

ESOTERIC COMMUNITY BUILDING IN CAMPHILL COMMUNITIES

Camphill communities provide a home, education, care and support for vulnerable people. They are places in which people live in community. They are places of beauty, order and purpose in which people work, care for the land and nature, celebrate the seasonal festivals and create sacred moments of peace and prayer. The Camphill communities are places in which people are trying to serve the needs of our time and to create the social forms of the future. They are places of personal transformation, spiritual mindfulness and social renewal.

It is only possible to understand the essential nature of Camphill communities through an appreciation of the fact that these community-building endeavours and practices are founded on spiritual principles, aims and tasks. Camphill communities are places in which the esoteric is made manifest.

In the same way, it is only possible to fully appreciate the esoteric community-building endeavours of Camphill communities through an appreciation of the esoteric community-building insights of anthroposophy.

This we can do by looking at what Steiner said about it, especially in the series of lectures that have been called 'Awakening to Community'.

Steiner wrote a lot about community, but it is clear that he was not referring to a life-sharing, intentional community such as Camphill communities, but to an esoteric community – to groups of people working together to study spiritual science. In the terms of Steiner's writing, community-building takes place within the groups of the Anthroposophical Society.

The esoteric path of anthroposophy is one that seeks to transform cosmic intelligence into human insight. This insight then become will –the will to transform ourselves, to transform society and thus to transform the development of humanity.

Steiner made it very clear that the only effective esoteric path is one that leads to active engagement with the world; to direct action; that directly affects our personal development and social encounters.

Some very important themes emerge from Steiner's writing about community.

He made it clear that the esoteric path is not just for the self-development of the individual. It is a social activity that leads to community.

He also stated that when people form an esoteric community that is founded on social harmony, then spiritual beings are able to unite with that community.

Finally, he emphasised that the task of such an esoteric community is to serve the future development of humanity and the spiritualisation of the entire created world.

We can now turn to these three themes in more detail.

In a lecture entitled 'Preparing for the Sixth Epoch', Steiner said that it is possible to imagine that people could study spiritual science without forming themselves into groups. However, he also said that *'as long as it is at all possible to establish, in the wider and narrower senses, associations of human beings who are known to one another and who come together in friendship and brotherliness within these working groups, we will continue to find them in full consciousness of the attitude of souls that is part and parcel of spiritual science'*.

He emphasised again and again that the establishment of groups is central to the whole conception of the Anthroposophical Movement.

'In the spiritual world, the work performed by those who know one another within such groups is quite different from work carried on outside such a group and dispersed around the world. The work carried out in brotherly harmony within our groups has quite a different significance for the spiritual world than any other work we may undertake'.

In the lecture called 'Brotherhood and the Struggle for Existence', he said that *'people who work together in a brotherhood are magicians because they draw higher beings into their circle..... This will be the secret of the progress of mankind in the future; to work through community'*.

We should take note of the fact that Steiner stressed 'brotherly harmony'. He – or his translators – have used different words for these special groups, all of which emphasise this harmony; words such as 'community', 'brotherhood', 'friendly associations' and 'intimate assemblies'. Whatever word is used it is clear that Steiner was talking about something more than people simply coming together to study spiritual science. They are also working to bring about a community here on earth that has a spiritual counterpart.

In relation to this, we can also ponder the deeper significance of the title of the lecture series 'Awakening to Community'. This term touches on the process of waking up – both to community and to the other person. Steiner was saying that in the particular form of community-building in the Anthroposophical Society, people must become closer to one another than previously; they must 'wake up' to the other person.

This process of 'waking up' takes place on several levels.

On one level, we wake up to the 'significance' of the other person - the unique destiny of the other person and also the significance of the other person to our own destiny.

We also become involved in, and responsible for, the development of the other person.

On another level, we wake up to the mystery of social encounters. In these social encounters we learn many lessons - about ourselves, about the other person, about the nature of the human being, the nature of human relations, and also about the role of karma and destiny in our lives.

Steiner said that the karmic 'waking up' to the other person also becomes part of our own initiation process into what he called 'the new mysteries' – which are founded on both individual activity and also on social activity.

He said that *'in the new mysteries the whole earth becomes a temple. The hidden tragedy and triumph of the pupil begins to become external fact. Our own friends become for us – though we may know little of it – the terrible and wonderful actors in the ceremony of our initiation'*.

Our social encounters are thus part of our initiation into the new Christian mysteries. In this sense, when we attempt to resolve the difficulties that we have with others, we are walking a path of initiation.

This waking up sounds enlightened, so easy and benign, and yet as we know, it can be a very difficult and very uncomfortable to wake up to the other person and it needs a great amount of courage, honesty and selfless work. Hence Steiner uses the words 'wonderful' and also 'terrible' to describe the role the other person plays in the ceremony of our initiation. He also uses the words 'triumph' and 'tragedy'.

Just as when we begin to 'wake up' to ourselves we become aware of our own shadow so, when we wake up to the other person, we also wake up to his or her shadow side. Hence our 'associations' are not always as friendly or harmonious as Steiner may have hoped for. In 'Awakening to Community' Steiner said that the social woes of our time are linked to our diminished ability to truly understand and be interested in each other as developing human beings.

These 'waking' processes are responsible for the difficulties and divisions between people. Steiner pointed out that, contrary to expectations, strife is rampant in groups that are dedicated to brotherhood and spiritual research. This obviously prevents the group from achieving its true aim. We need only to think of the divisions in the Anthroposophical Society after the death of Steiner to be aware of this.

There is yet another level to the process of waking up, and that is to do with destiny and karma. Steiner said that 'karmically ordered' communities will spring up when we awaken to the other person through studying anthroposophy together. We wake up to the fact that we are in a 'karmically ordered community' – that we have encountered each other previously in the supersensible world. When we wake up to the implications of this and when we can order our karma between each other, then spiritual beings can unite with the group or the community.

And the final level is that we 'wake up' to our karmic task and karmic responsibilities here on earth – which is to do with other people but also to do with the future development of the whole of humanity.

In regard to all levels of the waking process, it may be that some people choose not to wake up to any of this. After all, the process can be a difficult and even painful one.

Or it might be that we are not able to fully bring these things to consciousness and become only dimly aware of them as disturbing thoughts and memories. Again, it might be that it all seems so improbable and the implications so overwhelming that it is easier to dismiss such intimations as being mere fantasies.

The second of our three themes relates to the fact that Steiner asserted that higher spiritual beings can connect themselves to anthroposophical communities if the members of these communities are able to 'wake up' and work together in harmony.

In 'Awakening to Community' he said that *'through experiencing the supersensible together, one human soul is awakened most intensely in the encounter with another human soul'*. This wakens the soul to higher insight and in turn *'this frame of mind creates a situation that causes a real communal being to descend in a group of people'*.

Thus, we can see that a group of people working together wake up to each other. This working together awakens memories of a shared supersensible pre-existence and also awakens memories of scenes from the spiritual world.

As a result of this common spiritual recollection and inspiration, spiritual beings are able to connect to human beings and thus the spiritual enters into the material world. This implanting of spiritual idealism into human communities leads to true community-building. When the members of this community then consciously lift up to the spiritual world their physical experiences imbued with spiritual idealism the reverse process is activated. Steiner was saying that if people work together in harmony and lift their thoughts up to the spiritual world, then spiritual beings are drawn down into their company.

What are these higher spiritual beings that connect themselves to these esoteric communities?

Through his spiritual insights, Steiner said that, under the leadership of the spiritual being Michael, it was possible for the old mysteries to evolve into the new Christian mysteries. At this time, certain spiritual beings took up the responsibility of guiding various groups among humanity.

Unlike the old group souls, that were based on blood, racial or national ties – ties that left human beings without real freedom - these new group souls are based on the freedom of the individual. This is now the time of the truly conscious and free individual working together with other free individuals in community – the community of universal humanity.

Thus, in our time, Angels no longer guide individual human beings through the force of their family ancestry as they used to. Instead they now give guidance and leadership to people who work together in local groups, local associations and perhaps also intentional communities.

In the same way, Archangels no longer lead national groups as they did previously. Now they lead and guide social associations that operate on a national level.

And the Archai, who in the past had led racial groups, instead now lead human social forms that aspire to represent the whole of humanity.

These new group souls, who seek to further the true progress of humanity and the world, wait to ally themselves with those human beings who want to work together for the good of earthly evolution. They are only able to fulfil their spiritual task if and when people on earth work together in harmony in esoteric communities.

And now we come to the third of our themes relating to the tasks of esoteric communities. This is to create communities in which the spiritual beings of the new group souls are able to collaborate with human beings in order to further the future development of the human race on earth and to work together to fulfil the potential of earth existence.

The aim of this collaboration is to prepare for the next epoch of the development of humanity. In each epoch, the work of preparing for the epoch to come was previously done in the old mystery centres. Now this is the work of the new mysteries; work which is furthered in esoteric communities.

Humanity is now in the fifth epoch of human development and thus, the task of esoteric communities today is to prepare for the next epoch.

In 'Preparing for the Sixth Epoch', Steiner outlined the three characteristics of the next stage of the development of humanity. In the sixth epoch true knowledge will be spiritual knowledge, not the natural science of today. In addition, it will be characterised by a complete freedom of thought and thus there will be no dogmatic or collective belief systems. And thirdly, in the future stage of our development, the well-being of the individual will depend upon the well-being of the whole. No individual will be able to be at peace if another individual somewhere else is suffering.

The next epoch will thus be a time in which each individual is imbued with an awareness of the universality of humanity. We will all live in community – the true community of universal humanity.

Thus we practice now in the fifth epoch of our development, both in our esoteric work and also in the daily life of Camphill communities, the higher form of community that will prevail in the next epoch. In the light of this, Camphill communities can be seen as a form of new mystery centres in which the members of these communities have consciously committed themselves to the task of creating social forms that are a preparation for the future development of humanity.

The esoteric tasks of Camphill communities goes beyond this in that they are also centres for preparing for even more distant stages in human development in which all of creation – the human world and the world of nature - will be redeemed and imbued with spirit.

So now it is possible to see how the three levels of activity of esoteric communities come together. The individual commits to the social activity of working in an esoteric community. If the members of this community are able to work together harmoniously and lift up to the higher world the fruits of their spiritual inspiration and insight, then higher beings are called down into the group. These higher beings then work with the group members to prepare for the next stage of the development of humanity.

This is summed up by the words of Steiner from the lecture series 'The Influence of Spiritual Beings upon Man'. *'We may say that in a certain sense their existence - (the existence of the new group souls) - is dependent upon human concord, and it will be up to human individuals themselves whether or not they give as many as possible of these higher souls the opportunity to descend amongst men. The more men are divided, the fewer lofty beings will descend into the human context. The more that associations are formed and feelings of community are developed in complete freedom, the more will these sublime beings descend to men and the more quickly will our earthly planet be spiritualised'*.

Dr. Konig founded Camphill on these esoteric principles. He had seen how the Anthroposophical Society had broken down after the death of Rudolf Steiner and resolved to further the esoteric work of Steiner but in a different social form. For Konig, Camphill was to be a way of living Anthroposophy in daily life. It was to be a way of making esoteric wisdom and esoteric striving manifest in the daily life of the communities.

In order to bring this about, he created forms to express the different levels of engagement and commitment. When he formed what is known as the Inner Community, he made a distinction between the esoteric and exoteric aspects of the Camphill communities.

People who have made a commitment to uphold the esoteric principles, aims and forms of Camphill may choose to join the Inner Community. This is a universal spiritual community that transcends the place where the individual member lives or works.

All three of the themes of esoteric community-building that have been described above come together in the Inner Community.

The principles of the Inner Community include a commitment to inner schooling and inner development through meditation, study – both personal study and group study – and to a deepening understanding of Anthroposophy.

They include also a commitment to creating healthy social relationships in which the individual member may ‘wake up’ to the significance of the other.

Central to the Inner Community is the recognition of the spiritual wholeness and integrity of each person and the resolution to uphold the dignity of the human being.

The Inner Community seeks to lift daily life up to the spirit and to allow the spirit to become manifest in daily life. Through this process, the earth and nature are redeemed.

Through their work, service and dedication - through their commitment to do the good on earth and to serve the needs of the time - the members of the Inner Community create communities of shared life and work in which the social forms of the future may become apparent – the social forms of universal humanity.

These are the esoteric principles that form the basis for community-building in the daily life and work of a Camphill community – on the level of what is called the ‘life community’. It is in the daily life, the social encounters, the care for others, the work and the celebrations, the sacred moments, in the striving to create community and in the engagement with the world, that the esoteric principles of Camphill become visible.

Andrew Plant. Milltown Community. 2009