

“Celebrating Spiritual Diversity in the Ecovillage Movement”

A Chapter for the Worldview Key of the Ecovillage Design Education

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Spirit, Great Mystery, the Absolute – whatever your preference – is enigmatic and infinite, ineffable, yet everywhere and within everything. Countless are the names of the Divine, the spiritual practices and religious beliefs that exist on this small planet. The Unity loves variety. Therefore, it is not our purpose as ecovillage designers to define, much less prescribe, personal or group spirituality. Rather, we are privileged to simply facilitate an exploration of spiritual realms – individually, collectively, and syncretically. We engage ourselves and the group in a spiritual quest, remaining as humble as possible, and always with an eye toward applying our insights and revelations to the design of thriving sustainable communities – for the benefit of all. We position ourselves firmly in the center, where meaning is emerging, between the unseen implicate and manifest explicate orders, using the temporal to entice inspiration and guidance from the primordial, and thus directing evolution, or rather, *becoming* the evolution itself.

Spirituality is the core essence, the sustaining life-force infusing and giving direction, meaning, and purpose to a cultural system. Comprising the ultimate in shared values and ethics, the spirituality of a culture forms the basis for legitimating its socio-economic structure and its relationship with the greater-than-human world – its cosmic ecology. While there may be universal values and ethics common to all spiritual traditions (e.g. – love, compassion, forgiveness, mercy, reverence for that which nurtures and sustains life, etc.), each unique culture practices and celebrates its spirituality in a manner reflective of its unique situation in the world. Before the mono-cultural triumph of ‘globalization,’ diverse spiritual-cultural traditions arose and flourished as intricate, elaborate meta-solutions to the challenges and opportunities of living in a place; thus, in addition to offering numinous explanations for the vast, unseen, sublime dimensions of life, spiritual-cultural traditions the world over have had distinct practical and instrumental value in sustaining their peoples over time.

And so, in contrast to most other educational programs that prefer to sidestep or ignore this sensitive issue, the spiritual-cultural dimension to life’s existence is an integral component of the Ecovillage Design Education (EDE). Spirituality – and its multifarious cultural expressions in/as art, music, ritual, ceremony, pageantry, mind-body awareness, and various practices designed to develop expansion of consciousness and attunement to the needs and wishes of the greater whole – is infused throughout the EDE curriculum. The ecovillage is seen as a place consciously created to allow for the spiritual dimensions of life to unfold in all their wonder and splendor. Each ecovillage, depending on its particular locale and eco-cultural environment, may accentuate one spiritual tradition or practice more than another; but, in general, the ecovillage

vision fosters, tolerates, and encourages ecumenical spiritual perspectives. Ideals of mutual-respect, trust, cooperation, harmony, beauty, and wholeness are foundational and intrinsic to ecovillage living. Having these ideals materialize in day-to-day life through disciplined yet celebratory spiritual practice gives the ecovillagers a deep knowledge of human nature and insights into the greater mystery of which they are a part.

As a global educational program, the intent is to create a universal curriculum that can be implemented easily by peoples of all cultural backgrounds. As such, this curriculum attempts to explore and focus on themes and values common to all spiritual traditions. At the same time, particular emphasis is placed on the individual and *personal transformation*: it is at this level that we are attempting to prepare ecovillage designers. Human beings – more exactly the species *Homo sapiens sapiens* – as a whole have made a big mess on this planet but the solution lies in the heart and soul of each individual; there is where the real change will take place. The transition to a sustainable future is the expansion of so many consciousnesses. We believe that everybody taking the EDE course will benefit from an objective evaluation of the spiritual dimensions to life, particularly as they relate or have relevance to the design and implementation of ecovillages and sustainable community models.

Understanding Relationship

Traditional education has conditioned us to believe that the world and the cosmos are comprised of distinct, isolated, material objects – all separated from one another and collectively operating according to hyper-rational, deterministic, mechanistic laws. Yet this worldview has now been effectively debunked, and as Thomas Berry tells us, “The universe is not a collection of objects, but rather a communion of subjects.” Hence, there is an emerging understanding of the universe as a unified pattern of living systems that are all fundamentally interconnected in a complex network of relationships. This ushers in a new holistic or integral worldview.

If everything is part of an interconnected network – a nested holarchy of wholes within wholes – then we cannot understand anything in our world without understanding its relationships to the greater wholes of which it is a part. Although the rationalistic paradigm we inherited is characterised by an artificial division of the world into atomistic parts – and this reflected in its socio-economic structures – healing for the coming century demands evolution to the new holistic paradigm; and this will entail piecing the entire world back together again.

The holistic worldview can, however, easily remain an intellectual abstraction and empty discussion if it is not grounded in our lives in real-life applications – such as ecovillages. Physical reality is now understood to be based on a web of dynamic *relationships* – not atomistic parts. Modern physics demonstrates that what appears to our senses as concrete, stable and inert is, on the contrary, comprised of interrelationships of a myriad of elements in motion: energies,

particles, and charges animated by powerful internal dynamism. The lesson becomes very simple: Human society and its relationship to the natural world must reflect this dynamic interconnected web of life if we are to thrive in harmony with the Earth.

Ecovillages today provide the best living experimental laboratories for incubating new models of human culture. The ecovillage model promotes a 'systems' perspective, emphasizing the connections between activities, processes, and structures, and developing a broader, more comprehensive understanding of sustainable community. In ecovillage living and ecovillage design, the interconnections and interrelationships are highlighted, and become more visible to all. For example, seeing how organic food production relates to complementary currencies, which in turn relates to sustainable modalities of economics, which in turn relates to inclusive decision making procedures, which in turn relates to integrity in human interaction, which relates to love, which relates to wilderness and nature, which relates to ecological building, and so on...

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