

# Managing the Spiritual Neighborhood

How to Restore the Conscience  
of America's Communities  
A Grass Roots Approach

Alexander Gabis

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## Preface

This book reports on the progress of a continuing social research project. The project is on-going in the sense that the author of the research is still actively involved in the community where the project was conducted. This same community is also the place where the researcher, your commentator, has resided for fourteen years: the Camp Springs/Westchester neighborhood of southern Prince George's County, Maryland. The project had no sponsoring agent, is affiliated with no particular institution, and has yet to identify a qualified body to review its results. It was a personal endeavor that began without pre-determined parameters, or even a definite goal, but instead unfolded gradually, in phases, over a period of about five years. The full extent of the research, and the various reasons for conducting it will become clear as you read through the report.

Broadly speaking the project has taken on four distinct aspects: (i) an exercise in crime prevention through grass roots community outreach, (ii) an instrument with which to engage and challenge the established political leadership, (iii) an attempt to develop a logical underpinning for responsible civic action, and (iv) a proposal to create a new profession and a new kind of government. The underlying rationale for this research is to determine what might happen if a moderately clear-thinking individual applied his intellect towards the solution of a modern social problem, proceeding as if he were solving a problem in mathematics or the objective sciences. It should be noted that in this case the individual in question, though compassionate, and possessing a reasonably sound comprehension of the basic elements of life, nevertheless exhibits an unspectacular intellectual ability. This point is important because the conclusions that are reached might be viewed as quite out of the ordinary, or even revolutionary, from a social science standpoint. Yet they formed in the ordinary mind of an ordinary person. The implication is that a different thought process is at work; something that most folks, however intelligent, don't commonly experience. We will come back to this point in the discussion that follows. Note also that the development of our solution includes both a theoretical aspect and an empirical aspect, just as there would be in the hard sciences. Though this undertaking may not quite qualify as applied mathematics, it does perhaps deserve consideration as applied mathematical thinking.

The logic that we will present, though arguably mathematical in flavor, will not approach the complexity of even the most basic of proofs that you find in pure mathematics. We are not revising the laws of gravity here. On the surface at least, the social issues addressed in these pages seem quite straightforward. The question then becomes, why do such problems still exist? Many great thinkers and scientists have come and gone over the centuries, and there is no short-

age of creative minds among us today. What we will argue is that the problems identified in this book – fear, apathy, isolation – are far more important to the health of humanity than any scientific discovery or artistic creation. Thus we are challenging not just the political leadership, but also the scientific, educational and cultural leaders. We would like folks who demonstrate genius in other areas to sit up and take notice of issues that so directly affect the quality of life for all of us.

The new government that we speak of is not meant to replace our constitutional government. Nor is it an extension of that government. Rather, it will function in parallel, as a sort of complimentary alternative. The domain of the government will be very local – neighborhood level. It will operate on, and originate within grass roots communities. It has none of the laws or edicts that you normally associate with government. Nor is there any law enforcement. Yet there is a governing force at work. Call it the force of conscience. It's the force that enables folks to live together harmoniously; that keeps a person from spreading rumors, or stealing property, or throwing a punch at someone, even in a situation where such a punch was warranted. It has its source in the gregarious nature of human beings; the tendency for individuals to come together willingly and live cooperatively with one another. The governing body of the community is thus the community itself, rather than a collection of legislators working from afar. This government of conscience, or moral government if you will, is not really new of course. It has been functioning in every community, in every place that man has settled since the dawn of civilization. I say functioning, but not necessarily functioning well. We will see some strong evidence that in the urban landscape of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the government of conscience is languishing in a rather anemic state. This is the main finding of the project: that society is suffering from an acute poverty of conscience. So acute, and so deeply rooted that many folks would declare that the situation is uncorrectable; that we must adjust to the burden and carry on, because nothing can be done about it. Our argument will contradict this view. This is the second result of the project: a logical demonstration, backed by empirical evidence, that there are workable, practical strategies for strengthening a community's force of conscience, or, as we shall term it in Chapter 5, the "shared spirit" factor of a community (see Section 5.6). Though it might appear otherwise, the strengthening of shared spirit will not involve impressing morality on people. There is no preaching involved, no recitation of "values". The social problems we address are manifested as moral issues, but what we will try to show is that the solution to the problems lies outside the moral realm. The main point is that we are not merely philosophizing about these questions, we are actually applying our philosophy. However abstract the discussion becomes, we don't lose touch with the real-world application, for without that application our conclusions have little value.

We are characterizing the new government as "alternative" in order to highlight the distinction between prevention and reaction in social systems. The constitutional government – or at least, the current implementation of it – is primarily reactive in how it operates. Our alternative government on the other hand, is designed around the principle of prevention. It will be argued that the exercise of true prevention requires a different state of mind, a new mind-set. This mind-set, though perhaps out of the ordinary, is not at all unnatural. On the contrary, it is more unnatural not to have the preventive mind-set. Nevertheless, most people today don't comprehend true prevention. We will discuss this in detail in Section 1.2 and again in Section 5.4. Note that it is possible that what we are calling alternative today may one day become predominant. While it's important to keep that vision in mind, one must also realize that it could be years, decades, or longer before it comes to pass. In the most pessimistic view it may never happen at all. The establishment of a preventive government is truly a long-term project; one in which you would fully expect to be involved for a lifetime. Given the current state of society, it's an undertaking that may very well be passed on to future generations. We will talk about the level of commitment required by this project in Chapter 5 when we describe the new profession of "Garden Zone Manager".

Regarding this new profession: We use the term "garden zone" to refer to the intermediate zone of the environment between the remote wilderness and the interiors of our homes. It's the fertile region that man has shaped from the planetary whole in order to sustain himself. In modern suburbia the garden zone has lost its agricultural character and been transformed into a commercial, recreation and transportation zone. When we speak of a Garden Zone Manager, we're talking about a community manager who uses this region as a platform for addressing such problems as crime, homelessness and environmental protection. The garden zone will be the venue in which he or she initiates contact with individuals of the community. All of his work will take place very locally; within residential neighborhoods, and at nearby parks, markets and public gathering spots. The idea is to direct the community's attention towards the green that surrounds us; to reestablish our connection to the land and the outdoors. Gardening is perhaps the most natural activity for making this connection. By growing flowers, herbs or vegetable crops, the community not only connects to the land, but also becomes more self-sufficient. We will talk about self-sufficiency in Chapter 7, when we cover some of the specifics of a manager's job.

A Garden Zone Manager follows no written rules in his profession; no "code of conduct". Rather, he or she will rely on common sense and his innate sense of fairness and decency. He will also need the cooperation and support of his fellow community members. However, gaining that support will require work. The manager must make a deliberate effort to interact with people. The main

device for connecting to the community will be plain, straight talk. No one is ever forced into compliance; no threats are necessary, not even legal threats. The manager simply makes suggestions. His role is that of a concerned advisor. The idea is that there is a common ground on which the community stands, and there are benefits to be had from cooperating with one another. We will argue that it's possible to broach almost any topic with one's neighbors, including problems of conflict resolution, if your approach is right. The success of this approach will depend on our ability to overcome the barrier of anonymity that dominates our culture. Modern society has imposed what amounts to a survivalist mode of existence on us. We live on private estates and conduct our affairs individually, striving to succeed on our own, and there are no clear avenues for sharing our success with the people around us. In order to open such avenues the manager must employ friendliness and courtesy. He will in fact be required to set the example for courteous relations. Setting the example translates to volunteering, organizing, reaching out, and participating in activities that benefit the community as a whole: church groups, civic associations, school programs, Neighborhood Watch, road, park and stream clean-up, homeless outreach, food pantries and so forth. We will show that the manager's role is actually a spiritual one, where spirituality does not necessarily imply religious practice, but refers instead to a broader, more abstract experience having to do with one's personal growth. Spirituality is a term that is generally misunderstood, often misused, and never defined. We will offer a definition of sorts in Chapter 4 when we discuss the inner realm and growth of character (see Section 4.5). Courtesy is also a term that draws a wide breadth of interpretation. We will discuss courtesy in Chapter 1, where we will link it to awareness (see Section 1.3), and again in Chapter 5, where we connect courtesy and spiritual growth (see Section 5.9). Though I won't promote any particular religious practice, I will argue that generally speaking religion is a good thing, beneficial to both the person and the community. Moreover, I will suggest that clerics would make good candidates to become Garden Zone Managers, provided we can overcome some of the political obstacles that exist (see Section 5.10).

The job of making neighborly suggestions may sound helpful, but it's not obvious that there would be a profession contained here. The intent of this book is to show how important this advisory role actually is. When you see how much is involved in such a seemingly simple practice, you will better appreciate the potential of this new position. Chapters 2 and 3 present a number of examples that illustrate the lack of leadership at the neighborhood level. There is clear evidence of a fundamental shortcoming in our communities, and a need for someone who can point folks in the right direction. We will demonstrate that juveniles in particular are greatly in need of attention. Truthfully, our children

are way out of control, and no one seems concerned about it. Even the school system is failing in this regard, as we will see in Chapter 6.

Though the project was confined to one small community, the discussion will show that we are dealing with problems – crime, delinquency, etc. – that are widespread in today's society, and that have furthermore persisted for a long time. There are some powerful forces at work in the world, and some well established institutions – religious, economic, political – but despite their longevity, and despite the good intentions of those who participate in them, none of our institutions have solved these problems, and some of the problems are actually getting worse. The state of the environment has certainly declined, and continues to decline. Homelessness and poverty should not exist period, given the wealth of our country. Crime has improved somewhat, according to statistics, nevertheless the prison population is higher than ever, and on the world scene crime has increased dramatically in recent years. (Locally, in Prince George's County crime has remained high through the last decade.) What's needed is a new vision, a new paradigm. This report will suggest such a paradigm. The approach will come from the angle of grass roots crime prevention, but the real goal is to restructure society, starting with our communities. More precisely, the goal is to create a structure where none exists, for those entities that we call communities now, hardly qualify as such. They are several key elements missing in them. We will discuss those elements, and try to come up with a definition for community in Section 5.6.

You will notice as you read these chapters that the arguments sound quite personal; that rather than a sum of information collected from other sources, they instead seem to emerge from the author's own psyche. The author makes no apology for this mode of expression. Truthfully, I am pleased about having thoughts that are clear enough to allow me to put into writing some notions that took a bit of time to develop, and to express them in a fashion that sounds half-way meaningful. But I must tell you that these ideas, though they feel original and might sound original, are not necessarily unique to me. Others have had similar thoughts, and it appears that their thoughts were equally original to them. What this seems to imply is that there is single source from which such ideas emanate; a single source of thought. We will talk about this source, and the importance of finding it, in Section 5.5.

What you will find in this report is a frank discussion of issues that most people don't care to deal with. Unpleasant issues, like crime. No doubt some folks will say that I have become morbidly obsessed with crime. That one person can only do so much, and that by focusing too intently on the gross and limited aspects of reality, we lose sight of the boundless beauty of existence; that we are letting the negative side of life dominate the positive side. My response is that there is much important work to be done out here in the field, as it were. Some-

one has to be working in the real world, with real communities. Someone has to address these issues straight on; to take them as his or her duty. Perhaps it's my dharma to work in this area. Perhaps it's yours too. If you haven't thought about becoming involved in community service, this book might give you the incentive to do so. You may thus consider this an invitation. You are cordially invited to participate in something meaningful and to perhaps contribute to the positive evolution of man.

# Introduction

When you are searching for a solution, the first step is to understand the problem. But if the first step is carried to completion, you will have already arrived at the goal. For when you fully understand a problem, the solution should be evident just from the depth of that understanding. In the pages that follow I will attempt to develop such an understanding with regard to the problem of crime. I am going to propose a somewhat unconventional approach to crime, and I will proceed by describing crime in a way that conveys a perspective with which you may not be familiar. My aim is to penetrate the outer layers and expose the root of crime. What I'm hoping is that the discussion will produce such a clear picture of the problem that there won't be anything left to prove when I'm done. The problem description itself will point to the solution.

My view is that of a resident of Prince George's County Maryland, a close-in suburb of Washington D.C. I make my home in the Westchester subdivision of Camp Springs, southeast of the city, about ten miles from downtown. Westchester has experienced a recurring incidence of crime, and I'll describe the extent of the problem shortly, but I first want to introduce some abstract notions that pertain to the way society functions. I'm going to take a close look at the grass roots of society, because it is there that humans interact in the most basic way. The grass roots is where we find the foundation of our communities.

The arguments I will make are going to rely heavily on how one interprets certain words and certain concepts. In fact, as the discussion proceeds it might appear that our preoccupation with word definitions has become obsessive. Before we start examining these concepts, let me offer some general comments on the subject of language.

There are a number of terms that we use in casual conversation which appear to have simple and straightforward meaning, but which on more careful reflection reveal a connection to deeper regions. Community is such a term. Knowledge, happiness, love, reason, will, character, faith, culture also fit this category. Even a seemingly clear-cut notion like crime can be shown to have more subtle significance. Notice that I haven't included such words as spirit, divine, God, eternal, heaven or hell – words that we would certainly acknowledge to have deeper meaning, yet which are nevertheless tossed about just as commonly and casually as the others. We hear these words all the time. Teachers speak them in classrooms. Lawyers use them in court. Your barber utters them while he cuts your hair. Politicians, journalists, scientists ... they all make extensive use of these words. Yet quite often the words are misused. Abused you might even say.

Here's an example. A recent story in the newspaper described how the vacation home of a tobacco company executive was destroyed in a fire caused by a discarded cigarette. The headline read, "Divine Justice." Reading it reminded me of how as children we would taunt a playmate by saying, "God punished you!" when he committed some mean or foolish act that backfired on him. Did we kids have the slightest idea what the word "God" meant? Of course not. Did the copy editors of the newspaper grasp the deeper meaning of "divine" or of "justice"? It's doubtful.

A science writer for another newspaper, writing about research into unexplained astrophysical phenomena, declared that, "until we understand the universe, we can't understand ourselves." It's a deep-sounding thought, isn't it? Apparently the editors were impressed, since they extracted the line from the story, and included it as a sub-heading under the front-page headline. However, when you give this statement closer scrutiny, a number of questions arise. What does it mean to "understand" something, and how does one understand one's "self"? Furthermore, what connection is there between yourself and the universe? To tell the truth, this writer's thinking seems 180 degrees off. It seems you must understand yourself before you can understand anything else.

The fact is, we are bombarded with misleading language and vacuous speech from every direction. There is so much imprecision in the way words are used that you hardly ever hear a well-formed idea. As a result it has become impossible for the average person to distinguish where the chatter stops and the meaningful thought begins. Moreover, we have grown so accustomed to this condition that people don't even realize that there could be more to understand. The very phrase "deeper meaning" has no meaning for them. Consider some examples from perhaps the most insidious source of inanity, television. Say you wanted to understand what life was. By clicking on the tube you'll discover that "life is a sport" and that you should "drink it up". A renowned athlete speaks these words in a soft drink commercial. Not a light-hearted, fanciful commercial this one. On the contrary, its composition is quite serious, as if to frame and amplify the great dignity of the sports idol who imparts this supposed wisdom. And what about wisdom itself? Would you like to know what that is? There is a large brokerage firm that wants you to know. Their commercial informs us that "wisdom comes from insight." Again, with its tone and style the commercial conveys the impression that there is profound knowledge residing in this firm. They would have you believe that if you let them sell you stock, some of that wisdom will be transferred to you. It's clear that the marketing strategy of such companies depends on the ignorance of the general public; that they count on the fact that few of us will notice how silly this nonsense really is.

"So what," you say. "It's only a commercial. No one takes it seriously."

But if commercials are not meant to be serious, then why are they on? Over and over they are repeated on millions of TVs in millions of homes. And don't think their effect is not powerful. By merely suggesting that something is true, and repeating it enough times, to enough people, you can convince folks of anything. Consider the people who take up smoking because commercials tell them that cigarettes taste good. Language has power. Language shapes a person's mind, and the shape of his mind determines the shape of his life. Such power must not be taken lightly.

I single out television not only because of the amount of inane material it contains, but also because like it or not, TV plays a major role in how our culture is defined. If there is a positive side to this, it is that television is bringing up topics that most folks would never otherwise think about. The commercials just cited are good examples. They direct our attention toward two very deep questions: what life is and what wisdom is. But it's a shame that these questions must be set in such a worthless framework. We have to stop treating such concepts as if they were trivial matters. They are not trivial at all. They are far more significant than most of us imagine. They certainly don't deserve the indignity of serving as the filler script for a soft drink promotion. You could even argue that such questions should be looked upon as sacred, and furthermore, that language, the verbal expression of these concepts, is equally sacred.

There's another problem word. Without even trying to define it, is "sacred" an appropriate way to describe language?

I think it is, and I think that there are people whose speech does indeed reflect the sacredness of language; or, perhaps it's more correct to say that the use of language reflects the sacredness of the person. This has nothing to do with religion. The few "holy" people who use language correctly are also the people who can sort out the scattered nuggets of worthwhile commentary from the deluge of empty chatter. They are folks who have somehow managed to develop a firmer grasp of the deeper elements of language, and thus of life, despite the obscuring shrouds of confusion. Even if they don't fully understand something, they are at least aware of the limitations of their understanding. These are not philosophy professors that we're talking about. Rather, there are some fairly ordinary people among us who exhibit this broader comprehension. By ordinary, I mean people who are not necessarily well read in any sense; who study nothing more profound than the morning paper. Folks whose classroom is the daily routine of work-a-day life.

The purpose of this harangue on words and language is to emphasize the importance of being precise. By precise, I mean in the same manner that mathematicians are precise – rigorously so. Mathematics does not permit terms that are poorly defined, and in the same way, nothing that we say or write should contain any trace of ambiguity. We can't allow ourselves to "fudge" the terms of

our arguments. If you are not certain about the words that you speak, then it's better to say nothing. If that means we must be silent about topics such as wisdom and life, then so be it. And don't think that turning to the dictionary is going to produce the precision you need. Dictionary definitions give you the relative sense of a word, a meaning that depends on the meaning of something else. It's possible to look up the words that define the word whose meaning you require, but this process inevitably leads back to where you started. What I'm getting at is that ultimately the meaning you extract depends not on what the dictionary says, nor even on what someone else tells you, but on what you have already inside your head. The implication here is that a hundred people can understand a word in a hundred different ways, depending on where their heads are. Given this fact, it is somewhat amazing that we are able to talk to one another at all. What mysterious process is it that bridges the gap between different minds so that meaningful communication can take place?

I won't try to answer this question directly, but I will attempt to construct a bridge to the private island that is home to my own thoughts and ideas, the place where the meaning of things as I personally see them resides. My intent is to transfer from my island to yours a glimpse of my perspective on crime. It's a perspective that I believe to be somewhat uncommon, hence it may require a bit of indulgence on your part in order for me to convey it. The gulf between my island and yours can't be crossed in reality, so the bridge will by necessity be an abstract, intellectual one. An abstract bridge is admittedly not very satisfying, but given that we must work with the written word, it will have to do. Even if you could come to Camp Springs and walk where I walk, see what I see, and hear what I hear, I'm afraid we would still need an abstract bridge to connect my island to yours. However, I do believe that there is a certain amount of reality value to be derived from living closer to other people. More on that later.

As far as my thoughts about crime are concerned, they are fairly clear, though perhaps less clear than they could be. Nevertheless, there are several issues about which I have no doubt, and I will work hard on those issues in order to demonstrate that my views are reasonable. The issues revolve around a few key concepts. The main elements of the discussion will be courtesy, responsibility, prevention, awareness, and the notion of crime itself. Some other ideas that will come under scrutiny are education, spirituality, and community. Can we produce mathematically rigorous definitions for these terms? Probably not. Not within the scope of this work anyway. But at the very least we will not allow any ambiguities to pass unflagged, and it may even be possible to identify a direction that takes us closer to the mathematical paradigm that we seek.

# Chapter 1

## Awareness, Courtesy and the Quality of Life

Let us begin by looking at the word "community". The notion of community is pretty fundamental to the understanding of any social problem, so we should at least acknowledge its significance. The most simple use of this term refers to a population center, a notion that by itself is not very interesting. Nomads aside, a population center is nothing more than a region where some number of households are located. The individuals in those households could be carrying on an existence that is completely independent of the people around them. Even when you factor in the unifying elements that one normally associates with community – churches, schools, government, the local economy – the sense of community may yet be absent. Most of us are familiar with this "sense" of community. At least it seems that way. You hear the phrase all the time. People are apparently quite comfortable with it. But pinning down what it is exactly is another matter. What I'm going to eventually argue is that the defining aspect of community is awareness, and that the familiar sense of community that we speak of arises from community awareness.

When I say community awareness, what I'm really talking about is collective awareness. The difference is this: There may be persons who are aware OF the community (or of something they imagine to be the community), and you could perhaps say that those folks are "community aware", but I want to talk about awareness by itself; to bring into focus people who are simply *aware* to some degree – not necessarily aware OF anything, just purely aware. The awareness of several of such folks taken together creates collective awareness. I submit that the whole in this case is greater than the sum of the parts; that the collective awareness of those individuals is the foundation of true community.

It's a deceptively simple concept, this awareness thing. Let us be clear that it is not at all equivalent to the way awareness is used in such phrases as "cancer awareness", or "environmental awareness". In those contexts we are referring to particular targets of awareness; namely, cancer and the environment. Even when folks speak of "consciousness raising", they are usually referring to something that we are conscious OF, rather than to consciousness itself. They are connected, these two usages, but there is an important distinction between them. In one case you are taken up with the object of your perception, in the other you are involved with the subject, the entity that does the perceiving; that is to say, you, yourself. Your attention is directed inward rather than outward.

I'm sure this all sounds quite abstract and perhaps a bit strange as well. Let's just say this much: Awareness involves more than the flat, bland "I'm here and

I'm awake" sort of experience, and when you have a gut-level feeling for this, you more clearly recognize its significance.

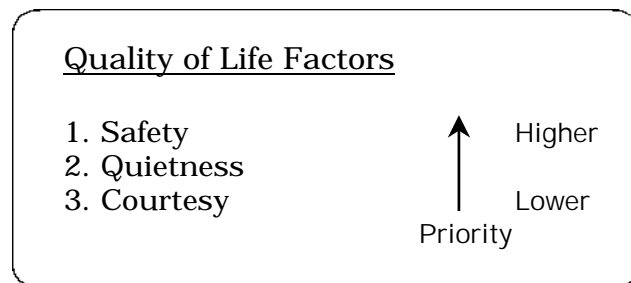
As we shall see later, strong communities contain a greater number of individuals with more fully developed awareness. If this is so, then it follows that to gauge a community's strength, you must measure people's awareness. Clearly however, this is not a simple matter. I suppose we could wire electrodes to the neighbors' heads and devise a way to record their brain waves as they go about their business, but that's not a practical option for us. Our best approach is to find something more tangible to measure. Something, say, like the quality of life.

Quality of life is a much more straightforward concept. Whereas awareness is abstract and amorphous, quality of life is concrete and clear-cut. Quality of life hits you in the face when you walk out the front door. Quality of life is leaving your house unlocked versus barred windows and an alarm system. It's three acre zoning and horse stables versus homeless men panhandling in traffic. It's the smell of freshly cut hay versus a code red ozone alert. Quality of life is as real as it gets. Understand that awareness is actually just as real, but the reality of awareness does not easily lend itself to examination by way of reason and rationality. Examining the quality of life on the other hand, could be as simple as counting the number or robberies in your district.

So why should awareness have anything to do with the quality of life? What connection could there be between a vague notion that hints at something metaphysical and the hard reality of a rising crime rate?

Well, answering this question is the main point of my essay. In order to establish a connection between awareness and the quality of life we will need to work from both ends. We will take a look at how folks in these parts behave, and lay out evidence that provides some clues about the general "state of mind" in the neighborhood. At the same time we will outline a rough logical structure that suggests a direction in which one must proceed in order to close the loop between empirical evidence and theoretical conjecture.

Let us then consider how the quality of life can be assessed. When you are speaking of a residential neighborhood, the three quality of life factors that come to mind first are safety, quietness and courtesy.



Normally we weight these factors in the order I have listed, giving safety distinct priority over the other two. Some examples will make this clear.

- Courtesy. Say the guy next door is a bit reclusive. You hardly ever see him, and when you do, he doesn't so much as glance in your direction. You tried to strike up a conversation once or twice, but in four years he has yet to show any interest in establishing friendly relations with you or your household. It would have been nice to have a neighbor you can count on to, say, take in your mail now and then, but with this guy it's out of the question. He obviously hasn't a clue about how to interact in a civilized way with the people around him. It's unfortunate, but it's a situation you can probably live with.
- Quietness. Now when the neighbor's kid is in the habit of playing the stereo at jet engine volume when he gets home from school, blasting the block with his booming, mega-bass, hip-hop rap, it's a good deal more disturbing. It would no doubt bring about a serious sit-down discussion between you and the kid's parents, regardless of how friendly his family was with yours. And if your request to turn down the volume weren't heeded, you might resort to calling the police to get your point across. It's a definite annoyance, but it's a problem that can probably be solved.
- Safety. However, if a pair of hold-up men robs you at gunpoint while you're out for an evening stroll, it gives indication of a problem that may not be solvable. It's a situation that seems not within your power to control. Your vulnerability is exposed in a serious way. You might think about taking measures to protect yourself, like buying a gun, or consider moving out of the neighborhood. That's how important personal safety is to most people.

If we could narrow the discussion to these three factors – safety, quietness and courtesy – it would simplify things, but we must not be so hasty. There are a number of other factors related to the quality of life that deserve consideration.

In the first place there are the things that are necessary for there to be life at all. Food and water are clearly essential. So are clothing, shelter, fuel and medicine. We should not overlook basic sanitation, and I would also include in this group the requirement that people are able earn a healthy living. Material factors such as these obviously have a direct impact on the quality of life. But what I would argue is that the material requirements of life are so important, so vital, that the very structure of civilization breaks down without them. After all, it's hard to talk about the quality of life when life itself is in jeopardy. You can't very well expect a man who doesn't have enough to eat to be concerned with safety, quietness and courtesy can you?

Or can you? Can people display the finer qualities of being human under circumstances that threaten to reduce them to animal-like survival? Can there be courtesy in the face of death?

Tough question, right? Actually no. Of course there can be. There are plenty of examples of how humanity has shined under the most adverse conditions. Nevertheless, in this discussion I would like to restrict our attention to communities where the basic necessities of life – food, shelter, etc. – are enjoyed by everyone. I want to assume that there is some minimum standard for these necessities such that any group of people, anywhere on earth, can carry on a fairly comfortable existence if this standard is met. Moreover, I submit that having an abundance of these necessities does not substantially alter the quality of life. A community of people who dine out every night, drive expensive cars, and live in opulent mansions is really no better off on the quality of life scale than folks who barter for their food at the local market, ride bicycles to work, and live in modest bungalows, so long as the essential needs are satisfied. Defining a minimum for the material necessities should not be a big deal, or so you would think, yet it seems that serious conflict can arise when people disagree on this matter. In any case, by whatever standard you use, the communities that I will describe here far exceed the minimum. There are poor neighborhoods not far away – it's only four or five miles to the worst parts of Washington D.C. – but here in Camp Springs, in terms of basic necessities, the standard of living is quite high for essentially everyone.

We should also not overlook the things that fulfill the human need for non-material sustenance. Food for the intellect, as it were. Basic education is certainly one of these things. Career opportunity is another. Exposure to music and the arts perhaps. And I might also include the opportunity to follow a religious path or seek religious guidance – from a serious authority of course – if one were moved in that direction. It's a bit trickier to produce standards for these factors compared to the material necessities, but again, in this community we exceed any minimum you can imagine for education, fine arts, career and religious opportunities. Free public schooling takes you through high school, and there are a number of colleges and trade schools nearby for those who want to continue their education further. Living so close to Washington, we are just minutes from some of the most prestigious music and art institutions in the world. Career opportunities? No real problem there. Although, I must say that the emphasis on high technology these days is worrisome. Kids getting out of high school may find themselves floundering if they don't have an aptitude in a technical field. As for religion, in Camp Springs there are mainly Christian denominations to choose from, but if you're willing to get in the car and drive, you'll find that within the greater D.C. area there are groups representing every major religion.

I would again submit that so long as the minimums are met for these intellectual needs, the quality of life does not significantly improve when there is an abundance. I admit that this point is not nearly as clear as it was for the material necessities. You might argue for example, that exposure to baroque chamber music is more beneficial than, say, big-band jazz, or that a pursuing a career in masonry is better than studying botany. The community where the classically trained brick-layers lived could then claim a higher quality of life than the jazz-loving botanists. However, I believe that if we focus not so much on particular varieties of creative pursuits, but on the opportunity to pursue them, then it's evident that as long as the minimum opportunity is present, no great change in the quality of life comes from an excess. The word opportunity in this context means that people with greater experience and knowledge – and perhaps some degree of social standing as well – extend themselves to others who are less experienced in order that they might pass on what they know. At the very least the experienced folks can show the novices where the best paths for advancement lie. There was of course a time in the not too distant past when opportunities for education, career advancement and so forth were deliberately denied to certain racial and ethnic groups, and to women as well. Remnants of that era are still in evidence, but for the most part some degree of opportunity for creative pursuits is extended to practically everyone now. To determine what exactly constitutes minimum opportunity one must explore issues of fairness. We won't try to address such issues here. I only want to claim that a minimum can indeed be determined, and that if it's defined reasonably, the communities of Camp Springs would satisfy it with plenty of room to spare.<sup>1</sup>

You might be wondering if I've forgotten the one factor that seems to dominate the American culture these days: recreation. I haven't forgotten it, but I certainly wish I could. I submit that recreation contributes very little to the quality of life. In fact, you could almost argue that too much recreation actually diminishes the quality of life. By recreation I mean to include essentially all of the more popular forms of entertainment: television, movies, night-life, gambling, boating, cruises, tourism, etc. All of this has such little value relative to the truly significant aspects of life that it hardly deserves our attention. Does recreation have any importance at all? Sure. But its importance has been so grossly inflated that we've lost all sense of perspective about it. Sports for example is greatly exaggerated for its contribution to the welfare of a community. Sports is supposed

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<sup>1</sup> The point about minimum opportunity may not be quite so clear. Prince George's County is currently facing a severe teacher shortage. The federal government has begun granting special visas to foreigners to teach math and science in public schools. The city of Chicago is reportedly recruiting foreign teachers for its school system. That we Americans must go overseas to find teachers for our own children speaks poorly about the degree of fairness we display in extending ourselves to young people who seek career advancement.

to build character, instill discipline, and so forth, but if it were that important, how is it that so few of us bother to go out and toss the ball around with the neighborhood kids, or pull up a lawn chair and watch a little league game at the park? Yet we can spend hours on end watching professionals play on TV. People seem to have an insatiable thirst for distraction. We are apparently so bored with real life that every chance we get we're looking for new ways to take our attention away from it. In any event, there is certainly no shortage of recreational outlets in this neck of the woods. When it comes to finding ways to amuse ourselves, we in Camp Springs measure up against anyone.

### *1.1 The Garden Zone*

The one other quality of life factor that deserves mention is the physical environment that surrounds a community: trees, terrain, climate, soil and water, plants and animals, etc. In other words, all that is our legacy as children of the earth. Environment also includes the structures that man has created in order to inhabit the planet and make use of its resources: roads, bridges, houses, schools, parking lots, telephone poles, and so forth. At the most intimate level are the objects that occupy our personal living space: walls and ceilings, carpets and floors, sofas, cushions, tables and chairs, potted plants. The personal environment also includes the clothing you wear, the music you listen to, and perhaps the food you cook as well (food being the part of the environment that we eat).

At the outer most reaches of the environment we have the wild areas, undisturbed by human activity. Closer in are the houses and homesteads that shelter us. The boundary between the inhabited and uninhabited areas is not a sharp one. As you move out of the wild and approach the settled regions, you encounter a transition area located at the periphery of human habitation. I would like to call this region the "garden zone". In a residential setting like Camp Springs the garden zone consists of the yards and gardens between and among dwellings, and also the parks, playgrounds, streets, sidewalks, and shopping plazas that make up the suburban landscape. The garden zone is where man has shaped nature to suit his needs. It is most recognizable in the places where we grow our food, the farms and agricultural areas. But you can also identify a garden zone in the heart of the city. There is after all the land, the air and the sky, all of which can be seen and touched even in the dark alley under a skyscraper. There is green in the city as well. Trees in the park, planters on sidewalks, window boxes on an apartment balcony. They link people to the trees and plants of the distant forests.

In earlier times we took for granted that the great wilderness would always be there; that the earth would take care of itself somehow. Clearly things are not

that simple anymore. Nevertheless, it would not be unreasonable to say that the wild areas of the planet are too remote to make a noticeable difference in the quality of life at the neighborhood level. Moreover, even if the state of the wilderness did have an effect, the effect would no doubt manifest itself fairly evenly everywhere, in every community. Given this, we could very well proceed on the assumption that the state of the wilderness is not an important factor in community quality of life.

At the other end of the scale, the environmental zone that does affect each of us quite directly is one's personal living area. However, you could argue that the condition of the space where our private affairs are conducted is not of great concern to the community as a whole. It would seem that the neighbors are not going to worry about what kind of wallpaper you have in your bedroom or whether your bathroom needs cleaning. Thus, in assessing the quality of life we could probably discount both the personal living environment as well as the wilderness.

When these two environmental extremes, the wild and the personal, are eliminated from consideration, what we have left is the garden zone. A lot happens in the garden zone. When you call "Good morning" to the lady across the street, your voice carries through the garden zone. When you drive to the supermarket, you travel through the garden zone to get there. The bird feeder that you strung on the branch out back is hanging in the garden zone. The elm tree next to the church is growing in the garden zone. The church itself is part of the garden zone. Weddings take place in the garden zone. So do funerals. Police make arrests in the garden zone. Wars break out in the garden zone. Presidents are elected in the garden zone. With all this activity going on, you would think that the garden zone would be getting a great deal of care and attention; that maintaining its health would be a high priority. But I would argue that just the opposite is true. I suggest that we are in fact neglecting the garden zone. We don't recognize the key position that it holds in the overall environmental scheme of things, and we are overlooking important ways that it could be used as a platform for improving the quality of life. By acting through and in the garden zone, we could not only improve the condition of the garden zone itself, but also benefit the other parts of the environment – the interior regions, and the remote regions.

Although the personal and the wilderness regions would on the surface appear to be unimportant to the quality of life at the neighborhood level, there are nevertheless good reasons for communities to be concerned about them. If the wilderness cannot be maintained, it's easy to imagine that dire consequences would result, not just for the people whose lives are closely connected to the wilderness, but also for those of us living in the developed areas of the earth. It's unthinkable that the natural areas and the riches they contain could someday

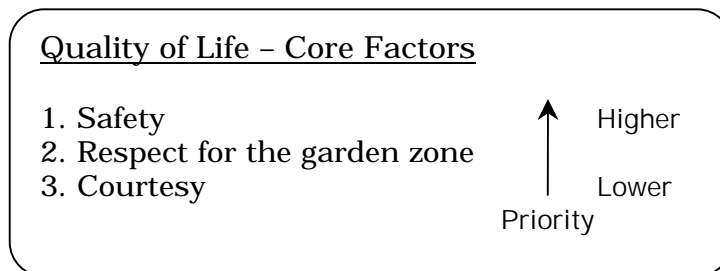
disappear, but there are signs warning us that this is exactly the direction where man is headed. Getting people to realize the significance of this threat is itself a daunting task. I submit that the best way to approach the problem is to take a stand in the garden zone and be an advocate for it. I'm not talking about a philosophical stand here. I mean to physically position yourself in the garden zone in such a way that you can point out your location relative to the rest of the earth. Point to the sky, to the land, and to the wild creatures. Call attention to the fact that we are part of this. That our zone of habitation, however insulated it might seem, is in fact shaped from the planetary whole.

Regarding one's personal environment, it too contributes to the quality of life for the following reason: Although the neighbors are shielded from a direct view of your private space, they do have to look at you. Your personal environment changes who you are and how you appear to others. It affects your emotions, your mood and your behavior. Sound can influence a person. So can colors, textures, lighting, and even compass direction. Moreover, the elements of the personal space are not necessarily limited to inanimate objects. If there are other people in your household, family members for instance, they too should be considered part of this environment. Clearly the habits and behavior of those people will affect you as much as anything else in your home. Some of these effects stay with you. They accumulate on your personality, and on those occasions when you move among people outside your home, the effects are transferred through you to the folks with whom you interact. This transference is the mechanism by which the quality of life is altered. If something happens at home that, say, puts you in a foul mood, you are more likely to be stressed and irritable when you venture into the community. Unless you have a way to rid yourself of this stress, it is certain that some of it will be released on other community members. Clearly the quality of life will be impacted by the release of this pent-up stress. Conversely, when you move within the community, the qualities of the folks outside are transferred by you back into your home. If the people in the neighborhood are friendly and supportive, it will have a positive affect on you directly, and indirectly on your personal environment, including the other people who occupy it.

The place where one comes into contact with other community members is the garden zone. The greater the interaction among people in the garden zone, the greater the transference of qualities, good and bad, that will take place. Thus, as above, in order to make the best use of the garden zone, we have to take the right stand. Not only must we take a stand that points to nature, but also one that points to the private environment of each individual. Again, the stand I'm referring to is not merely rhetorical. I'm saying that we must literally get outside and find a way to position ourselves such that we can call attention to the quali-

ties radiating from personal environments that degrade, or improve, the overall quality of life.

Let's review how the argument has developed. We proposed that the most obvious factors that determine the quality of life are safety, quietness and courtesy. Let's call these the "core factors". We eliminated from consideration material needs, food for the body, because beyond the minimum, there is no qualitative improvement. Non-material, intellectual needs were discounted for the same reason. We argued that recreation is in such great abundance that it doesn't deserve our attention. Finally we determined that all aspects of the environment are indeed important to the quality of life, and that the best way to handle the environment is through proper use of the garden zone. I would now suggest that the quietness factor belongs to a wider array of elements related to environmental considerations. Noise is but one of many forms of environmental pollution. As the garden zone is the platform from which we address environmental concerns, let us use a more general term for the second factor in the quality of life outline. Let's call it "respect for the garden zone". Our list then appears this way:



### 1.2 Prevention ... A New Mind-Set

It's pretty obvious why safety would be at the top of the quality of life list for most people. Clearly when a person is physically threatened, he or she is more likely to take decisive action. The response is immediate and direct: get out of harm's way. This mode of thinking, where safety is given highest priority, is reflected in the way we govern ourselves. There are elaborate mechanisms in place for maintaining public safety and security, and for ensuring that we can respond quickly to emergencies, particularly when lives are in jeopardy. You want to be prepared for anything, but there can be allowances based on the character of your community. The main thing is that you are ready if a need arises; that you can react effectively. Everyone appreciates this: fast reaction; quick response. Whether it's by the fire department, the police, or the paramedics, this is what

people pay taxes for, and when they don't get it, that's when they complain the loudest.

The reactive philosophy carries over into many areas. It's almost instinctive. From environmental crises to medical emergencies, we love the notion of coming to the rescue when disaster strikes. We've all seen the TV shows: "Rescue 911" and the like. It seems to give us great satisfaction to overcome big obstacles to get the job done. We heap much tribute on the emergency response guys. We make them into heroes, and perhaps justifiably so. When it comes to glory, there is nothing that compares to personal suffering and sacrifice. But the reactive philosophy goes even deeper. It goes beyond heroics. It is widely held that people must make mistakes in life and then later correct them, and that is how the learning process works. "To err is human" is what we've all been taught. What this seems to imply is that crises are unavoidable; that we must go through life *expecting* to screw up. I suggest that this thinking is flawed; that it doesn't allow for the possibility that life can be structured such that people get things right the first time.

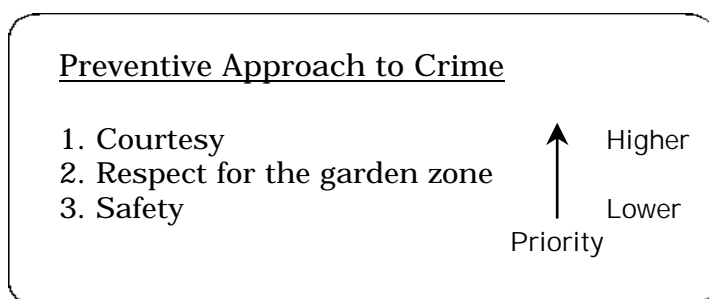
What I'm getting at is that there is another approach to consider. A preventive approach. You could call it the quiet, low-key approach. There is no suffering involved. The underlying principle is that you avert the crisis before it takes place. The idea is to develop a mode of functioning such that crises don't occur. It's hardly heroic, but when people take even the smallest step in this direction, significant benefits come of it. Although folks generally do seem to comprehend the difference between prevention and reaction, most people don't grasp how far the preventive approach can actually take us. I was having a casual conversation with a minister friend recently, and I said something to the effect that not all folks were trustworthy. His reply was that if there weren't any dishonest people in the world, he wouldn't have a job. Similarly, a heart surgeon would no doubt say that if people didn't have hardening of the arteries, he wouldn't have a job, and a cop would tell you that if there were no robbers, the police would be out of work, and insurance salesmen would say that if we didn't have disasters, there wouldn't be a need for them either. I maintain that the sentiment expressed by my friend is reactive rather than preventive. A minister's job is arguably more preventive than the job that cops, surgeons and insurance men perform, but how many clergymen have set their sights on creating a society where absolutely everyone can be trusted? Not many I'll bet. And how many heart surgeons seriously plan for the day when everyone quits smoking, stops eating junk food, and maintains a strict exercise regimen? How many policemen are figuring out ways to eliminate crime completely so that one day we wouldn't need police at all? Same question for the insurance companies. Are any of them working out a way to eliminate the need for insurance?

No doubt this all sounds hopelessly idealistic. But I'm not saying that we should march in tomorrow and close down the doctor's offices and the police stations. What I am suggesting is that not enough of us are able to appreciate that the preventive approach does indeed have the potential to accomplish all of this.

There is quite a lot at stake here. Lives can be saved through prevention. One very striking example of the preventive/reactive dichotomy can be drawn from the events of World War II. People look back on that era and speak with great emotion about the glory and the heroism of the allied forces in defeating Germany and Japan. Our boys went over there and saved the day. Indeed, they saved the world. At least that's the customary way to see it. But consider this: The period surrounding World War II was perhaps the bloodiest chapter in recorded history. Tens of millions of people were killed, most of them noncombatants. Moreover, after the war ended, the world was plunged into 40 years of cold war, the end product of which was a global nuclear umbrella that still casts a shadow over humanity. When you look at it this way, it appears that World War II was a massive, catastrophic blunder; a screw-up of epic proportions. Sure, we reacted heroically, but how did we let things get so far out of hand? How could we have allowed so many people to die? Of course, others will argue that there were decades of build-up, that we didn't start the war, and so forth. We won't go into the details. I only want to illustrate the marked distinction between reaction and prevention, and to point out the potentially huge benefits that can be derived from a preventive approach.

There is a great need for more people to come to this understanding, to work as if the ideal were the goal. Almost everything we do comes from the reactive side. The effort is unbalanced. Some of us need to embrace the preventive ideal, otherwise nothing will ever change. The difficulty is that to fully understand this ideal, one must develop a new mind-set. But changing one's mind-set is more than a buzz phrase, and adopting a different philosophical outlook involves more than abstract conjecturing. The importance of this change of outlook cannot be over emphasized, but it is a difficult thing to describe. Yet without experiencing this change one cannot understand what true prevention really means. It's a matter of seeing the full range of possibilities, not just intellectually, but in a different way, a deeper way.

Let's for the moment proceed as if we understand what this new mind-set is, and apply the preventive philosophy to the problem of crime. Looking again at the three quality of life factors for a neighborhood – safety, respect for the garden zone, and courtesy – I maintain that when you adopt the preventive approach, the order in the list is reversed. Safety becomes the least important consideration, and courtesy takes precedence over all else.



What this implies is that the guy who has trash piling up in his yard gets a higher priority than the hold-up man who robbed you, and a kid using four-letter epithets gets a higher priority than both. It seems paradoxical. Are we going to let robbers have free rein while we pick up trash and scold a rude child?

Ideally, yes. When you are fully committed to prevention, all of your energy is brought to bear on the most critical point, and that point is courtesy. If you strive for the highest goal, everything else will fall into place.

Clearly there are weaknesses in the argument to this point. To start with, our description of the altered mind-set that underlies the preventive approach is so vague that it's hardly useful. For all anyone knows we could be concocting some imaginary reality; raving about some fanciful new power of the psyche. Furthermore, we haven't provided an explanation of why the preventive approach would invert our quality of life priority list. Let's consider this point. Setting aside the mysterious mind-set thing, I believe that it's not all that hard to see why prevention should bring about an emphasis on courtesy. If one thinks of prevention not so much in terms of taking precautions to thwart would-be criminals, but as an effort to address the problem of why it is that people become criminals in the first place, then it makes sense that one would want to focus on broader aspects of individual behavior, and on the relationship between individuals and the surrounding community. Wouldn't you then start by assuming that any person could potentially become a criminal, and work at determining the circumstances that bring it about? Granted, a hundred experts would offer a hundred different theses to explain the phenomenon, but I submit that when we consider physical behavior, courtesy is as good a word as any to describe the aspect of human activity which most generally corresponds to how well people treat one another, and this includes the committing of crimes against another person. In other words, a criminal is first of all showing us that he has not yet learned how to be courteous. Prevention thus requires that you view all crimes, regardless of their severity, as acts of rudeness.

At the neighborhood level courtesy covers a wide range. Your dog gets loose and frightens a jogger. You plant a tall tree that blocks your neighbor's sunlight. You carelessly put out trash which the crows tear up and scatter. Driv-

ing too fast through residential streets; letting your junk car rust in front of the house; allowing your kids to play basketball until after the neighbor's bedtime. There are hundreds of little things that violate courtesy. What they all illustrate is a lack of respect for the people around you. Respect is where courtesy has its source; not a begrudging or resentful respect, but respect that is deep and honest. This brings us back to awareness, for respect means being aware of other people – aware of their needs, aware of their desires. Respect can be as basic as being aware of the mere presence of a person. But again, being aware *of something* – people, trash, trees, cars – is an aspect of being simply *aware*.

### *1.3 The Effects Of Awareness*

Allow me to put forth a couple of key assertions regarding awareness:

- (i) When you refine your awareness, your thinking becomes clearer.
- (ii) Clearer thinking leads to more responsible action.

Apart from the difficulty of defining awareness, I think most would agree that the first assertion is not too farfetched. Even from the most simple-minded view, it's apparent that there is a connection between awareness and thought, and probably between refined awareness and greater clarity of thought as well. You don't have to "think" very hard to see that awareness is some sort of mental characteristic. Mental characteristic ... mind ... thinking ... thoughts ... okay, yeah ... awareness and thought ... it sort of makes sense. When we examine this more carefully however, it appears that one could easily confuse these two things, awareness and clear thinking; that the two could be equated somehow. After all, what exactly is thought? Isn't it strange how you can have thoughts constantly, yet not be able to put your finger on what they are, of what material they are made. If we don't know what a thought is, how can we possibly know what a clear thought is? Same thing with awareness. If we can't even define simple awareness, aren't we just compounding the confusion when we speak of refining it? It seems that our attempt to be mathematically precise has fallen completely apart, doesn't it? Let's trudge on and try to pick up the pieces as we go.

The second assertion, that clearer thinking brings about greater responsibility, is perhaps even harder to prove. In the first place, the word "responsible" is one of those terms that resists any attempt at strict definition. A host of questions arises when you start to think about it. Exactly what are you responsible for? And to whom are you responsible? And in what manner? Even more difficult than pinning down responsible action is how to make the connection between responsibility and thinking.

Let's proceed by arguing a lemma that is somewhat easier to get a handle on: that clearer thoughts bring about greater courtesy. If you think of courtesy in terms of how a person carries himself – his body movements, his tone of voice, the degree of self-control he displays – then courtesy begins to look less like a moral consideration and more like pure action. Action we know, arises from desire. One desires something, and then acts on that impulse. Going a step further, we see that desires come from thoughts. Thought, desire, action ... isn't that the sequence? Clearer thinking produces more well-conceived desires, which in turn creates a greater economy of action. Economy of action implies that one's movements are smoother, finer, more natural, less choppy. And that's what greater courtesy means; that you glide through life rather than tromp through it.

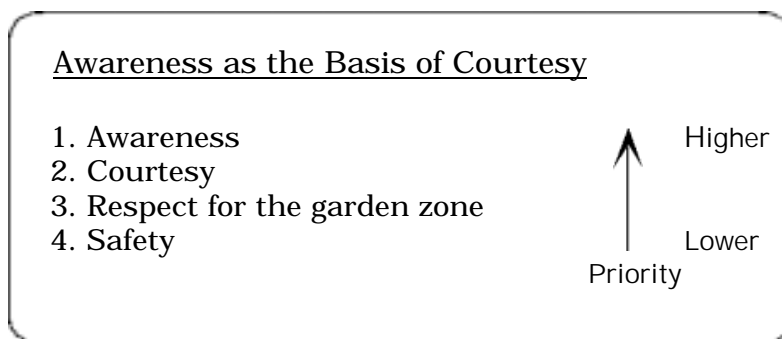
When you have clearer thoughts and hence, an elevated sense of courtesy, you more clearly see the potential effect of your actions. You can more readily differentiate between hurtful actions and kind actions. Just this ability alone, the ability to discriminate, is an important first step in the direction of becoming a responsible person. But there is more to this argument. The ability to see the effect of your actions can be advanced to a very high degree. At the highest level of advancement you realize that ultimately everything you do to someone else is actually being done to you, yourself. Everyone is familiar with some version of this principle. It's the golden rule that we learned as children ... do unto others, etc. But very few people grasp its full import. And yes, that implies that very few of us are thinking clearly. This doesn't mean we are unable to think clearly, only that it requires some work to get there. For the ability to unfold, a path needs to be followed; there is a process to be undergone. In any event, when you realize that your actions eventually come back on you, you are less likely to do things that are hurtful. Not doing hurtful things is the sign of a more responsible person.

We could also construct the argument this way: As your awareness develops, your knowledge of yourself grows. Understanding yourself is prerequisite to understanding everything else, including other people. Moreover, when you act with yourself (or the "self") as a reference point, your actions have a different value, a deeper value. You are more at peace with what you are and who you are. There is less hesitation, more ease, more spontaneity, in what you do. Greater ease of action, clearer thinking, and a deeper understanding of yourself and of others: taken together these qualities enable you to behave better towards other people; more naturally, more sincerely, more respectfully. This is where courtesy comes in, for sincerity, respect and courtesy are intimately connected. If courtesy is closest to pure action, then sincerity and respect occupy a position just slightly toward the moral side of the courtesy compass. Such qualities as these are what form the basis of responsibility.

Here is a third construction for why clearer thinking leads to more responsible action: If there is even the slightest impetus for acting responsibly buried inside you, clear thinking will permit you to recognize that the impetus is there, so that you can choose to act on it or not. Some people will choose not to act on it. Some people may in fact choose to take a contrary action, to do something that is actually irresponsible. But if they have indeed developed greater awareness and clearer thinking, then they will at least not be acting blindly. Their decision to act irresponsibly will be a precise one. They will enter into the act, however hurtful or selfish it is, knowing full well that what they are doing is wrong. Once again, knowing what is wrong is required in order to avoid doing what is wrong, and this is the first step towards becoming responsible.

As shaky as this logic may appear from a technical standpoint, my personal experience, and the knowledge associated with that experience, makes up for the weakness in it. Not that that does you any good, but I'm hoping that as we take a closer look at how courtesy and responsibility are manifested in the neighborhood, these arguments might gain strength.

If you accept the assertion that refined awareness brings about greater courtesy, our quality of life table looks like this:



We saw that the preventive approach leads one to emphasize courtesy, because it requires that we think in terms achieving the highest possible goal; to position first the factor with the most far reaching effect. Now that we have determined that awareness is what underlies courtesy, it follows that awareness deserves to occupy the top spot in the quality of life hierarchy.

It's not immediately clear how one would go about introducing a notion like awareness to one's neighbors. Moreover, how can we expect to improve the community's awareness when we can't even define what it is? I submit that the answer lies in the nature of awareness itself. Everyone experiences some variety and degree of awareness. Even if one's intellectual understanding is not clear, there is another faculty by which we "see" how awareness functions. Whether we

realize it or not, this other faculty is working all the time, generating experiential input that broadens our comprehension in a subtle but essential way. This ability to fathom the nature of reality is quite intimate to each of us, but it's not something that our intellects can get a direct handle on. That's why it goes unnoticed by most people. Yet there have been folks who recognized this faculty. Plato called it the "dialectic". He argued that knowledge gained by way of dialectic is higher even than knowledge produced by reasoning. In *The Republic* Plato wrote this about the dialectic:

When the eye of the mind gets really bogged down in a morass of ignorance, dialectic gently pulls it out and leads it up ...<sup>2</sup>

Dialectic reveals the "essential nature"<sup>3</sup> of things, and it is at that deep, essential level where one locates awareness, which Plato termed, the "good".<sup>4</sup>

What's neat about dialectic and awareness is that one can stimulate the awareness of other people by simply interacting with them. Such interaction produces the best results when it involves folks who already have refined awareness. It only takes a small number of these folks to tickle the awareness of an entire neighborhood, and in so doing, to bring about a significant change in the quality of life. I maintain that people with greater awareness realize that there are others who are less aware than they are, and understand that because of this difference, the burden is on them to set the example. They may have never even heard the word awareness, let alone subjected it to the kind of analysis that we are performing here, yet these folks somehow know that it's up to them to be the models of restraint and dignity. To people like this no violation of courtesy is too small. Every little act makes a difference. But it's not a neurotic thing. It's much more natural. It comes from a deep-seated knowledge that even seemingly insignificant words or deeds can have a far-reaching effect.

There are indeed folks who fit this category. The hard part is to get them to come forward, to play a role in the community. Not everyone is disposed to getting their hands dirty in this fashion. It requires that you not only set the example, but that you also talk to people about it. You must deliberately initiate courteous interaction with other people. It involves practicing personal communica-

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<sup>2</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 2cd Edition (revised), 1987) section 533d, p. 344. There is a lucid discussion of Plato's dialectic written by Jonathan Shear in his book *The Inner Dimension; Philosophy and the Experience of Consciousness*; (New York, Peter Lang Publishing; 1990)

<sup>3</sup> *Republic*, 534b, p. 346

<sup>4</sup> *Republic*, 509b, p. 309: "The good therefore may be said to be the source not only of the intelligibility of the objects of knowledge, but also of their being and reality; yet it is not itself that reality, but is beyond it, and superior to it in dignity and power."

tion ... one-on-one ... you and the neighbor, or you and the neighbor's kid. You can look at it as an educational process, but it's a different sort of education. You share your experiences with others in a positive way. You show that you are interested in hearing where they are in life, not so that you can demonstrate your superiority, but to draw attention to the finer aspects of personal growth. There is learning involved here, but it's not the kind of learning that we normally speak about. It is not an assimilation of facts, but something of a different nature altogether.

So now we've made a leap in logic from awareness to education. Are we really to believe that community members, neighbors as it were, are going to take on the role of teachers? Aware or otherwise, why should we expect anyone to do this? Moreover, what exactly is it that we would ask of them? Are we supposed to start teaching awareness somehow?

One must realize that education is what prevention is really all about. No matter what the area of interest – health, environment, safety, crime – your approach must have education as its basis if it is to be truly preventive. As far as teaching awareness is concerned, there is nothing to be taught. Awareness is already there. Everyone has it. What we need to do is *refine* awareness. The idea is to direct our attention, individually and collectively, away from matters that are remote and external, and towards areas that are more immediate and internal; closer to who we are and where we are. There are many ways to accomplish this, many approaches that carry one's awareness towards the more intimate regions. On the individual level one does it through the practice of a self development discipline.<sup>5</sup> With groups of people more complex dynamics come into play. One person's awareness plays off of, and resonates with, the awareness of a second person, and together their awareness resonates with a third person, and a fourth, and so on. Entire nations of people are vibrating with awareness this way. But it's mostly an uncoordinated, incoherent vibration. I suggest that in order to coordinate awareness we must first bring people's attention back to where they live. When we speak of turning our collective attention inward, where else would we turn other than towards home, where home means your community, your neighborhood, your block, your household, and ultimately yourself. By managing collective awareness at the neighborhood level, we can better handle problems related to the quality of life. This is where we want to put the focus, on grass roots awareness.

Let us once again distinguish the common use of the term "grass roots awareness" from the meaning I would like to convey in this discussion. An example will help illustrate the distinction. There was a recent story in the *Washington Post* about President Clinton's media campaign on global warming. The

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<sup>5</sup> Transcendental Meditation is such a discipline. See Section 5.5.

article described how the President was lobbying weather forecasters and hosting a conference on climate change. It went on to say that Clinton was "trying to build grass roots awareness of the problem." Elsewhere the *Post* described this activity as a White House effort to "raise awareness" of global warming.

There is no disputing that what a president does can affect the awareness of millions of people. But the effect is weakened by the remoteness of the source. The ripples generated by the President's movements lose amplitude as they pass through the hierarchy of government, and when they are filtered through the lens of the media, they become even more diluted. By the time the President's image reaches the average citizen, it has become not unlike the image of any other person who is prominent in the media. For most folks there is not much difference between seeing the President, and watching a TV actor recite lines. Secondly, there is the distinction that we discussed above between the awareness *of* something and awareness by itself. The nearer your awareness is to the center of your universe, the more uncontaminated it becomes. When you try to raise awareness of a phenomenon like global warming, you are merely adding another external concern to the thousands that are already drawing people's attention outward at every moment. We need to balance this outward pull with an inward anchor. If you look at society as a pyramid, it would appear that the President is at the top, and the rest of us are down near the bottom somewhere. But from the standpoint of awareness the diagram is reversed. Each of us occupies his own private mountain. When you sit at the top of the mountain, you control everything below. By keeping your attention as close as possible to the peak, you can bring about the most powerful effects. Thus the real way to improve grass roots awareness is for the grass root to be aware of itself, from itself. The grass root must never lose sight of its existence as a grass root. From there everything else will fall into place. This bottom-up perspective is crucial if there is to be any true progress towards improving the quality of life.

#### *1.4 Staking A Claim On Courtesy*

The concern about global climate change expressed by the President would fall into the "respect for the garden zone" category in our quality of life table. You would not expect many people to appreciate an issue like this unless they were first of all cognizant of the state of the environment in their own backyards. Whatever the merits of the President's campaign, his message becomes nothing more than political posturing for folks who don't have the technical ability to evaluate the problem, and who furthermore have no sense of how to put it into perspective relative to the climate right outside their homes. Most of the people in my neighborhood can't appreciate the importance of a healthy rain in the

growing season, let alone whether the global climate is fluctuating. They don't even know what a growing season is. They think food comes from refrigerators and water comes from faucets. The land, the oceans, the rivers, the sky ... none of it has much meaning.

Moreover, respect for the garden zone falls beneath a more important concern: courtesy. And higher yet than courtesy is awareness. If we want to adhere to the prevention-oriented principle of putting the highest first, we can't let ourselves be dragged down the slope of our private mountain, into regions that are farther and farther removed from the reality of our immediate surroundings. We must continually bring our awareness back home, first in a personal sense, and second, relative to the people closest to us: family, neighbors and community members. Some folks in the neighborhood will no doubt want to find their own approach to developing personal awareness, and to them I say more power to you. The more people that do this, the better. Others may not appreciate the value of following such a path. The high road, as it were, might not appeal to them right off the bat. But I believe that everyone can appreciate the importance of the next level down, which is courtesy. That's the region where we're staking our ground. The aim is to make the pursuit of true courtesy a universal discipline, recognized by everyone and endorsed by the most respected people in the community. The least a person can do to show that he or she is a responsible community member is to practice courtesy.

So what are we proposing? Some kind of courtesy enforcement patrol, ready to issue tickets like meter maids do? Why wouldn't this kind of thing be handled by the police?

The answer to the last question is that the police must follow the reactive approach. That's how they are trained. They are not meant to be educators. Their role is to enforce the law, and there are tight restrictions on that role. In law enforcement there is very little gray area. When it comes to courtesy however, the gray area abounds. We're all familiar with the adage which instructs that it's not important what you do in life, but how you do it. It is along those lines that courtesy operates. Courtesy is how you carry yourself, how you move. Are you a person who rushes through life like a runaway trash truck, shoving aside everything in its path and spewing debris behind it as it goes? Or do you move gracefully through life, blending in and always giving way, yet standing out if you have to; a person who, when he leaves, disappears silently and without a trace?

Courtesy is like a 24-hour-a-day workout where every action you perform is part of a lifelong routine of self development. There has to be a lot of forgiveness in how it's handled. Virtually everything that has to do with courtesy is a judgment call. But judgments of this sort are not like the decisions made in a courtroom. We have been trying forever to regulate courtesy through the law,

but it's a futile effort. Laws are written to be enforced, but you can't ever force a person to be courteous. Maybe it works that way in the movies. You know ... Dirty Harry growls, "I'll teach you some respect," as he collars the bad guy. But Dirty Harry isn't reality. Force and intimidation don't teach respect; they teach resentment and fear. To teach courtesy you need a willing pupil if there is to be any hope of success. It's not a matter of enforcement. It's a completely different process, and clearly the law doesn't provide the right framework for it .

If the law is not suited for courtesy education, what do we have left? The school system? Perhaps. Parents? Certainly. Religion is another avenue that must not be overlooked. In fact, you might argue that when we talk about courtesy education, what we're really referring to is moral education, and that would take us straight into ecclesiastical territory. However, I see courtesy as skirting the fringes of morality. The question of morality is never far away, but maybe if we're careful, we can avoid the quagmire that surrounds it. I mean, let's face it, when it comes to morality, everyone is an expert. I don't mean to denigrate those folks for whom morality is a serious subject, but the fact is, everywhere you turn someone is holding forth on a moral issue. On the radio, on television, in the newspapers, from pulpit to street corner, from judges to prelates to your uncle Fred, everyone is sitting in judgment of everyone else. Move through the check-out line in a supermarket and there's Oklahoma bomber Timothy McVeigh on the cover of *Time* magazine. The caption asks, "Should he die?" Play a video game at a local sub shop and up pops a message from the director of the FBI, "Winners don't use drugs." A newspaper columnist writes the line, "This is plain old biblical good-and-evil stuff." The quote appears not in the editorial section, but on the sports page, of all places. The countless moral pronouncements that come to our attention each day are a continuation of the ages old debate about what is right and what is wrong. If it were only a debate, there wouldn't be cause for concern, but there are major differences in the views that people express. The differences can be so great, and the proponents so antagonistic, that violence and even war can erupt. The conflict will go on forever unless people recognize that the way to get beyond it is to change the way we look at such questions. If we shift the focus away from what is moral, and towards what is courteous, we can rise ever so slightly above the fray; just enough to offer a glimpse of the direction we must ultimately take in order to solve the problems that are facing us.

Let me review the main points of the discussion thus far. We began by postulating that the essence of community is collective awareness. I suggested that awareness is directly related to the quality of life in a community, and then defined what quality of life means. We saw that by positioning ourselves in the garden zone, we can get a better handle on environmental factors, both internal and external, which affect the quality of life. I then suggested that when we

adopt a true preventive approach, our view of the quality of life is reversed, and courtesy takes precedence over quietness (i.e., respect for the garden zone) and safety. By arguing that refined awareness leads to clearer thinking, greater courtesy, and more responsible action, we concluded that awareness should receive an even higher priority than courtesy in the quality of life scheme. Next we saw that a preventive approach must involve education, but that it's a different type of education than we are used to. Courtesy education, and awareness education are not the same as book learning. Nor are they the same as moral education. We saw that refining your awareness amounts to bringing it back home, where home means first yourself, and second your immediate surroundings, your grass roots. Finally I declared that my own idea for handling awareness in the community was to approach it by way of courtesy.

As it stands now, none of the institutions we mentioned – school, church, family or the law – is educating folks about courtesy in a way that is effective. Courtesy is taking a beating, and you need look no further than Camp Springs to see what I'm talking about.

#### Main Discussion Points

- Quality of life is related to the development of community awareness.
- By taking a stand in the garden zone you can effectively grab a community's attention and influence the quality of life from an environmental perspective.
- The preventive approach inverts our priorities with regard to crime. Courtesy takes precedence over all else.
- Refined awareness leads to greater courtesy, thus awareness deserves a higher priority than courtesy.
- A different sort of education is required in order to teach courtesy.
- Although morality may come out of courtesy, courtesy goes beyond moral questions.
- Refining awareness requires that you bring your attention back to the grass roots, starting with yourself, and your immediate surroundings.

Figure 1.1 Points of discussion