

Toward a Sacred Society

by Tom Bender

Our communities grow as a reflection of our values.

The greatest problems of our communities are not physical in nature nor are they resolved merely by physical redesign of those communities. Alcoholism, tobacco and drug abuse, crime, child and spouse abuse, homelessness, obesity, apathy, divorce and broken homes, poverty, failing schools – all are reaching epidemic proportions. All seem resistant to resolution.

These problems have a common core. They are not diseases of the body, but of our psychic “immune system.” They arise out of lack of self-worth, lack of respect by and for others, or lack of opportunity to be of use to family and society. These problems are diseases of the spirit.

It is a disease of the spirit when the weight of the successes and failures of the past lies so heavily on a person or culture that they don't even try to measure up either to the past or to their own potentials.

It is a disease of the spirit when wealth and comfort make us too self-satisfied to reach out for the vital nourishment of work, community, and giving to others.

Our health depends most centrally on our spirit. A spiritual core to society is essential for personal and social health and survival. Simply put, that spiritual core deals with “honoring.” It deals with respect, with what the Golden Rule distilled into, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

How do we honor each other and ourselves? How do we honor old people, children, the sick or dying? How do we honor workers and those outside the workplace? How do we honor those going through life's changes? How do we honor our neighbors, our past, our communities, or our adversaries? How do we honor plants and animals; the earth, air, and waters; our planet and the stars from which we are descended?

Our surroundings themselves are worthy of honoring. They act like mirrors, expressing our values and conveying to others our inner strengths and fears, pride and hungers. They speak of our relation with nature. They reflect our patterns of work and what we gain from that work. They show our relations with others. They reflect our goals as a society.

In a sacred society our surroundings are a source of meaning, power and strength. Once we accept that some places should be held sacred, it is impossible to deny the sacredness of all places, all things, and all life. Affirming the sacredness of our surroundings we have to acknowledge that we inhabit a sacred world. As part of that world, we are to be held sacred also. And that calls forth a totally different way of relating and acting. If the person/place/world we love is not happy, we cannot be happy.

The first step toward sound community is to reaffirm the sacredness of our world and establish that value as a touchstone of our society.

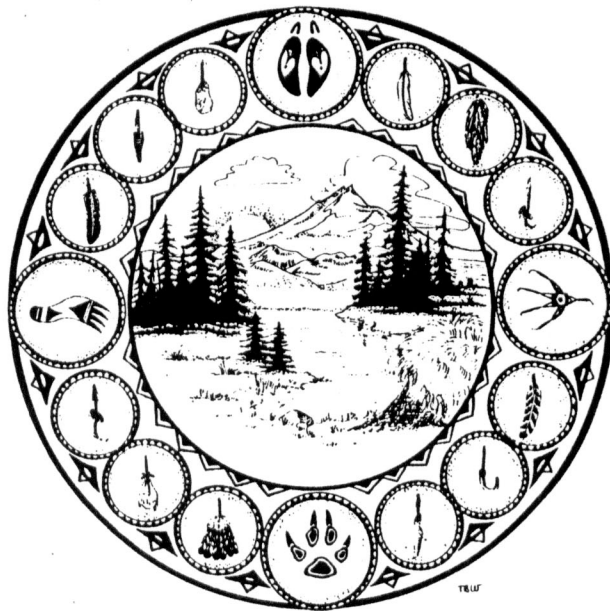
Life in a sacred society is difficult to comprehend from outside, for we have no comparisons to the kind of support, strength, freedom, meaning, and confidence – and therefore health – that arise from being part of a community of respect. Glimpses of it can be seen in indigenous communities throughout the world which still maintain threads of ancient ties to land, spirit, and wholeness.

With a sense of the sacredness of all life, new inner goals arise to guide our lives and the shaping of our communities. These can achieve the goals of green cities while assuring that

the process itself becomes sound and that deeper issues are resolved as well. We need to:

- Affirm the sacredness of our world in our hearts and our actions.
- Relate to all people, places, and things with honor, love, and respect.
- Reevaluate what the real goals of our lives are. Determine what appropriate roles work, material goods, self-esteem, and success play in attaining those goals. Eliminate the patterns in our lives which do not well serve those goals.
- Acknowledge our responsibilities to the rest of creation, and the right of the rest of creation to an undemeaned existence. Act as advocates for those parts of creation affected by our actions that are unable to speak to their own needs and role.
- Employ consensus decision-making that acknowledges the needs and input of all.
- Curtail our patterns of overconsumption of material goods and resources and depletion of non-renewable resources.
- Demand and provide opportunity to all for rewarding and contributing work.
- Give priority to equity of economic and political power rather than material growth.
- Transform current business patterns and goals into patterns that support a sacred and sustainable view of our world and the wellbeing of all people.
- Act as advocates for the less fortunate throughout the world for humane living, working and environmental conditions.
- Initiate the transition from legalistic to moral and spiritual controls for our actions.
- Rebuild our communities to minimize need for transportation, resources, and consumption of land, while bringing our lives into closer contact with others.

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