



Community is a Verb

It is the doing of Social-Three-foldness.

My biographical journey through different expressions of community.

Karl-Heinz Finke, Canberra, December 2023

These ponderings on community have been inspired by the two questions asked recently in the survey form sent out by the *Voice of Biography Work* –

1. What does community mean to you?
2. Why do we need Communities in these times?

Here I reflect on my 68 years of living in and exploring a variety of communities, and summarise my insights about both community and the Social Laws given by Rudolf Steiner. Please note, in this article the Phases are not 7-year-cycles or Septennials.

Phase 1 – Extended Family, Village Community, Nature

Fundamental Law of Social Development

In early cultural development humanity strives to form social groups: at first the interests of the individual are sacrificed for the interests of these groups; further development leads to the liberation of the individual from those group interests and to the free development of individual needs and potentials.

Rudolf Steiner, GA 31, *Free Choice and Society*, July 1898

I grew up in an extended family in a farming village. I remember well the mutual support of the family and the village community. How life was embedded in the rhythms of nature and shared culture, faith, and traditions. The seasons and the weather representing nature, and the toll of the bell bringing the culture, the prayer times, the service times, the meal-times, and the resting hours. On Saturday afternoon the bells did the Sunday ringing and work stopped. I remember how nature was revered and feared. In cooperation with Nature crops grew, and animals flourished, but nature could also bring devastation and destruction. Nature was felt as part of community and community embedded in nature

As the *Fundamental Law of Social Development* describes, the community is partially knitted through the necessity of sharing resources for survival. There is an element of dependency on each other and the natural world. Community is fostered by shared traditions and a shared faith. Community culture is expressed in seasonal festivals and common care for community members in need.

Steiner describes this network of family, social and natural environment as ***Nature Karma or Karmic Demands***. We arrive in this setting without a return ticket and become part of it. Ideally this karmic community (of people and nature) supports us in our nestling stage, takes care of us and gives us a sense of belonging to the people and the world around us.

It supported me also with a sense that Nature is a friend.

Reflecting on this community I have realised unresolved issues: Who cares for the stranger? The misfit? The newcomer? I noticed that it could take one or two generations to become a *local*. And after I moved on, I became a *stranger*. And finally: Who cares for Nature?

Main insight: Early experience of community matters, including relationship to nature.

Phase 2 – Family, Friends, Country Town Community, Nature

First expansion from Village to Country Town

***Darkness, Light, Love***

*To bind oneself in matter,
Is to grind the soul to dust.
To find oneself in spirit
Is to unite human beings.
To behold oneself in humanity,
Is to build worlds.*

Rudolf Steiner, GA 40, *Verses and Meditations*, Stuttgart, 11 Apr 1924

I started to become aware of the ‘grinding souls to dust’ aspect of life in this phase, as I emerged from a naïve sense of oneness.

After moving to a country town, I developed a strong drive to explore. Fearless and equipped with an inherent sense of orientation I explored the surrounding fields and woodlands. I felt that nature is friendly and protective. My encounters with people varied, I was open and curious, and it took me a while to realise that not everybody is friendly and trustworthy. I felt safer in my communion with nature than with some people. Also, I started to become aware of and experienced inequality, social class differences and even cruelty in human community. The naïve trusting image I held from the village community experience was shattered and later broken. I realised social class is mainly based on education and wealth, and that wealth divided the Country Town into **Haves** and **Not-haves**. I also realised that the (Christian) faith was not holding the community together. There were many Sunday-Christians who paid lip service to their faith at Sunday church, but during the week did not follow the Christian principle of caring for their neighbour. Even worse, the Christian **Haves** exploited the **Not-haves**, because with money came power and influence over others.

I became aware of inequality, injustice and the realisation that shared religious *commandments* do not determine that individuals act accordingly. I lost the code I was taught to live by and wondered if I would find and trust another one. My sense of being supported by Nature grew.

Main insight: Economic and educational equality matters. Religion is not enough as a code to life by.

Phase 3 – Rebellion against ... Ideas, Ideals, Ideologies and Cults**2nd Expansion: From Country Town to Journeyman*****Fundamental Social Law***

The well-being of an entire community of human beings working together becomes greater the less the individual demands the products of their achievements for themselves, that is, the more of these products they pass on to their fellow workers and the more their own needs are not satisfied out of their own achievements, but out of the achievements of others.

Rudolf Steiner, GA 34, *The Science of Spirit and the Social Question*, 1905/06

The quote above depicts the ideal I was unknowingly searching for, which would help to overcome experienced inequality; it was in stark contrast to the reality of the human community around me.

My drive to explore led me to read like an automaton. I read most of the books in the School and the Public library, hoping that knowledge would help me to understand the unresolved issues I experienced – within the human community, and in the relationship between the human community and Nature. My studies led me to realise that fundamental assumptions about the social fabric, especially in the economic sphere are in fact creating social imbalance. For example: the mechanism of interest on lent money makes the **Not-haves** poorer and



causes the constant **redistribution of wealth** from the poor to the rich. And the rich have the power and influence to make laws which stabilise or enhance this mechanism.

I lost faith in my religion, became a Journeyman in my own Quest for truth, and started to explore ideals and ideologies further afield: socialism, communism, and anarchism. I started to move away from the mainstreams of society to explore the diverse, creative, and challenging strata of subcultures. In this Journeyman Time I realised that understanding human development, psychology and education leads to **evolutionary** change, and avoids the sinking into cataclysmic **revolutions**. This made me distance myself from revolutionary ideologies. I realised that the socialistic, communistic, and anarchistic theories and ideologies were not providing me with a new code I could live by.

As my connections to human communities deteriorated, my connection to Nature held, perhaps saving me from the Abyss.

I experienced karmic recollections: images and sense impressions emerged in "visions" which were not in sync with the every-day world around me. This happened whilst travelling in Nature or at significant places mainly in Scotland and Ireland.

Wanting to explore further and make sense of my visions, I turned to study and experience of different scriptures, religions, ancient traditions, and cults. On this journey I lived in a Hare Krishna community, spent time in a Buddhist Temple, became part of Osho's Neo Sanyas movement, worked in a Sikh Golden Temple restaurant, lived in a Christian Monastery, and had many other encounters with people, places, and philosophies.

This was my experience of Steiner's **Encounter Karma** – with people, places, situations, and world-views.

My bond to Nature stayed strong, but there were also disturbing experiences related to places in Nature. I became aware of the destructive influence of human technology and the exploitation of Nature.

Main insight: Experience and encounters of all kinds can contribute to new codes to live by.

Phase 4 – Finding my Tribe: Ecology and Spirituality – Eco-spirituality

3rd Expansion: From Journeyman to Metropolis

Motto of Social Ethics

*The healthy human life is found
When in the mirror of each human soul
The whole community finds its reflection,
And when in the community
The virtue of each one is living.*

Rudolf Steiner, GA 40, *Verses and Meditations*, for Edith Maryon, 5 Nov 1920

My Journeyman Phase includes my first years in Berlin which became my home and later home-base for 33 years. With each Phase my horizon expanded, and the picture became more complex. I began to realise that as an individual I am placed between cosmic-spiritual, social-political, and natural-survival influences. There are no simple answers, and some answers can only be found by **living into the answer** – being open to change on the way and by the answer itself.

Two experiences were signposts for a new phase.

Firstly, I read a notice in the Neo Sanyas Ashram asking us to make an effort to invite rich and famous people into the movement, and suggested restrictive rules for the community. I knew immediately: This is the end of it and I am out!

Secondly, the Biography of **Rudolf Steiner – In Personal Testimonies and Pictorial Documents** written by Johannes Hemleben fell into my hands when I visited friends. I started reading this book and it was like talking to Steiner himself. On my quest I had met Anthroposophists



before, but had shelved them as being a not very up-to-date cult. Reading this biography, I suddenly realised that this was the founder of Anthroposophy, and what I read was making total sense. ***How to Attain Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*** was the first book by Rudolf Steiner I read, whilst moving away from the Neo Sanyas Community and towards ***Anthroposophy*** – I had found ***Human Wisdom***. The more I studied Steiner's Philosophy and Developmental Path, the more I realised that I had finally found answers to my social, developmental, and spiritual questions and most of my quest then turned towards studying Anthroposophy. But there was a problem – I found it hard to relate to Anthroposophists. I thought they were a bourgeois, know-it-all, and cultish lot. I wondered if Rudolf Steiner, who seemed to have been flexible and open-minded, deserved the Anthroposophists, who appeared to be stuck in quotations (albeit by Rudolf Steiner). I had found my spiritual direction, but the community quest was unresolved.

Two events in Berlin helped me – the *Tunix-Kongress/Do-nothing Congress*, and the *Alternative Environmental Festival*. Both promoted the propaganda of the deed, living activism and *be the change you want to see in the world*. I became part of the *Whole and Health Food Movement*. Wholegrain bakeries, vegetarian restaurants and organic farms were founded. New interconnections between cities and farming areas were explored and new technologies especially in the anti-nuclear-energy sector were researched.

In this alternative melting pot community I found my tribe. People who wanted to do meaningful work and live in harmony with nature, who were striving for an interconnection of ***Theory and Practice***. Sometime later I realised that the motto of the Benedictine monks ***Ora et Labora*** / Pray and Work, pointed in the same direction. For myself I added the reverse – to *work with an attitude of prayer*, be in the here and now, give your manual work the same undivided attention as you give to your studies and meditations.

I became part of an anthroposophical housing cooperative – about 40 people living and working together in two 4-level inner city houses in the middle of Berlin.

We tried to follow indications given by Rudolf Steiner about the ***Three-fold Social Order*** and ***The Motto of Social Ethics*** was the code we strove to live by. An ***Independent Adult Education Centre*** (Independent, meaning not government funded) was our initial project. The importance of independent educational institutions were seen as the fundament of social and political change.

For some time I moved between studying Social Sciences and Psychology, working as a chef in a vegetarian restaurant, and teaching cooking and nutrition.

In this Phase, there is a strong influence of Encounter-Karma: meeting people, places, situations, and world-views. I learnt how much social dynamics and the ability or lack of self-reflection of the individual impacts on communities. It was a Phase of practical social experiments. I assumed that money or the lack of it is the bottle neck for new initiatives. But experience taught me that the attitudes of people involved, have more impact on the success or failure. I realised that ***Community*** and the ***Three-fold Social Order*** are verbs. They cannot be theorised about; they emerge out of contributions and achievements given acknowledgement by the community.

Unresolved was that labour is differently valued, the contribution of one person, even their voice, is valued differently from another's. The contributions of women, and people working in care and education, is less valued than that of people in banks and companies.

There is also the illusion that natural resources are endless and can be exploited for individual gain. The current Climate– if not Extinction Crisis – demonstrates the mistake of an abusive relationship with Nature and calls for a rapid change of direction. There is no planet B.

Main insight: Attitudes matter. There are important unresolved issues related to the acknowledgment of different contributions to community, and the human relationship with Nature. One can develop an individual code to live by.



Phase 5 – Finding my colleagues. Building new worlds

4th Expansion: From Metropolis to Travelling Educator

Cosmic Perspective: For a Circle of Collaborating People

Picture to yourselves that behind each one of you there stands their Angel. The Angel wants to give strength.

Above all of you the sweep the circling Archangels, carrying the fruits of the work and the experience of each one to each of the others. Out of their circling and carrying, the Archangels are shaping a chalice of courage.

From the heights, the Good Spirit of our Time [Michael], who is one of the Archai, allows a drop of light to fall into the chalice. In this way, the Archai bestow a drop of light.

Rudolf Steiner, GA 296, *Ritual Texts*, Part of GA 293, Lect. 1, 21 Aug 1919

The above depicts experiences I had in different sizes of communities, in teams of colleagues, in our housing Co-op, and in group-work as part of teaching and learning processes.

If we have the strength to gather and share our resources freely, trying to find answers to obstacles we meet, and share our visions, we can be blessed with drops of insight, helping us to see more clearly, and act outside of the box of limitations which seem to hold us back.

I started to work for full time in adult education and became a coordinator and trainer in the above mentioned, **Independent Adult Education Centre**.

In settling down and working full time in adult education in Berlin, I thought that I had arrived at my final expansion. I had invited Coenraad van Houten, Gudrun Burkhard and other renowned trainers to our Centre, and participants from all over Germany came to us. Both, Coen (Adult Education) and Gudrun (Biography Work) turned out to be two of my most important life encounters, and became my teachers.

New changes emerged for me. I had the insight that I must follow questions and promote only what I can stand for. The following quote from the Bible resonated within me: *I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don't want to go.* (John, 21.18).

Two questions came to me. The first during a three-week *Schooling Course in Middle Europe*. Angela, a Trainer from the Centre for Social Development asked me to join their English-speaking team. I answered: *If you think I can do that, I will.* This was the starting point for working in a different language in another country – the UK. Interestingly, the Scotland as part of the UK was also the country where I had had Karmic Recollections and strong Nature encounters during Phase 3, my Journeyman Phase.

The second question came after we were asked to run a Schooling Course in Australia, and I was invited to help run that course. The 4th Expansion started quite unexpectedly.

The quote at the beginning of this phase refers to the Good Spirit of our time, Michael. There were moments in our workshops, where we had a special experience – the atmosphere changed, we were able to speak, to listen, to share, to sit in silence in a felt presence, beyond that of the people gathered together. We started to call this the **Presence of the Michael School**. We realised some aspects which contributed to creating the conditions for this to happen, but also realised that we cannot make it happen. The **presence** described above was the presence I was hoping to experience in the meetings of the **First Class**.

Reflecting on this phase there is still **Encounter-Karma** at play, but **Direction- or Mission Karma** is emerging. Working in different cultures alerted me to Eurocentric concepts I was not aware I was carrying. This made me ponder on Colonialism, and its influence beyond the economic and judicial spheres.

Main insight: Listening to the Call from communities. Importance of an expanding perspective of what community means and needs.



Phase 6 – Mission and Fulfilment

5th Expansion: From Traveling Educator to a Global Online Expansion

Quote – Soulcraft

We long to discover the secrets and mysteries of our individual lives, to find our unique way of belonging to this world, to recover the never-before seen treasure we were born to bring to our communities.

To carry this treasure to others is half of our spiritual longing.

The other half is to experience our oneness with the universe, with all of creation.

Bill Plotkin, *Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche*, 2003, p9

Two aspects made the above quote relevant for my Journey with communities. Firstly, the realisation that **Direction Karma** or **Karmic Fulfilment** depends on finding one's mission. I have started to use Direction Karma and Mission Karma synonymously. Karmic Fulfilment comes through being able to contribute.

Secondly the quote contains in a very short form my ponderings on the interconnection between the Individual, Humanity, Gaia-Earth, and the Cosmos / Spiritual World. This led to the experience of a new dimension, a new sense of interconnectedness. The first Phase instilled a strong sense of belonging to the Human Community and its embeddedness in Nature. In the following Phases, in meeting Anthroposophy a third realm of belonging emerged, the belonging to the Cosmos.

In this Phase 6, I found myself within an international community of colleagues and course participants. I had the challenge and privilege of working with people from a multiplicity of traditions and cultures – UK, Hungary, Brazil, US, Australia, India, Thailand, New Zealand, Taiwan. As much as we were teaching and sharing our individualised understanding of Spiritual Science, our participants, their culture, the global community, and the spiritual world were **teaching us**.

Being able to share and discuss the philosophical and world-view perspectives related to our workshop content gave a strong sense of fulfilment.

Who would have imagined that the village boy would be led to be educated by meeting different cultures and traditions? And that sharing Spiritual Science in the context of local tradition would become his mission?

It seemed very important to me to nurture a connection between local (spiritual) traditions and Anthroposophy. Otherwise, how could I justify for example teaching Destiny Learning in India – the place which formed the term Karma.

Main insight: Global community demands flexible thoughtful responses, and a new sense of interconnectedness. Community includes Gaia-Earth and the Cosmos/Spiritual World.

Phase 7 – Seeding, Leaving a Legacy and Letting Go

Contraction: The Speaker is also a Writer – Handing over and succession.

Spiritualisation of the Earth

The more people get splintered, the less noble souls will step down into the realm of humanity.

The more connections are formed, and the more feelings of community are created with a notion of complete freedom, the more noble beings can step down to humanity and the faster the Earth Planet will be spiritualised.

Rudolf Steiner, GA102, *The Influence of Spiritual Beings Upon Man*, Lect. 9, 1 June 1908.

An international pandemic stopped the global travel. There had been shared ideas with a new



partner (in life and work) on how to transform the different workshops into online learning packages as a retirement project. But this transformation suddenly became a necessity. Workshop after workshop was transformed into accessible Learning Packs – with Study Guides, reading materials and lectures – to be completed with real-time online sessions. For years I had declared that I would rather do a hundred lectures before writing one book, and here I was helping to crystallise 33 years of work into an accessible written format. I was with some agony as we could not predict how well the material would transfer into the new online format.

After the first year we knew that it is possible to delve into deep intimate sharing in the right online setting. And I realised that by creating the Study Guides and recording lectures, I was creating a legacy, that I was already in a **seeding process**.

Working across time-zones from the West coast of the US, via New Zealand, Australia, India, parts of Asia and Europe, and the UK, we often felt that we were working on the unity of humanity and the transformation of Gaia-Earth. This reminded me of the quote above, which was brought to our Gatherings in Europe by Gudrun Burkhard. We have now used it with international Gatherings, and it becomes a guiding image for the transformative work we trust we contribute to.

Main insight: This Phase is work in progress – of contributing to community in the broadest sense, including Gaia-Earth and the Cosmos.

I have moved from a community of blood relations to communities of friends, colleagues and shared interests, to a network of like-minded spirits.

The future orientation of legacy and seeding is happening. Almost all the Learning Packs are finished. The handing over of courses in Germany has been done. The handing over of international online activities is in preparation. The individual achievements are going back to the community. What I learned and failed to learn will become a seed for my next incarnation. And then the final step ... letting go.

Some aspects will reunite with Gaia-Earth, others with the Cosmos.

See you around ...

Karl-Heinz Finke