our ever communicating with alien life forms, even if they do exist. We have to be listening at the right time, and announcing our presence at the right time, and the chances of connecting are not very good. But the possibility exists.

And that's where the musicians became relevant. In the midst of the noise, one musician could be heard playing a bit of Beethoven. Then, someone else joined in, and then another instrument began playing its own part of the same movement—all while the rest of them were tuning and testing and practicing. So you gradually began to hear music along with the noise. It didn't seem to be programmed at all, just people picking up on what they heard, and joining in. Eventually (just as the narrator was concluding his remarks), all the instruments were playing the final measures of the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth, where the opening chords are repeated and resolved. It was a dramatic climax to the film and a clear demonstration of how something important *emerges* from

Community as a Jam Session

chaos. I thought immediately about my experiences with building community, where everyone enters at their own level and with their own agenda, but sometimes something happens from the interchange, a coherent state emerges as though by itself. Nobody directs it, nobody controls it, it just seems to happen, but when it does it seems almost inevitable, and *exactly right*.

In my example of the orchestra that gradually makes music in an emergent fashion, the piece they eventually played was a specific piece of music, and each instrument had a specific part to play in that music. (They all knew the same song.) Actually, a better example would be a jazz ensemble in a jam session, where nothing is "written down" and what each instrument plays *emerges* from the context itself, what the musician "hears" in his own head as a response to what others are playing at that moment— *not even necessarily the same song*. And to go even further, imagine an ensemble in which each member has an infinite number of instruments at hand, so that he not only plays what he hears, but with the instrument he "spontaneously" chooses to play with. That's what happens in our heads when we, for example, have a conversation with someone. What comes out of our mouths has much more to do with what's going on in our heads than what the other person says. But we already know that, don't we?

In a group situation, the process is compounded as the number of individuals increases. What, then, causes this "coming together" feeling I keep talking about? It's hard to

Dreams of Home

imagine such a complex system as a group of people, with no central control, each one responding to all their personal "resonances" of neural networks, ever coming to a place where they sense anything in common. But clearly, it happens.

One of the crucial understandings of this phenomenon is the lack of central direction or control. Sure, someone can instruct or inspire a group to "work together" on something. Getting it to "be a community" is something else. As someone described it, it's like an orgasm—it's hard to *make* it happen. "Letting go" is abandoning control and allowing what is inherent to emerge.

Something just as important, if the result is going to be more reliable than chance. The participants have to have some idea of how it works, or at least the type of behavior that encourages or discourages it. Eventually, as Jack Gibb trusted, any group will find itself—its Self—as a community. But time is not often an inexhaustible resource in the life of a group.

November 12, 1999

The Group Self

When Scott Peck refers to “true community,” he means a group that has made it through the stages of community building: pseudocommunity, chaos, emptying, and finally, community. There’s a sense among the participants of togetherness, not simply emotionally but a deeper connection and identity among those involved. They exhibit, in Jack Gibb’s terminology, high degrees of trust, openness, realization and interdependence. The group, as an entity, is transformed.

That doesn’t mean, necessarily, that every member of the group is equally transformed. Sometimes individuals observe the change in the group and withdraw even further, feeling left out and alienated. Still, there may be a palpable change in the relational quality of the group itself, however temporary it might be.

I’ve been struck by a parallelism between present-day cognitive theories and my experience of the changes in groups. As described in *The Embodied Mind* by Varela, Thompson and Rosch, the process of cognition is seen as a kind of distributed processing, in which changes in neural networks come from two-way interconnections as well as straight-line sensorial communication. In other words, a sensory input from, say, the eyes, is mixed with a lot of other influences even before being passed to the cerebral cortex for interpretation. All this blending is circular and reiterative prior to any symbolic activity. The process is no

Dreams of Home

longer seen by researchers in terms of Von Neumann computer activity, where a central processing unit is “in charge,” and data paths are unidirectional. Cognition “emerges” from the activity of many neuronal systems, few of which seem dedicated to particular tasks.

In a community as described by people such as Peck and Gibb, a sense of community “emerges” from the activities and sensibilities of the constituents, not from any control or direction by one or more members or even by rules or procedural fiat. Certainly, deliberate behavior by members can enhance or diminish the process, but in the end community seems to “just happen.”

When it does, it has a feel of substance, a kind of “we are one” reality, and this profoundly affects subsequent behavior of its members. There is a desire to protect and nurture the community, to extend it in time and scope. (How many weekend workshops in community building end with members exchanging names and addresses and vows to meet again!) What began as a collection of separate individuals has become an institution.

Cognitive researchers, as mentioned above, have pursued the concept of “self” that seems so real to us humans, and have run into blank walls and circularities. (Not that that conundrum is new. Philosophers have been grappling with it for centuries.) No matter how real my self seems to me, when I attempt to find it, to isolate and observe it, it slips out of my grasp. Conversely, no matter how much it eludes direct examination, I insist (along with Descartes)

The Group Self

that “I am.” The Buddhist tradition may observe that the self is but an illusion, but at this point in my development, it surely seems a solid thing. There seems no way I can make sense of a reality without a “self.”

But I can understand the distinction between the sensing of “community” felt so strongly sometimes by members of a group and the “objective reality” that the community is but an illusion, a figment of the imagination. (That is not to say that it has no effective—and affective—consequences.) Another term for “community,” as it is perceived by those who feel a part of it, is “group self.” Does it exist? Well, yes and no. Can I find it and point to it? No.

When I look at it that way, I can turn my attention to my individual “self” and see it in a different light.

November 30, 1999

Robert Persig and Community Process

Even though Robert Persig wrote *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* in the early 1970s, when “community” was a blooming buzzword, he gave little attention to the dynamics of group process. He was more concerned with the gaping split between two worldviews—the classical and the romantic. The classical, growing out of the concept inventories of Aristotle, grew into our dedication to empirical science and “Truth” over “Beauty.” The romantic worldview, the mythic, the intuitive, the immeasurable, was relegated to second-class status along with art and mind and spirit. Aristotle, perhaps, was reacting to Plato, who wrote of the importance of form and ideal over mere substance. Plato was also greatly invested in discounting the ideas of the Sophists, who professed something beyond form or substance.

Persig sensed that something more, something larger, something out of which grew the dualities we live with every day—classical and romantic, mind and matter, good and bad, black and white, either-or. The list is quite long, and most importantly suggests the mindset of modern society. The thing that encompasses all these dualities he calls Quality. Quality cannot be defined, only pointed to, because it is beyond words. Yet we all know it, and to the

Robert Persig and Community Process

extent that we attend to it in our lives we live more richly and contribute more to those around us. It is as much a part of science as it is art—no, it's the other way around—science is as much a part of Quality as is art. The scientist may restrict her attention to what she can measure, but any hypothesis is but one of an infinity of possibilities. The selection of hypotheses depends only a little on logic and empirical data, and a lot on something else, like intuition.

The process shows itself most clearly when one is stuck. A problem presents itself, and the solution evades us. We step through our inventory of past experiences, past solutions, but nothing fits. This is different, and we aren't equipped to handle it. Except that we are.

Persig says that it's when you get stuck—really stuck—when “nothing works” and you can see absolutely no way out of an intolerable situation, that's when your potential is at its maximum. That's when all the knowledge you have about how to handle situations fails, and you are required to stop. And care. Not think. Care. In Persig's words, you are now depending upon “preintellectual awareness,” or what Poincaré, a mathematician from the late nineteenth century called the “subliminal self,” the part of you that is open on a level deeper than thinking, deeper than rationality. To the Buddhist, sitting on her cushion, it is perhaps the “beginner's mind.” It is the source of creativity. It is where values come from. Where Value comes from. An awareness of Quality. Because it is beneath consciousness, a lot of things happen there that

Dreams of Home

relieve us from having to weigh every action. We can decide to act because we intuit the “best” course to take. There are always an infinity of possible courses. Something in us has to select from that infinity, and thought takes too much time (to say nothing of the stress).

If we care, then our selection will be for the good.

When community “works,” it’s because we’ve stopped and tapped into Quality (or call it Spirit, or even God). No wonder it feels like “magic!” Often we wonder, “Where did that come from?” Where did this group, a moment ago foundering in chaos, suddenly get the wisdom to transcend it?

Persig insists that it’s the “stuckness” that does it. When we follow the rules, or depend upon what we have learned about similar situations, we are drawing from our intellectual capacity, our memory bank of rational solutions. Sometimes these work. Sometimes this situation is enough like that situation that we can use the tools we developed for the past to solve the problem of the present. If everything we do is like that, we are soon dull and mechanical, living by rote, following the rut in the road. But in relationships (and everything of value is about relationships), no moment is exactly like any moment in the past.

TORI principles point to a different way to be with people. Trust is not only trust of others, or even of oneself. It is trust in a process of being open to life, to letting go of rules and roles and looking at this situation, this moment,

Robert Persig and Community Process

in its uniqueness. The reason we are so aware of the function of crises in TORI gatherings is that they force us to access that other level of awareness, that intuition of “higher ground” in our relationships. That place where we are not different at all, in spite of superficial appearances.

How do we learn to do it without crisis? How can people learn to really be in this moment, moment by moment? That’s a bigger thing than group dynamics, of course. It’s an individual thing, something I have to learn in the quiet of my own mind. If I can learn to be here, now, I’m not burdening our intercourse with old conflicts I never resolved or fears I never faced. To the extent that I am free of conditioned responses, I can be present to you and to me. I might not get stuck so often because that process of Quality that is always inside of me as it is inside of you will be available to our dialog.

January 18, 2000

Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis: the Shift to Community

Reading an interview with Ken Wilber (him again!), I was struck by something he pointed out in the development of the self. At each stage of development, there is a leap, often a complete reversal of viewpoint and identification. In the move from the “preconventional” phase to the “conventional” phase, for example, the child has to let go of “magic,” with its sense of omnipotence and inclination toward impulse, to assume the rules and roles of convention, to give up the narcissistic sense of being the center of the universe and accept the dominion of “reality.” Later, in the move from the conventional to the postconventional phase, one learns to let go of exclusive dependence upon rules and roles and integrate the possibilities inherent in a heterogeneous universe.

I keep seeing parallels between the development of the individual and the development of community. The impulse toward community could be seen as similar to the shift out of the preconventional phase of the individual, where one senses the need to belong, to be among others. So a person joins a group—whether it be a club, a church, or a ball team. (It’s probably not a coincidence that this shift tends to occur at about the same age as one enters

Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis: the Shift to Community

school. One is able to function in a group setting because one can learn the rules of the game.) The level of interaction among the members is relatively stable. One comes to know where one stands.

Eventually, however, some people in the group begin to push the limits. They want more from the experience. One sees greater possibilities. One may assert oneself, pressing the group to go in some new direction, try to take charge of the activities of the group. This, of course, raises the probability of conflict if others also try to steer the course of the group in different directions or keep the status quo. Individualism is a manifestation of diversity. This is where splintering and scattering often occur as the group breaks up into different factions. The struggle that can occur may end up in what Scott Peck calls "chaos." The stronger personalities in the group compete with each other for attention and direction. The others feel pulled in different directions, and may despair or drop out altogether. The group is no longer "a group" but a collection of individual—and separate—needs. The "thesis" (the group as an entity) is challenged by the "antithesis" (individuality).

"Synthesis," of course, is the bringing together of these two competing tendencies. Acknowledging, in deed, the needs of the individuals along with the needs of the group is a difficult task to accomplish. There must arise within the members a sense of the group as more than a collection of individuals, without abandoning the distinct needs of each member. There may occur compromises and

Dreams of Home

agreements to return to a more stable state, but these are likely to be only temporary solutions if the needs of some are simply suppressed in service to a “greater need.” True synthesis requires a transcendence, a transformation, not only of the group but of the members themselves. They have to see beyond the present state to a new perspective, and they have to do that at a gut level, not simply as an intellectual “reorganization.”

The realization of community, like the realization of one’s self, is the creation of a new level of consciousness, never denying lower-level needs and realities but integrating them into something new, a manifestation of vision. And, just as true for community as it is for individual growth, realization does not come suddenly, fully formed and secure. It’s hard work and it’s full of doubts and fears and struggles. The vision may become obscured at times by the pain of growth and abandonment of the old, the known and the safe. As the developmental psychologists put it, the individual ego has to “die to” its old self in order to be “born again” at the next level. It’s seldom without pain.

Collectively, we may not yet be ready for “true community.” Perhaps it requires first a transformation within each of us, a readiness to stretch our limits, to let go of our comfortable, individual nests. Maybe what it takes is a new perspective on reality itself, and that’s likely to happen only when we’re ready for it.

January 25, 2000

Resisting Community

In a group gathering a few days ago, someone observed that one reason “community” is often so difficult to achieve is because emptying is seen as a threat to the ego. The remark has kept insinuating itself into my thoughts ever since.

Of course. That’s what emptying means. I don’t know why it didn’t occur to me before. (One more reason why friends are indispensable!) Our egos are dedicated to self-protection, and the greater the threat, the more fiercely they defend. It’s perfectly reasonable that the opening to true community is seen as a threat to the ego. The ego identifies with its current level of consciousness. Every transcendent experience involves “dying” to the old level in order to move up to the new. And community involves a higher level of consciousness than just a collection of people. The “chaos,” as Scott Peck calls it, is exactly that ego war.

And that’s where the sadness comes from that so often accompanies emptying. We grieve the loss of the ego. It’s only when the ego can re-establish itself on the higher level that the new awareness can take hold. And that’s one reason conflict so often accompanies the movement from “group” to “community.” We fight ourselves, our own reaching for the next state, and everyone present is caught in the crossfire.

Dreams of Home

Instead of asking if there isn't some better way to get there than through conflict and tears, maybe we should be looking for other ways to die.

January 24, 2000

Community Building as Personal Growth— Another Look

I've been reading Heisenberg's essay "Science and the Beautiful," in which he discusses the inner impulse to manifest "something" that lurks just beneath our consciousness sometimes, something that seems imprinted upon our soul yet eludes us until one day, when conditions are right, emerges almost on its own. He related this phenomenon to Plato's "idea" and Jung's "archetype."

I couldn't help but relate that to my struggle to identify the "magic" I sensed sometimes in community. For years, I was obsessed with the mystery of it. It wasn't until my reading of Ken Wilber unlocked the door in my head that had prevented me from seeing beyond the limits of "rationality" that I could begin to identify (recognize, really) what the magic might be. Not that it was instantaneous, even then. Yet clarity continues to increase . . .

"Community" requires an awareness, among the participants, of the true relationship that exists among us—the deep and profound connection that links us all, whether we know it or not. When the "magic" happens, we glimpse it and feel it. If we don't recognize it for what

Dreams of Home

it is, it's because we simply haven't learned yet. Our personal worldview doesn't make the space for it. Even our language, our personal vocabulary, may not contain the words we need to "know" it. We may ascribe the sensing of it to something else, something more familiar to us, something we know how to encompass—even if it is not *what's really going on*.

I guess what I'm really saying is that there's a potential in each of us, closer to the surface, perhaps, in some than others. That potential is the potential for community in the deep sense. It may take coaxing to manifest itself. No doubt it takes practice. The building of community, then, requires individual growth as well as an appropriate group situation. Jack Gibb may have thought that all it takes is to put people together for a sufficient length of time and it will happen. William Poloniak echoes Gibb: "When people are allowed to be in the same environment with minimal constraint or interference from others, a natural process of becoming a community *always evolves*." However, he calls space, time and *commitment* the "angels of community." Perhaps it's the commitment that signifies the nearness of the potential.

In other words, if someone goes into a community building situation simply curious, without an inner preparation (I'm tempted to call it "faith," or at least "idealism"), it's less likely that they will get in touch with that sense of *connection made*, even if others in the group do. That would explain why some people just don't seem to "get it."

Community Building as Personal Growth
—Another Look

Is all this just wishful thinking on my part? Is “potential” just another word for intention? We’re all familiar with the idea that if one goes into a situation expecting a certain outcome, that outcome is more likely to occur (what any good scientist learns to avoid). If I have identified just another example of this, calling it first “magic” and then “spirit,” then I’ve been building myself up to stand upon a structure of straw.

But another physicist, Sir Arthur Eddington, encourages me. Just as the name of something is not the thing itself, the thing itself is not its significance. And what I’ve been struggling all these years to understand is not the “thing” of community so much as the significance of community. In a way, I can’t be wrong. What I sense, *is*. How I manage to suggest it to you may lack some eloquence, to put it mildly. Eddington’s field is physics, but his insight is something outside the realm of physics. He says that even the most ardent scientist cannot explain his ardency in terms of his science. That ardency, like a sense of beauty, comes out of somewhere deeper, even, than his consciousness. To Eddington, ultimate reality is “mind-stuff,” with the material world merely a subset, and physics merely a symbolic language intended to describe that subset. Mathematics is deliberately cyclical—it rests upon agreement, only. The direct *knowing* of something can come only from within.

If I see something in our coming together that looks to me like “spirit,” but you’re not convinced, I can only invite

Dreams of Home

you to keep looking. What you see you might describe in different words, and that might affect the degree to which you ascribe significance to it. My finger pointing to the moon is obviously not the moon itself. I'll be content if you simply turn to look.

February 24, 2000

A View of TORI Groups as Socio-Religious Communities

Ken Wilber, in his book *A Sociable God: Toward a New Understanding of Religion* (Shambhala Press, 1983), calls for an expansion of sociological study of religious groups to include transpersonal aspects. He suggests that such groups operate both in horizontal (cultural) and vertical (transcendent) dimensions, to differing degrees of *legitimacy* (how well they satisfy the integrative and other needs of the developmental level(s) of the member) and *authenticity* (how well they promote the transcendence to a higher structural orientation of the member).

In his description of the parameters of such studies, he discusses the adaptability of individuals to the level of functioning of the groups themselves, and the importance of recognizing how well suited a particular person is to the expectations of the particular group. For example, "A prerational, borderline individual, who needs desperately to create rational structure and ego strength, should not be introduced to the more strenuous transrational meditative-yogic disciplines, because they are designed to loosen the rational structure temporarily and thus will simply dismantle what little structure the borderline has left."

Dreams of Home

As I read, it hit me that a TORI gathering, even though it is almost never seen as a religious group, operates on similar fundamental principles. Jack Gibb, in his later writings, moved into the spiritual implications of the work he had been doing for most of his career. This awareness came out in markedly transcendent proposals concerning "what it is all about." Scott Peck, also, went from writing *A Different Drum* about the meaning of community within the culture to *A World Waiting to be Born*, about considerably higher visions.

What would TORI look like to a "transpersonal sociologist" (a term and a field urged by Wilber)? To the extent that it adheres to (or at least promotes) Gibb's behavioral dimensions of trust, openness, realization and interdependence, it is certainly operating in the same neighborhood as many religious groups. The fact that it avoids identifying with God-talk or mystical concepts simply puts it closer to denominations such as the Unitarians or Theravada Buddhism than to Baptists or Roman Catholics. TORI "community meetings," the central cohering activity of the gatherings, operate with clear expectations and ground rules, even if these are not always made explicit. There is, true enough, a lack of formal ritual in such meetings. The emphasis is on individual freedom to participate as one is moved

In Community Building Workshops, the formal events sponsored by the Foundation for Community Encouragement, which F. Scott Peck began, not only is the individual free to participate at the level he/she is

A View of TORI Groups as Socio-Religious Communities

comfortable with, the participants are urged to "speak only when moved" to diminish small talk and compulsive space-filling chatter. Reducing the dialog to meaningful individual expressions tends to raise the level of consciousness and promote the feelings of connection among those present.

The "ground rules," communicated more often by example rather than by "should" statements, are intended to enhance the level of trust and the sense of connectedness among the participants. "I" statements (speaking about and from the acknowledged viewpoint and feelings of the speaker, rather than expressing judgments or abstractions) help to keep defensiveness to a minimum. Avoiding the giving of advice helps to maintain an egalitarian atmosphere. Subjects of discussion, while not explicitly mandated, are usually personal. Sympathy and compassion are freely dispensed, contributing to the closeness that is the clear, if unstated, objective. Attention to the process is encouraged.

All of this leads, ideally, to a coming together, what Peck calls "true community," a close sharing of humanness. An ongoing TORI community takes on the attractive characteristics of a close-knit family (and sometimes the unattractive cliquishness and gossiping, as well). But "family" is only part of what is sought after in this type of community.

Dreams of Home

At this point, I'll use my own experience as an example, for I have gone through a lot of the stages of "belonging" and can attest to a certain development in what the group has meant to me. I first attended a TORI gathering with a friend, and was impressed with how much the others seemed to care for and respect each other. On the other hand, I saw it as a kind of in-group, with me on the outside. I went through a period of crisis and nearly left the gathering. But when I revealed my feelings to the group, I was immediately enfolded. I felt suddenly that I belonged. I soon recognized that it was like "family" to me, where I felt accepted almost unconditionally, and my attachment to the group increased over a number of years as my "belongingness" grew more secure.

Eventually, I became aware of something that often occurred in gatherings, a profound sense of "we" that seemed to go far beyond the "family" feeling I had become accustomed to. It seemed at a different level altogether, and often included even newcomers present. In the "family" phenomenon, there are "us" and "them." In this new sensing, there was no "them." I called it "magic" and tried to get a conceptual grasp of it. It was only after a time of discovering meditation and mysticism that I began to see the "magic" as a shift of consciousness, a transcendent experience of *spiritual* connection.

The "magic" doesn't happen in all gatherings. I have sensed it, however, in groups that knew nothing of TORI or Community Building Workshops. Reading Jack Gibb's later writings, I get a clear impression that his was a path

*A View of TORI Groups as Socio-Religious
Communities*

toward spiritual awareness. I can imagine that even in the beginning he intuited the spiritual significance of trusting and opening and realizing and interdepending as the ways to spiritual connection in a secular environment.

Jack Gibb and Scott Peck both participated in the "T-Groups" at Massachusetts Institute of Technology back in the 1950s, although I've not read any acknowledgment that they worked together. But as I understand those experiments in group dynamics, the result was to discover the emergence of what I'd call "community" and techniques to encourage it. The ensuing "encounter groups" of the 1970s may have contributed little to the knowledge of how to achieve community, but it seemed to raise the expectations of people toward a more humanistic way of being together. The workshops of people like Gibb and Peck were part of that "human potential movement."

Participation in TORI and other "community building" efforts has declined in the past decade, as the charismatic leaders have turned to other things (Jack Gibb died a few years ago). The "movement" may have had its day. I have no doubt that the impulse is still with us. Whatever form it takes in the future, whether in secular enterprises such as Michael Lerner's *Politics of Meaning* and the *Communitarians* of Amitai Etzioni, or the growing mystic traditions such as Tibetan, Zen and Theravadin Buddhism, there is likely to be somewhere in between a small group of searchers experiencing the cusp of

Dreams of Home

transcendence on their own, discovering what has been known for centuries, for the first time.

March 3, 2000

If There's Not Enough Time . . .

. . . and there never is—to do the job right, to really connect with that person, to learn the Secret of the Universe, or to achieve *True Community*—then what is there to do?

I was writing to my sister this morning about my current ideas on the Big Question: *What's it all about?* She and I have been corresponding on such weighty issues, and I wrote about my lack of interest in the subject of reincarnation. It seems to me to be wishful thinking. I'd rather focus on what I can experience here and now, in this lifetime. I've become comfortable with my mortality, and even the possibility that my life might end before I'm quite ready for it. I haven't seen any convincing evidence about life after death, whether in a Christian heaven or in a continuing string of incarnations "until I get it right." If by the time my time is up, if I haven't gotten it right, then well, *I got as far as this.*

Then, however, I expressed some of my impatience over *realizing* true community. A lot of what I've written in these essays touches on my wanting to experience that "magic," to feel that deep contentment in my connection with others (*deeper, even than my old desire to belong, what I used to think was "it" – the magic*). I've even talked with others about how I (we) might facilitate that in TORI

Dreams of Home

gatherings. Jack Gibb wrote about the conditions of trusting, opening, realizing and interdepending that enable community to happen, but he didn't set up a structure of activities beforehand, as I understand they do, for example, in the Human Awareness Institute workshops. The Community Building Workshops inspired by Scott Peck arranged a minimum of structure just to get the group started on the right track, and David Bohm prescribed a particular process for his *Dialoguing* gatherings. William Poloniak referred to the "angels of community" as "space, time and commitment."

In my letter, my complaint revealed something about me, that while I may have come to terms with the inevitably premature end of my life, I hadn't come to terms with the just-as-likely premature end of a community gathering. So much I want to say, so much I want to experience, so much I want to feel with people—and there's never enough time! In the past, I've found myself shutting down during the last evening of a gathering, to protect myself from the reality of ending. Then I'd get grumpy and sullen, all the while swallowing the lump in my throat. I'd become angry with those who had to leave early (and guilty if it was me, but relieved that I didn't have to feel all that loss right up to the end). Sometimes I'd get cynical about the lack of "commitment" in the group. All because I couldn't deal with community cut short.

There's an old cliché about "if you love someone, you've got to let them go. If they fly away, they weren't really yours, anyway." Not grasping. Not hanging on. It relates

If There's Not Enough Time . . .

to the "no expectations" expectation that is espoused in TORI sometimes. It's probably an aspect of trust, a willingness to accept less than perfection, less than completion *in order to provide the atmosphere in which community can emerge by itself*. Community might not happen; if it doesn't, then it wasn't really yours, anyway.

What *can* be taken away from a gathering, whether or not community "happens," is a knowledge that I was *truly present*, and that I was not alone, and that I was able to touch someone and be touched by someone. But only if I let go of that butterfly, open my hand and my heart to whatever happens. *We got as far as this*.

Desire and aversion both contribute to my suffering. I need to remind myself of that. Often.

April 05, 2000

Dreams of Home (Part A)

In recent years, I have two recurring dreams, two themes that return to me in different forms, over and over. It's fascinating to me how creative my unconscious mind is in stirring the soup of images, places and people long stored in my memory to come up with different situations to tell me the same two stories.

I know that dreams can tell us much about ourselves, things that we may not want to deal with in our lives, reenactments of fears that we face all our lives but cannot acknowledge during the day (often because they are childish fears that we wouldn't want to admit to, horrible nightmares that conjure up our personal visions of archetypal images and experiences), wishes about infantile or sexual pleasures, or satisfactions of other, continuing desires. Psychotherapy can sometimes put these recurring themes into perspective for us and allow us to understand ourselves and our behavior better, even let us find peace for the child within so we can get on with our adult life. I haven't spent much time in therapy, but I think I can understand something of what my dreams tell me.

I can still remember a couple of dreams I used to have in my childhood: one was being threatened by a bull, and the other one was being chased by a truck. Both of these dreams tormented me around the age of four. I got a lot of satisfaction, about the time I began studying psychology

Dreams of Home

in college, in interpreting these two dreams, for they were obviously about my father. He was large and sometimes threatening (though never, in my memory, abusive toward me or anyone else), and at that time he drove a truck for a living. I remember clearly the last time I dreamed the “bull dream.” Certain that the bull was going to eat me, I suddenly decided to face it. I was through with running from it, and I simply stopped and turned toward the beast. “Go ahead, eat me,” I said in resignation. The scene then went black, and I woke up. I didn’t have that kind of closure with the trucks. It’s possible that the truck dreams stopped at about the same time, but I’m not sure. My satisfaction as an adult was in recognizing the classic father-son conflict and its seeming resolution.

Another recurring dream in my childhood was drowning. That one stopped when I was about twelve years old when I learned how to swim. Even at the time, I think I recognized the meaning of the dream, the fear of water, struggling to stay on the surface. The resolution came in the form of learning, in my dream, that I could, by tucking my head and keeping my face close to my chest, actually breathe a little, just enough to survive. The drowning dreams went away. There may be more symbolism in that one that I’ve not been aware of, but it, too, was a source of satisfaction to me, an accomplishment in life.

My two “theme dreams” in recent years seem to have to do with returning “home.”

Dreams of Home

One dream is about returning to my “growing up” place of employment, Repro Art Service in Cincinnati. It was a small company, started by a couple of young men who broke away from their employer, taking most of the other employees (me included) with them. We produced technical art and publications, and grew into a firm of sixty people. It was my first job in which I felt a part of things, something other than “just a job.” I worked with them for twelve years, going from drawing illustrations for industrial instruction manuals to supervising production. When I left Repro Art Service, it was to return to college for a master’s degree, but mostly to find out who I was in the world aside from my protected relationship in the company where I came of age. Breaking away, even at age forty, was another phase of my growing up. My recent dreams of returning to Repro Art Service always involve going back with a lifetime of experience, getting respect for myself and my knowledge, a peer to my old employer rather than as the bright young kid willing to go to the ends of the earth in order to get approval from the boss.

As a teenager, I remember having conversations with other boys about someday returning to our hometown in a Cadillac convertible, cruising the streets and showing off to all those people we had felt inferior to during our school years. I suppose my dreams about returning to Repro Art Service were part of that fantasy. They also represent, I’m convinced, a wish to go back home, where

Dreams of Home

my place was secure, where I felt loved and appreciated: the proverbial prodigal son.

As I remember, the Repro Art Service dreams began some years ago after I had been free-lancing for a long time, doing the work that I had learned in that little company, only now able to produce drawings and entire books by myself that we needed a crew to do before the infusion of computers into the field. But being able to do the work was only a part of what mattered. When I left that company, I was in senior management, only one step below the owners. I directed the work of illustrators and writers doing the work I had learned myself over the years. They had rewarded me appropriately for my growth, and I had a family and home in the suburbs, drove a Mercedes Benz, and drank martinis on the patio at the end of the day. Still, I felt incomplete. I had done what the bosses asked me to do, and had learned what they wanted me to learn. I was still, in my mind (and, in theirs, I was convinced), the kid they had hired years before.

Decades after I left, I wanted to go back there, to show them that I was *somebody*, that I knew more and could do more than what they had taught me. The teenager was still alive in me. I didn't need to cruise the streets in my Cadillac convertible, but I still needed approval and respect for myself and what I was apart from them.

The other dream is more specifically about being "in community," of belonging. The scene varies and the people vary—there are seldom specific, recognizable

Dreams of Home

friends there, only warm and comfortable situations. I'm most often in an old house, with lots of people. There are usually no particular activities going on, except that usually I'm engaged in trying to find my belongings in order to get dressed, or I'm trying to find a vacant bathroom. People are everywhere.

I began having the dreams about crowds of mostly anonymous but familiar people in old houses about the time when the Toronto TORI community began to decline in energy and numbers. Those dreams were not so much about going back to prove myself as simply being a part of a group of people, comfortable and accepted.

It's clear to me that both of these themes are about *returning home*. Both of them are about family. One family is about *doing*, the other about *being*. Both are about *belonging*.

To me, that's what community is all about—*belonging*. Not everybody I know has acknowledged the longing I feel, sometimes, to return to Family, to go back to the old *familia* that represents comfort and acceptance to me, the place where, as someone put it, "It's where, when you go there, they have to take you in."

And not everybody I know has acknowledged the pull of a different kind, the sense of belonging that is not out of the past and yet is older—eons older. That's what the next few pages are about.

May 19, 2000

Dreams of Home (Part B)

Some ten or twelve years ago, at a small TORI gathering in Toronto, I spoke in a community meeting about “something” that seemed to call out to me, a hint of some kind of Truth that I had yet to identify. At the time, I was particularly aware of my age and the fact of my mortality. I remember observing the irony in the real possibility that I would discover “Reality” about the time I was to die, that discovering the “meaning of life” or whatever it is would come at the end of mine. Whatever I might have done with the knowledge would be, by then, moot.

I really had little idea what I was saying. The whole question of ultimate reality seemed so far from my grasp that I couldn’t imagine even what form the knowledge would take. I was aware only of the growing question. It hadn’t interested me much before. I assumed that most everybody was as ignorant about it as I, and that if humankind was ever to discover this Truth, it would have to wait until it (we) were more evolved. Science, I felt, was working on it; everybody else simply speculated.

A separate question was working inside me at the time, a rather more mundane question, I thought. What was it that I felt, and others mentioned, at very special moments in community gatherings? Surely someone knowledgeable in group dynamics would know: what was the “magic” that happened in community? I began writing about it, and at first identified it as related to “belonging.” My first

Dreams of Home

experience with TORI seemed to have something to do with that feeling of “family” or “home” or whatever it was that allowed me to feel a part of the community. I remembered the large family gatherings of my childhood, the frequent reunions that had shrunk and become unsatisfying, somehow, after I became an adult. I missed that excitement and that feeling of belonging. TORI gave it to me again.

Eventually, that explanation didn’t quite work for me. There was something else. An electrical charge that happened in a group when things shifted from “us” to “we.”

Does that make sense? “Us” is the objective form of the pronoun; it suggests a separate observer, or at least a separate object of consideration. “We,” the subjective form, suggests that there is no separate observer and observed. At first, as I became aware of it, I assumed that everybody must feel it. I *wanted* to believe that. Otherwise, it could not be *real*. It didn’t always happen. But I felt it, not only in TORI groups but in other gatherings where deep feelings were shared and the group seemed to go through some kind of shift. Often, it was after a period of struggle by the group, a conflict that arose, or an issue that energized people in a deep way. For a long time, I thought that conflict was the key, that intensity was generated and when released by resolution, the “magic” happened. Intensity and release: the orgasmic response. Palpable. *Wow*.

Dreams of Home

I've written a lot here about Ken Wilber. The fact is that he opened a door inside my head. He gave me a way to think about mysticism that did not raise my protective skepticism. What he wrote about levels of consciousness, from the inanimate rocks to Pure Spirit, somehow made sense to me, even though I couldn't keep up with the vast scope of his arguments. He said that rationality, that epitome of Creation (in my mind), was merely somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. We humans had as far to go to understand Reality as we had already come from our one-celled ancestors. The next level up would take something more than rationality. The good news was that there was a way to get there.

And Wilber said, along with Buddha who said it 2600 years ago, "don't take my word for it; do *this* and see for yourself." *This* he said, was meditation/contemplation/prayer (choose your own term). He pointed to centuries of essential agreement among those who really looked into it—from all traditions—that there is something more beyond the reach of logic and rationalism.

The door that Ken Wilber opened in my head was not only about transcendent experiences on the meditation cushion. It looked back on my question about the "magic" of community, and made clear to me that the "magic" is transcendent.

According to the *philosophia perennis*, the "perennial philosophy" that marks the agreed-upon aspects of all the

Dreams of Home

major philosophical and religious traditions, the development of consciousness proceeds through a series of growth stages, from pre-personal to personal to transpersonal. A relatively few people have moved to the higher levels, but many of us have had “peak experiences” as Abraham Maslow called them, brief moments of clarity and insight.

It's no accident, I'm convinced, that these two threads, *belonging* in community and *transcending* spiritually, come together in my life now. They are not two different things, even if my yearning for home attached itself to an earlier phase of my life and my urge for transcendence is a reaching upward and outward. Like parallel lines, they meet at infinity.

True belonging is, as Wilber put it, always already. The awareness that we are One is but an instant away. It may take me decades of practice on the cushion to come to that awareness.

Vincent Sheehan, in his book about Ghandi, wrote, “*We absorb the assumptions of the time and place almost without knowing it, and are equipped with weapons we never bought. It takes years to learn how to throw them away and go, defenseless and undefending, toward whatever the Truth may be.*”

My introduction to TORI, and by extension to “community” was an introduction to that experience of going “defenseless and undefending” in a group of people and thriving emotionally. No matter my longing for *familia*, the reality of family in my childhood was not

Dreams of Home

“defenseless and undefending.” I doubt that any of my relatives from that time could have tolerated the atmosphere of TORI. Games and subterfuge were rampant. I had to be away from that situation long enough to forget how to play the games before I could enter into the “infinite games” that I found in the loving anarchy of TORI.

And that, in turn, opened me up to the “magic” of transcendence, allowed me glimpses of something more, something of incredible depth that I would never have even recognized, much less reached for in earlier years.

What’s so wonderful is that now I see, or at least think I see, that it all fits together.

There is no “they;” there is only “we.” Indeed, if we are to believe the wise, there is no “I;” there is only One.

May 19,2000

References

I've made references to several writers in these pages; they have affected me and my journey, sometimes profoundly.

Carse, James P., 1986, *Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility*, New York: The Free Press

Eddington, Sir Arthur, 1984, in *Quantum Questions: Mystical Writings of the World's Great Physicists*, Boston: Shambhala Press

Gibb, Jack R., 1978, *TRUST: A New View of Personal and Organizational Development*, Los Angeles: Guild of Tutors Press

Peck, F. Scott, 1987, *The Different Drum: Community-Making and Peace*, New York: Simon and Schuster

Poloniak, William, 1994, *On Creating a Community*, Cardiff-by-the-Sea: Quantum Publications

Goff, David D. 1992, *Communitas: An Exploratory Study of the Existential and Transpersonal Dimensions of a Psychological Sense of Community as Found in the Community Building Workshops*, Vol. 1, Palo Alto: Institute of Transpersonal Psychology

Wilber, Ken, 1996, *Eye to Eye*, 3rd ed., Boston: Shambhala Press, 1983

— —, 1996, *The Atman Project*, 2nd ed., Wheaton: The Theosophical Press

References

- —, 1996, *Up From Eden*, New Ed., Boston: Shambhala Press
- —, 1995, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution*, Boston: Shambhala Press, 1983
- —, 1996, *A Brief History of Everything*, Boston: Shambhala Press
- —, 1998, *Ken Wilber in Dialog*, Wheaton: The Theosophical Press
- —, 1999, “A Sociable God: Toward a New Understanding of Religion, in *The Collected Works of Ken Wilber, Volume 3*, Boston: Shambhala Press
- —, 1999, “Paradigm Wars” in *The Collected Works of Ken Wilber, Volume 4*, Boston: Shambhala Press

Appendix:
In The Words of Jack
Gibb

Some “Trust Theory”

(In an old unpublished manuscript that Jack Gibb used for workshops some years ago, we came across the following, that seemed enlightening:)

Defining Trust

Trust is the essential process in human growth and development. Most useful is to define trust in terms of its seven manifestations.

1. Collaborating. The person who is trusting joins others in co-creating the moment, building community, making things into larger wholes, forming a partnership, building the elements of community, and integrating “seeing” into “thinking and doing.” The trusting person does not join in the processes of competition or segmentation. To trust is to *be with*.

2. Discovering. The trusting person is one who is discovering as an essential part of being. The trusting person comes to learn and to listen, not to teach or to persuade others. The trusting person is not trusting [in order] to influence, teach, model or sell. The trusting person participates fully in the search to be more whole,

In the Words of Jack Gibb

to learn new concepts, to explore new actions, to invent new roads to happiness, and to be open to new ways of being and discovering.

3. Honoring As a trusting person, I see the God in me and the God in you, and I honor this. Trusting the universe and its processes, I am on an eternal quest to see the divinity in all processes and forms, the universe in all of its expressions, the *all-ness* in every form and process. The trusting person does not compare, evaluate or rank.

4. Pro-acting. The trusting person is on a deeply spiritual journey in life, a Path with Passion, is participating in the universal quest for wholeness and meaning. The trusting person is not reactive and is not captured by the rewards and punishments used by others to influence.

5. Visioning. The trusting person is seeing the larger frame, creating new perspectives, joining all beings in co-creating and co-growing the universe. The trusting person is not caught up in minutiae, opportunism or the “quick fix.”

6. Flowing. The trusting person is organic and developing—a constant expression of the earth, the heavens, and the universe. This person is keeping in touch with the cosmos and the *all-ness*. The trusting person is not being caught up in the process of building controls or in being controlled.

7. Being. As a trusting person, I am constantly in search for myself, to find my own exaltation, to be who I am in all situations, and to continually be more in touch with

Dreams of Home

larger wholes. A trusting person does not get trapped in being *in role*.

The Omicron Orientation

Following publication of his Trust book, Jack developed his ideas into two areas: Omicron, a field of study, and Astron, an organization devoted to implementing the Omicron principles.

Some of the manuscript that we quoted from above made its way into three books which, unfortunately, were still unpublished at Jack's death. These three books, which he called "The Trilogy," reveal Jack's growing spiritual awareness.

Through the kindness of Diane Beakley, who was a close associate of Jack, we have the text of those books: The Passionate Path, The Magic of Self Regulation, and Touching the Universe. In his introduction to the third book, Jack described the Trilogy:

*"The first book, *The Passionate Path*, deals with [Omicron] theory as it applies to the journey of any person through this lifetime and through the cosmic *allness*. The second book, *The Magic Of Self-Regulation*, deals with the theory as it applies to the hard realities of life in the corporate world of organizations. This third book looks at the application of our theory to the "universe," the significance of ontogeny and phylogeny to the evolution of a transcending society and to our interdependent journeys to the *allness*."*

Trust, to Jack, is not simply a technique for better communication, or even better community. It is part of an

In the Words of Jack Gibb

individual's relationship to the world, and, ultimately, to himself or herself. He says, elsewhere in The Passionate Path, "The Omicron processes are in full flower, and life is more whole, more fulfilling, and more celebrative when we trust ourselves, each other, our organizations, and the processes of living. Trust is the magic filter that transforms the trusted. But the most powerful immediate effect of trusting, and the factor that makes trusting worth the energy, is upon the person doing the trusting. Regardless of the hypothetical nature of the world out there, whether or not it is trustworthy, the process of trusting transforms the world inside the viewer, and serves as a magical chemical that starts the transformation of the person or organization that is trusted."

Knowing Jack only through his writings (and not all of them, as yet), I see this quote as at the very core of his beliefs. It's a remarkable, even daring, assertion. Yet it's quite compatible with the teachings of the Buddha, 2600 years ago.

Dreams of Home

Here are more of Jack's words on his ideas, excerpted from *The Passionate Path*:

The Omicron Orientations as Trust-Oriented

There is only one principle that one really needs to know. "The more trusting one is, the better life goes." All positive aspects of life are highly related to trusting attitudes. Each of the Omicron orientations is oriented toward high trust. The Omicron theory is an extension of the Trust Level theory spelled out in the 1978 *Trust* book⁶.

1. **Wholizing.** Our original concept of trusting is more appropriately termed "wholizing." To trust is to be into the whole, the *gestalt*, the *allness*. To trust is to see things from a larger perspective. It is impossible to be fearful (the counter-trust stance) when one sees the situation in its wholeness, all of it. Wholizing produces trust, and trust creates wholeness. The two processes are eventually the same, as we define them.

2. **Emerging.** The nature of natural process is that it flows and emerges. To trust the universe is to trust the process of the universe, and that the natural, organic process will have positive, "friendly" outcomes.

3. **Discovering.** There is a false security in living in a fixed and established universe where there is no instability, no

⁶ *TRUST: A new view of personal and organizational development*, by Jack R. Gibb, Guild of Tutors Press, 1978

In the Words of Jack Gibb

margin for error, no unknowns. It would be relatively easy to trust if all of the universe were visibly trustworthy and predictable. It is apparent that the universe is not like this. The universe and its processes are discovering themselves, in a dynamic state of unpredictability, working themselves out in an enticing and challenging state of emergence, unprogrammed and unprogrammable. To trust in this kind of process is the existential dilemma. This kind of trust is highly rewarding, an attitude (organic stance) that is highly appropriate for an unprogrammed human form that is living in a dynamic and changing relationship with an unprogrammed universe. Exciting.

4. **Being.** One's being is another dynamic and changing form, evolving, emerging, changing with the degree of *enhancingness* of the environment in which it is nourished or diminished. Trusting is the magic that enhances being. It is the trusting environment that is nourishing and developmental for being. This is true of any form in the universe.

5. **Pathing.** The more trusting, the more spiritual, noble, nourishing, and life-transforming is the pathway. The passionate path, as indicated here, is a trusting concept. Full belief in the efficacy of the passionate journey is to have full trust.

6. **Transcending.** Here we are talking about higher degrees of trust. The "moving beyond" modality of the transcending process is moving into the areas where trust

Dreams of Home

is necessary to bridge between the perceivable realities of normal life and the parasensory, unpredictable, moving beyond that is the promise of a high-trust life. We are moving into areas of fire-walking, clairvoyance, precognition, and other *beyond* processes.

7. **Universalizing.** To move into universal metaphors—into the areas of archetypes, myths, fantasies, dreams, and the unconscious—is to move into areas requiring trust. To relate to the universal is to move beyond the hard touchable realities. It was “Doubting” Thomas who asked to touch the wounds of Jesus, trusting one sense modality over another.

* * *

When we are trusting, we are more personal, more open to self and others, more allowing of the world, and more interdependent, less controlling. When we are fearful and distrusting we become more *in role* than personal, more closed than open, more managerial with the motivations of self and others than allowing of motivations, and more controlling than independent or interdependent.

I believe that trust is more basic than fear. In the long run, high trust drives out high fear. The universe is ready for a high-trust orientation like Omicron. These orientations speak to the deepest insights in the race. I believe that the deepest level in the human being is a trusting region. When the crunch is on, when danger and paranoia seem the order of the day, then the deepest nature in the human condition comes to the rescue of the race.

In the Words of Jack Gibb

Jack Gibb

Dreams of Home