

Managing the Spiritual Neighborhood

How to Restore the Conscience of America's Communities

A Grass Roots Approach



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Chapter 5

Holes in the Spiritual Neighborhood

This may sound like another contradiction, but from my vantage point here in the affluent suburbs of Washington D.C. life is pretty good. People are working. People own their own homes – big homes at that. Our bellies are full. Our kids get twelve years of free education. Look at the rest of the world. There are countries in Africa that are in perpetual civil war. In parts of Asia families exist on the equivalent of a dollar a day. In Latin America they live on less than that.

Hey ... we live like kings here. So we have a little crime. What's the big deal? Where would you rather live? Russia? China? Why are we so well-off and those other countries so poor? We must be doing something right.

Think about it. We've got it good. You don't want to mess around with this. It's the American way man! Besides, I work hard for my money. I deserve what I've got. Look, I vote every four years, I obey the law. What more do you want? If I want to come home at night, grab a cold one and veg-out in front of the tube, that's my privilege. It's what freedom is all about.

Tough position to argue against, isn't it? And why should we even try to argue against it? We do have it good. In some respects Americans have it better than anyone has ever had it. Technology has made life very comfortable. Very comfortable indeed. At least for most of us. But not exactly for everyone. And that's where the problem lies. Those of us who are comfortable are a little bit too comfortable. We aren't able to see things from the perspective of the have-nots. Even people who come from poor backgrounds seem to forget very quickly what it was like to be just scraping by. We have set things up such that you might have to fight your way to the top, but once you make it, you never have to look back again. But not everyone is able to win at this game. For that matter not everyone is disposed to playing the game this way. That's why the gap between the rich and poor keeps getting wider. I don't mean to disparage the folks who shout about the success of modern capitalism, and I'd be lying if I said that I have not personally benefited from having been born in an industrialized nation, but however much we are doing right in this country, it simply isn't enough if there are still people who are hungry. What is disturbing is that people seem to think that poverty is normal; that there will always be a certain percentage of the population living on the edge. But there is nothing normal about suffering. I don't want to suffer. Do you? Does anyone? We are settling for far less than we should in this regard, and I submit that the reason for it is that collectively we don't have a heart. Just as we saw the lack of compassion in Camp Springs, it is

apparent that the rest of the country is also deficient in this critical commodity. Again I fall back on the one-person argument to buttress my claim. If just one person is hungry, or just one person is without a home, then something is wrong – not wrong with that person, but wrong with us. Imagine if you will, not just one hungry person, but thousands, millions. Imagine twenty-four thousand people literally dying from hunger. That's the number given by The Hunger Project for deaths due to malnutrition *daily*, worldwide. The mind can hardly grasp it. Twenty-four thousand. What does it mean? It could be seventeen. It could be sixty-three. It could be a billion. For most of us it's just a number and nothing more. We are numb to misery of such magnitude.

Economists get nervous when you raise arguments like this. They don't want to hear anything that sounds even remotely critical of the free market system. But my criticism is not of the system, it is of the people who are participating in it. When there is such overwhelming evidence of heartlessness, how can you not be critical? Once again we come back to growth of character. Whatever compassion there is in people's hearts, it is not surfacing; not to the extent that it should. Forget the twenty-four thousand number. It's irrelevant. The only number that matters is one. If you can't help one person, then you can't help anyone. This argument is based not in abstraction, but in reality. I personally experienced the reality of seeking, and failing, to get help for one person who was living on the edge right under our feet in Camp Springs. You don't address a problem like this by tinkering with the system. You must "tinker" with individuals. And you start with the people who live in your own backyard. In order to fix the problems of the world, you must bring the problems home; bring them back to your neighborhood. You must expose the link that connects the people of your community to the other inhabitants of planet earth. That link is a deep one. It is far more substantial than the headlines in a newspaper, or the TV pictures sent from an overseas correspondent. There is a profound connection between you, me and the rest of the world. When that connection is not realized, we all pay the price. But you don't have to bring your community down to uncover the connection. You don't have to lower your own comfort level. In fact, if the approach is right, we should all become *more* comfortable. The problem is that we are not setting our sights high enough.

Here's an example. At the beginning of 1996 the Prince George's Police Department resolved to reduce violent crime by two percent. They were so pleased when they met that goal that the following year they increased it to four percent. A modest increase, but within the range of possibility. But the possibilities seen from a reactive perspective are much more limited than those of the preventive side. The homicide rate in Prince George's is about 100 per year. Robberies number about 2000 per year. Aggravated assaults about 3000. Residential burglaries are over 5000. Car thefts 10,000. This for a population of about 800,000.

Sure, a four percent reduction is nice to see, but is there anyone who is seeking to reduce these numbers to zero? Permanently? Is there anyone who dares to even think in those terms? That's what true prevention means. With the preventive mind-set you can't allow even one person to be mugged, or carjacked, or murdered, because the loss of one life and the loss of a thousand lives are equally tragic.

Setting a proper goal requires three things. First, you have to know where you are starting from. Second, you must have a clear sense of what direction to take. And finally, you have to select the right vehicle for moving along the path. In a way it doesn't matter what the actual goal is, so long as you have selected the correct path, the right vehicle, and know where you are to begin with. It's almost as if all worthy paths lead to the same place. We are of course speaking of a metaphysical path here. That's where people get confused. Their awareness is restricted to material matters and material goals, and they are unable to see this other side, this other road. Anyway, for me the starting point is the neighborhood where I live. From a material standpoint you could hardly find a better place to begin. On the global scale Westchester and the rest of Camp Springs are clearly way up near the top. The wealth of the residents, the size of the homes, the proximity to Washington, even the climate – all of these aspects of life easily measure up to anybody's standards. Not that things are perfect. The state of the environment could be better for example, and you could also raise questions about the solidness of the foundation on which our material comfort is based. But for the moment things are as good as they need to be, materially speaking. Where the problems exist are on the non-material, internal side of life. That's where the greatest room for improvement lies. Given our crime statistics and the extent of the attention deficit in this community, it's evident that our internal starting point is quite poor. Not that it's so poor compared to other communities, but poor compared to what it really ought to be.

I hope it's not too confusing to talk about an internal starting point when you speak of a neighborhood. What I mean is that the neighborhood is made up of people, and that the lives of each of those people has an inner and an outer aspect. You can think of the internal side of the neighborhood as the collection of inner aspects of each of the individual residents. I would like to refer to this collection as the "spiritual neighborhood". (This of course constitutes a further dilution in our definition of the word "spiritual", but the phrase sounds good, so we'll go with it.)

I have identified a number of rather large holes in the spiritual fabric of Westchester, some of which we've already discussed. In order to give you an idea of the direction I propose to take, I have listed these holes below, and in the following sections I'd like to offer some specific suggestions for how one might go about repairing them.

Repairing Spiritual Holes

1. Establish an intelligent presence in the garden zone.
2. Fill the leadership gap between government and neighborhood.
3. Promote willing cooperation and voluntary contribution.
4. Develop a truly preventive approach to crime.
5. Point to refinement of awareness as the key to improving the quality of life.
6. Develop the Natural Community in the place where people live.
7. Establish simple trust among neighbors. Eliminate anonymity.
8. Provide a structure through which people can demonstrate grass roots responsibility.
9. Use courtesy as an on-ramp to the path of spiritual growth.
10. Elevate the status of community service. Create a new profession.

5.1 Establish An Intelligent Presence In The Garden Zone

Recall that we defined the garden zone as the transition area between the remote, uninhabited expanses of the environment and the interior regions of one's personal living space. People pass through it, work in it, play in it ... cops, kids, commuters. But in a suburban community like Camp Springs there is no one who positions himself in the garden zone for the specific purpose of addressing the quality of life; no one at least who adopts a true preventive posture. As we saw earlier, the preventive mind-set brings about a shift of priorities, away from the gross issues of safety, and towards the more subtle qualities that come from having respect for people and for the environment. Certainly there are organizations that concern themselves with local environmental issues, but those folks are not visible at all in a community like mine. In fourteen years of living in Westchester I have never once heard of a naturalist coming here to visit us as a neighborhood; as a collection of homes sitting on the shelf of a minor flood basin. To the best of my knowledge, never has anyone passed through, even just to point out to the local kids that the strange cries emanating from the park come from the resident owls, or that the beaver pond on Tinker's Creek filters water that reaches the Atlantic. The curbs over the storm drains in this neighborhood are painted with the message "Chesapeake Bay Drainage", but I wonder how many people understand the significance of that message. There's a world of difference between reading a slogan on a curb and hearing a human speak to you in the flesh. The teenagers in this neighborhood see the park as a place to smoke

dope, shoot guns and set fires, and there is no one here to tell them otherwise. There is no one in the garden zone whose job it is to educate us about these matters.

Actually this isn't entirely true. There are some local people who occasionally speak up for the environment. Up the street at Bells Church (United Methodist; Reverend Franklin L. Ways, Pastor), I've listened to sermons that explained how we are "citizens of the earth", and there is a Methodist affirmation of faith that asks us to confess the sins that we make "through the abuse of technology which endangers the earth and all life upon it." Other churches have echoed a similar sentiment. The school system also provides a certain amount of environmental instruction. I myself helped out with an after school program called "Hands on Science", where fifth and sixth graders participated in such exercises as searching for signs of life along the edge of the playground. The kids had to guess whether or not the critters they found would still be there if the field were turned into a shopping plaza. Both of these voices, that of a local pastor and that of a community volunteer, are more effective at conveying a message than a painted sign, but there is still a goodly distance between where these folks stand (i.e., the pulpit and the school house) and where the activities of a neighborhood occur. I submit that the closer you are to the place where people live, the more penetrating the message will be. But you can't just waltz in, give a lecture and then disappear. Nor does it work when you require folks to travel elsewhere for this sort of instruction. Reaching people at the mall, at the nature center, or at the church is nice, but it's not the same as when a member of your family – or your "village", if such a thing existed – is reaching out to those who are right around him. In these parts even the local school is not exactly local, not when your kid has to ride a bus to get there.

What we need is for folks who live right here in the neighborhood to assume an educational role; to connect our environment to the affairs of the community, not just with words, but with meaningful activity. We need folks who can make it real. And guess what? There are indeed people who fit this description; people who have taken a highly visible stand in the suburban garden zone, and who deliver an educational message to their neighbors. They're called gardeners. They are the folks with the funny hats who are planting trees, watering flowers and growing vegetables. Their daily lesson is right out in front of their homes, in glorious living color: tulips and tomatoes, pansies and petunias. Gardeners understand the importance of the sun and the rain. They know what good soil is. They're in touch with the cycle of the seasons and experience first-hand the relationship among plants, animals, man and the earth. They may not know it, but gardeners who quietly tend their plots are serving as teachers, and they're doing it in a way that cannot be duplicated by a visiting naturalist. They are showing their neighbors that we humans were not meant to spend every minute of our

lives shut away in a cement box. They are teaching us that there is an earth under our feet and a sky above our heads, and furthermore that earth and sky are part of us. Sun, moon and stars ... wind and rain ... insects and trees ... they are components of life. They are like the limbs of our bodies, but people have forgotten that these limbs exist. Imagine if you went through life using just one arm, not knowing that the other one was there. That's what it's like to not feel the presence of the earth. And I'm afraid that despite all the environmental preaching we hear these days, most people are still not getting it. They are still not able to understand man's connection to nature. Not in this country they're not. In America we build giant theme parks with mechanical elephants. We create plastic rain forests deep inside shopping malls. That's what nature has become for us. Plastic.

There aren't that many true gardeners in Westchester. There are plenty of folks who can mow the grass, or pay a lawn company to do it, but few people who actually go out and dig dirt. Even more rare is the gardener who extends his focus beyond the fence that encloses his property; who is interested not only in the upkeep of his own garden, but in the entire neighborhood, including the green areas that surround it. Yet doesn't it seem natural that we should make this extension? That the sphere of a gardener's concern should not be limited by arbitrary lines on a surveyor's map? Gardeners don't feed the community anymore, not in modern suburbia, so their interest in the neighborhood is primarily an aesthetic one. When you talk about aesthetics, you're talking about beauty. The assessment of beauty requires that you approach the place where the outer world joins the inner world. There is after all both an objective and a subjective aspect to beauty. There is both the material object of beauty, and how one senses and reacts to that object. We are trained from a young age to assess beauty in specific ways: beautiful cars, beautiful music, beautiful cities. But couldn't a radish be beautiful? Couldn't a worm be beautiful? They could be if we were taught to see them that way. Moreover, there is a type of beauty that doesn't require training to recognize, so much as it requires that we clean the foggy window that clouds our vision. It's the beauty in nature. By calling our attention to this natural beauty, gardeners are drawing us towards the finer aspects of life. This is what it means to have an intelligent presence in the garden zone, someone who can point the way towards those softer regions.

Aesthetics involve more than just the placement of an ornamental plant. It includes things that are far more basic. What about just keeping the neighborhood clean? Isn't that an aesthetic concern? Beer bottles and cigarette butts tossed carelessly from a car window. Houses overgrown by thirty-year-old foundation shrubs. Junk vehicles parked on front lawns. I submit that such mundane matters as these belong to the domain of the gardener, if only because he spends so much of his time outside in the places where this stuff occurs. To

address these concerns requires that a gardener handle people, for it is people, not plants, that smoke cigarettes, drink beer and drive cars. Handling people translates to management. Thus gardeners should really be thought of as managers, and the domain that they manage is the garden zone.

5.2 Fill The Leadership Gap Between Government And Neighborhood

Say we agree that there is a need to extend the purview of the gardener to include the entire neighborhood. Say that matters having to do with trees, shrubs, property upkeep, and the state of the earth in the immediate area of Westchester should indeed be coordinated on a neighborhood-wide basis and that individual property owners should be expected to cooperate to some minimum degree. What's the best way to go about accomplishing this coordination?

We could of course rely on the law to enforce it. There must certainly be code written somewhere that applies to cases where people let their shrubs get overgrown, don't cut their grass, dump trash and so forth. I confess that I don't know much about such laws, but I imagine it wouldn't be too difficult to get familiar with them. Perhaps a few of our local gardeners could read up on this stuff and serve as informal legal advisors. In cases where no statutes have been violated, such as the situation with my neighbor's pear tree, I suppose we could hire a lawyer and take people to court; try to make folks cooperate by that means. The same approach could be used for environmental problems that are not specifically related to plants and trees. Blaring boom-boxes, properties that are deteriorating, people driving too fast, teenagers committing vandalism – all the things that show disrespect for the garden zone. The way we normally deal with these matters is to first call the police. If that doesn't work, we might search for a government official who cares about the problem, and who could issue some sort of citation. Finally, if all else fails, we start a civil action against the guy.

Another approach would be to establish covenants that cover these areas, and require homeowners to sign on to them when they buy their homes. I believe that covenants are normally drawn up when a development is first built. I'm guessing about this, but it seems that a homeowner's association of some sort is created by the developer, and that obligations are somehow linked to the title of each home such that by simply taking title to a property, the buyer agrees to comply with the regulations. In the case of an existing subdivision like Westchester, there might be a way to incorporate these obligations into the titles that people already hold, assuming of course that everyone agrees to them. But once again, you must ultimately fall back on the power of the courts to achieve com-

pliance. There is always the threat of a law suit hanging over the property owner's head.

But what's wrong with that? Isn't it the law that enables the orderly functioning of society; that keeps us from sinking into chaos? And no one is above the law, correct? That's what I keep hearing, that only scoundrels and social misfits consider themselves "above the rule of law". Politicians and legal authorities of every stripe lecture us with this phrase. But I've got news for them. There are far more powerful forces than the law that direct the behavior of men. That's why folks have such disdain for the legal system. It's the shallowness of it. People who rely on adherence to the law in order to make their way through life are seemingly incapable of thinking for themselves. They understand how to obey, but when it comes to acting responsibly on their own, they are lost.

In any case, there is one other option available to the "Garden Zone Manager" (i.e., gardener) for handling the environmental problems I've described. It is not a law-based measure at all, yet the power of this device is such that we could completely reshape our society if enough of us employed it. No exaggeration. Here's how it works.

Say person X is disrespecting the garden zone in some fashion, and say person Y is a gardener/manager who is allowing his attention to extend to the entire neighborhood. Person Y approaches person X and ... get this ... *asks* person X to desist from what he's doing. That's right. He *speaks* to person X and, on behalf of the neighborhood, *requests* that person X turn his music off, quit dumping trash, slow down, whatever.

What ... !?

The hell you say ... !?

Are you really suggesting that a neighbor is going to *ask* something of another neighbor? When did neighbors ever talk to one other, let alone make requests? Aren't people going to feel funny about this? About *speaking* to each other?

It is an odd notion, isn't it? In this age, in this society, it's pretty obvious that people do feel awkward about talking to one another, especially in the anonymous setting of the American suburb. You can sense how awkward it is. Walk around the block. Observe how people shut themselves inside their homes, behind locked doors, communicating with no one. Fear of crime is part of it, but there is also the fear of personal exposure that we discussed before; of letting others get a good look at who you really are. It's hard to believe that we have achieved such an extreme state of isolation without anyone recognizing how unnatural it is. Yet it is possible to penetrate this isolation. To do so you have to be a little bit aggressive. Aggressively friendly you might say. With a little work you can get folks to recognize you, wave hello, and maybe even say something.

The conversation will probably involve something innocuous like the weather, but it's better than nothing at all.

The greatest awkwardness comes when you bring up a topic of actual relevance; say, an issue that touches upon community etiquette. That's where the communication gap is the widest, and that's the gap that the government cannot fill. The government cannot impose openness and cooperation on a community. It can order an individual to do something, but when a member of the community steps out of line, the first thing you should do is talk to that person. There needs to be a respected neighbor who can approach the guy and say a few words to him. You are not giving an order. You are not carrying a gun or waving a subpoena. What you're trying to do is to elevate the problem; to take it out of the realm of confrontation and forceful compliance, and turn it into a sincere exchange between people with common interests. And it doesn't really matter what the nature of the offense is. For that matter, the word "offense" is not even appropriate. Call it an error, or a miscue perhaps. Pretend that you're a teacher, and one of your students slips up somehow. Say the student gives the wrong answer on a quiz. You're not going to charge the kid with an "offense". You're going to correct him, and you're going to try to do it in such a way that your instruction registers. Same thing with mistakes that neighbors make. Every incident is treated the same; from jaywalking to homicide; from seemingly trivial things like, say, ignoring the stop signs in the neighborhood, to something as serious as a teenager shooting a gun, such as was the case with the infamous Gary (see Section 3.1). Even that problem should have been handled in this fashion, at least initially.

Realize that we are not disrespecting the law with this scheme. On the contrary, we would seek compliance with the law, not because people might go to jail, but because respecting the law is the courteous thing to do. There's a world of difference between these notions. In fact, it may indeed be desirable to have a person in the neighborhood who is familiar with the written law. Not necessarily a lawyer, but someone who knows a little about regulations that govern the sorts of things that go on in a residential subdivision, and who is familiar with the proper way to interface with the legal system. As coordinator of the Watch, I am often asked questions like: "Can I park a car without tags in my driveway?" or, "Who should I call about the abandoned property across the street?" or, "Does my dog need to be kept in a kennel?" If the lawmakers considered such questions important enough to include them in the code, we should at least be aware of the law's prescription, regardless of how we feel about complying with it.

You might well ask why a resident wouldn't call a local official for help with such matters, or contact his representative on the town council, or county council in my case. Isn't that what we pay those guys for?

First of all, the councilman for a large jurisdiction might represent thousands of people. My own council district in Prince George's County has a population of something like 85,000. Roughly 16,000 of those live in Camp Springs, and there are well over 1000 residents in Westchester alone. There is but one person who represents these people at council. That one person sits at the lowest rung of the governmental ladder for us. All 85,000 of us. His number would be the first one you dialed if you had a serious need to get something done. You can't possibly expect one person to handle a population of 85,000, no matter how energetic he or she was, and no matter what kind of staff he or she had, not if there were to be even a token amount of personal service. I am not aware of a single occasion when a councilperson actually visited this neighborhood during the years that I have been here. Not that I would expect such a visit. When there are dozens of other neighborhoods competing for the guy's attention, Westchester is not going to stand out unless he happens to live right here. (Note that there have indeed been past members of the county council who owned homes in Westchester. All of them have moved away.) Without the presence of a living, breathing person, it sure does feel like there is no government here. No government, no leadership, no real authority, and no one who sees things from our perspective; who understands the gravity of the situations we have to face.

An incident like a stolen car, for example, is devastating to a resident like me. Not long ago the neighbor across the street had his 1984 Chevy taken from right in front of the house, directly across from my driveway. When I learned about it my heart sank. You can imagine how badly my neighbor felt. You come home at 8:00 p.m.; three hours later you're getting ready for bed, and you look outside and discover that the car is gone. It's a sickening feeling to suddenly realize how vulnerable you are and how brazen the thieves must be to steal a car from under your nose, in the very place where you make your home. The theft of a car is no small matter. It could bring about considerable hardship for many people. But for the councilmen, for the bureaucrats, even for the police, such an event hardly registers. It's just one more item in the end-of-year crime tally. Maybe it's just me. Maybe I'm the only one who feels the urgency of these matters. I certainly felt it when sixteen-year-old Gary shot the tires out of the car on Berkshire Drive. From that one incident alone it was obvious that the young man required immediate attention. He should not have been allowed to roam free for one more minute. If there had been any true grass roots leadership, any clear thinking community elders, they would have pulled in the reins on that boy right away. And I'm not necessarily saying that he be locked up, but that there had to be some way to keep that kid under control. Law or no law. Witnesses and rules of evidence be damned. Everyone knew that Gary was trouble. Everyone knew he fired his gun, and that it wasn't the first time. Everyone knew that he and his pals were stealing cars. Hell, if I had the slightest amount of sup-

port for it, I myself would have extracted him from his environment. Pulled him out of school and put him to work. Or perhaps just the opposite. Perhaps see to it that he never left school; that school for him was a 24-hour-a-day proposition. So long as he was no longer wandering our streets, because he was clearly incapable of handling that freedom. But there was no support for this. No backing. None of the supposed authorities in our supposed community (a) had any sense at all of how serious the situation was, if in fact they even knew about it and (b) had a legal right to approach the boy as a true community leader would have approached him. And the approach I'm talking about is not one of punishment, but of correction, of training, as you would train an unbroken horse. That's what Gary needed.

The other reason why it's better to turn first to a neighbor when there is a problem to solve has to do with self-sufficiency. People who live in isolation tend to think of the government the same way they think of a plumber. We're not accustomed to seeking help from those right around us. We instead call in an outside expert when something needs to be fixed. Whether it's a clogged sink or a suspicious car, you handle it the same: make a service call. The operation is completely impersonal. You don't care who the guy is, where he comes from, or what he has to do. Repairman or policeman, just get him down here and get this pipe cleared. Moreover, there is a lot of technological magic in our lives. Our appliances are magically powered from a wall outlet. We watch TV pictures that travel magically through the air to reach us. The doctor gives us a magic pill to make us well. Where does the water come from? Who put the telephone poles there? How did this can of tuna wind up at the supermarket? Someone has taken care of it, but very few people know who, or how, or what's really involved. It's handled somewhere else. It could all be directed from an underground blockhouse in Idaho. There could very well be Martians at the controls. Who knows? The complexity of modern life is such that it takes a genius to understand anything, and an army of engineers and scientists to make it all work. The average person has been rendered powerless. He has no meaningful part to play in a world that operates by mechanisms that are far removed from the universe where his daily life is conducted.

Not only is the technical side of life maintained by forces beyond our grasp, but we must rely on outsiders to handle the human problems as well. And when I say outsiders, I'm not just talking about out-of-state or out-of-town folks, but the people in our local bureaucracy. For they too are strangers to most of us. Even in the democratic system that we hold in such high regard, and which is supposedly designed to provide each individual with a say in how he is governed, even here the vast majority of us live lives that are quite remote from the sphere in which society's leaders do business. What we need is more involvement by local residents in maintaining the health of the community. It is through

involvement and participation – through activity, in other words – that a meaningful connection can be established between individual life and collective life. In the same way that gardening makes the environment real, we need to introduce activities that add reality to the other aspects of life at the grass roots. We may not be able to repair a television set, but we can at least get involved in keeping kids out of trouble, or in supporting the elderly, or housing the homeless. For that matter, even the telephone poles, the water supply, and the can of tuna could be made real if we found the right structure for it. And I must tell you that the structure we're looking for is spiritual in nature. However, once again I'm gritting my teeth be using the word spiritual in a way that does not strictly conform to our own definition.

5.3 Promote Willing Cooperation And Voluntary Contribution

So this is what I'm proposing: that we commission gardeners (or people who are garden literate) to serve as local managers in the neighborhood garden zone. They must be folks who (a) live in the neighborhood, (b) see the neighborhood as one domain, and (c) are able to approach a resident and offer a few friendly words of advice about matters that affect the quality of life. There is no force involved in this scheme. You are requesting and advising, not giving orders.

Clearly we can't expect that every problem will be solved by merely talking to a person. Not at first anyway. There are going to be people who either can't or won't take a hint, in which case legal measures may still be required. On the other hand, what we're aiming for is a community that automatically conducts itself correctly (and I acknowledge the vagueness of this term). We would like to progress to the point where ultimately we don't have to resort to the law at all to maintain harmony in the community. And the only way to get there is by sticking with the non-coercive method.

But is this realistic? How many people are really going to cooperate when approached like this? Look at the meager response that the Watch received. Barely twenty percent of the neighborhood showed even a minimal interest in it. Why should people give you the time of day, let alone respond to suggestions about their personal habits? Aren't they going to question your authority? Furthermore, isn't it a little risky to be offering advice to someone you don't know? There are folks out there who have very short fuses. What if they get angry, or violent? Isn't this a job the police should handle? At least they carry guns, in case something goes wrong.

The answer is that we have no choice. Someone has to do this. Someone has to stand up for a non-forceful, non-violent solution to these problems. How

many great men have preached, and continue to preach, on this point, reminding us again and again about the importance of non-violence? It is not a new notion, but judging by the way things have gone you can't help but wonder if anyone is listening. Even people you would describe as good citizens – decent, honest, church-going folks – even they scoff when you talk about using an approach that depends on voluntary cooperation. They call it a fantasy. Yet we must persist, for this represents the only path that is truly evolutionary. And it can work. You might call a twenty percent response a failure, but when you see the faces behind that twenty percent, when you get to know them personally, when you actually speak to these folks, you realize that they represent the best that this community has to offer. They are the people who do indeed show some measure of advancement in character development. We know this because of their supportive actions. It's clear that these folks recognize that the residents of Westchester do have common interests; that there is common ground for us to stand on, despite the insular lifestyle that modern society has imposed on us.

Are people going to question your authority? Probably. But whatever authority we have comes not from somewhere else, from some invisible agency, but from ourselves, from our collective willingness to collaborate for our own good. For my money such authority as this is superior to any other. Will there be people who get angry? Maybe. But so what? What's to fear? It's not like you're approaching a figure in a dark alley. These people are your neighbors. You live together. If a guy gets angry, fine. Let him get angry. What do you do if a member of your family gets angry? Your brother, say, or your spouse? Walk away. That part is easy.

Could the guy retaliate? Could he come after you with a gun?

You don't even consider those things. That's exactly the kind of thinking that we're trying to get away from, because it arises from ignorance. Anyway, people will gradually figure out that you're not going to arrest them, that you're not going to punish them, that you're not going to bring in a couple of goons to rough them up. Nothing of the kind. They will learn that in this neighborhood we don't stoop to such base tactics. We're better than that. Now realize, it might happen that you give a person a *look* which tells him that you would *like* to rough him up. The expression on your face might indeed send such a message. There's nothing wrong with that at all. To my knowledge a menacing stare hasn't yet drawn blood from anyone. Moreover, there is an infinite repertoire of facial expressions at our disposal, and we can convey a great volume of information with looks and with body language. How many kinds of smiles are there? How many ways to frown? How much can you say with a smirk, with a look of disgust, with a darting glance, or simply by looking away? Isn't this the more civilized way to solve problems? It seems to me that you can read the very thoughts of another person through his gestures, his body language, his expressions ...

and this is before you even consider the subtleties of verbal communication. What's incredible is that the lower life forms seem to be more skilled at this than we humans are. Animals have developed the art of the correct posture: submissive, aggressive, imposing, inviting. They know how to use the bluff, the feint, and the sham display – techniques that permit individuals to coexist and which create order within a group without the need for bloodshed. Most humans on the other hand, seem to have learned but one posture: the turning of one's back on the other party. Don't look at him, don't speak to him, don't even acknowledge his presence. When such a posture is taken, it eliminates any possibility of civilized interaction. This is what we're fighting against. This cold, aloof, unresponsiveness.

As for letting the police do the work, nothing would be accomplished by it. The police are by definition coercive. That's why they call it law *en-force*-ment. There is lethal weaponry within their reach at every moment. They represent power, where power is determined by the capacity to physically impose your will on others. I'm not necessarily taking a stand against guns here. I only want to point out that the police, and the system that they represent, do indeed hold a place on the violent side of the equation. It's obvious, isn't it? Clearly this is how most of the world is run today. Yet doesn't it seem like we don't want to face up to this fact? That people are reluctant to admit that regardless of your political bias, or your moral views; whether you're defending the environment, protecting the unborn, fighting for freedom, or serving the will of God somehow; that however righteous you believe your cause to be, if other people must be hurt in order for you to pursue that cause, then your course runs contrary to the principle of non-violence. How can we teach a kid principles that we ourselves don't subscribe to? How can you expect a kid to get rid of his gun if you yourself still carry one? Moreover, the job of the Garden Zone Manager is to promote courtesy. You want him to exemplify grace and dignity. The behavior of a cop on the other hand is just the opposite. His mode of functioning is fundamentally undignified and discourteous. Let me explain why.

A cop is trained to react immediately when he perceives a threat; to shoot first and ask questions later. Just the other day I read how an unarmed man sitting in a pickup truck was shot by a Prince George's police officer. It seems the man reached towards his back pocket for his wallet, and when the officer saw the sudden movement, he shot the guy dead. We can debate about whether this action was justified; the point I want to make is that cops operate on a hair trigger. You must be careful about how you *move* when a cop is nearby. But remember, physical movement is what defines courtesy, and clearly the grossest movement you can make is one that injures another person. By maintaining a stance that threatens such movement, by his constant readiness to inflict swift retaliation, by not letting his guard down for even a moment, a police officer shows you the

coarsest side of his character. And by assuming that you are capable of attacking him, he positions you in the worst possible light. But isn't this an essentially insulting attitude? To have someone assume that you are a deadly menace? It is intended to keep people from getting too close, and that's exactly what it does. When you sense such an attitude, you recoil from it. But we don't want people to be recoiling from each other, we want them to come together. We need to be able put an arm around a kid's shoulder; to give a guy a friendly slap on the back. We need to be physically friendly to one another. None of this is possible with a person who could easily pull a gun if you scratched your nose the wrong way.

Having said this, I feel compelled to add that there are some decent cops out there; there are a few who do show signs of intelligence. The problem is that a cop's job requires that he act like a thug. People don't seem to realize that there is nothing civilized about apprehending miscreants. Policing is an ugly job. Any job that involves killing can only be ugly and brutish. We have no business glorifying it the way we do. We should not be celebrating, but weeping, when a bad guy is taken down. Moreover, the justice system doesn't make a cop's job any easier. We ask the police to get the criminals off the streets and into court, and then the courts turn around and attack the police for the way they go about doing it. It makes no sense. That's why we need to find a different approach; something that offers a clear alternative to force and violence.

5.4 Develop A Truly Preventive Approach To Crime

I've been saying all along that we want to sidestep moral questions in this discussion, but despite my protests it may appear that we have presented an ethical argument with this line of reasoning; that our logic amounts to nothing more than a declaration that violence is immoral. However there is something else, something beyond morality, about the forceful approach to crime that makes it unsuitable for the program we've proposed. The real reason for avoiding violence comes not from the fact that you cause others harm, rather violence is undesirable mainly because of what it does to *you*. The mere thought of violent action can cause a great deal of distress. When I consider for example how there are people sneaking around after dark; prowling the streets while we are all in bed; swine who are stealing our cars and breaking into our homes; how they are degrading the community, killing us with their thievery. If you allow yourself to dwell on how despicable this stuff is, if you give full vent to your feelings, you find yourself having serious thoughts of murder and mayhem. To hell with treatment. To hell with jail. To hell with courts and lawyers. You want to find a rifle, hunt them down, and blast the vile sons-of-bitches!

Whew! See what I mean? Count to ten and take a deep breath!

It's stressful just writing about this stuff. Imagine having to face these circumstances for real. Rage hurts. It physically hurts. You get ulcers from it. Indigestion. High blood pressure. That's what makes it so difficult to solve these problems. The longer and harder you focus on them, the more stress you incur. And I have indeed noticed that folks aren't always eager to hear about this kind of thing. Even the good folks in the neighborhood, the ones who are concerned, and who want to be informed, even they are much more subdued when you talk to them about crime. They furrow their brows, listen quietly, and thank you for the information, but it's clear that they're not happy to hear it. To fully consider the possibilities of dealing with a criminal act requires that you venture deep into desperate regions. The more serious the crime, the darker and more desperate it gets, until you ultimately want to kill someone, as revolting as that sounds. So it's easy to understand why people would prefer to hear positive things; good news rather than bad. They need things that lift them up rather than drag them down, and that's where the preventive mind-set comes in.

Prevention means turning your perspective around. In the context of responding to crime, it means that we ignore the negative, and instead locate the positive; avert our gaze from the ugliness, and work at growing the beautiful. Rather than fighting with the most difficult aspects of crime – the career criminals, the violent offenders, the open-air drug markets in the worst parts of the city – you want to retreat, find a relatively quiet place to set up camp, and see if you can't maintain the peace in your immediate vicinity. This too is not a new notion, this idea of seeking out the positive. What lies at the root of it is the integration of one's SUB-jective perception with one's OB-jective perception. It means that you color what you see according to how you would like to see it. Although it's fairly easy to intellectualize the process, practicing it is quite another matter. Most of us are not accustomed to this mode of thinking. On the contrary, we are trained not to do this. We are taught that objectivity is paramount in every discipline. But when you don't permit the subjective – or should I say, the subject – to participate in your outlook, when your analysis is exclusively objective, you miss the big picture. Seeing the big picture means more than finding some obscure link in an abstract puzzle. It means that the reality you experience is affected. An expansion takes place. Limits are removed. Since there is no reality other than that which we experience, it's easy to see the potential of this subjective perception thing. It gives each of us the ability to alter our circumstances, our condition, our very reality. In other words, it has the power to change the world. Literally.

When it comes to solving the problem of crime, you'll go nuts if you don't allow subjective knowledge to come into play. However, I must admit that I have trouble following my own advice on this matter. I personally find myself struggling to see the positive in life. I know full well that when I gaze too long at

grossly negative images, it causes a strong reaction in me, even when those images are only in my head. To tell the truth, it's worse when the images are in my head, rather than right in front of me. Yet I insist on looking at them. I'm not sure why this is exactly, except that it has something to do with my internal makeup. Moreover, it's easy to tell others to focus on the positive, when you yourself are not in the same position. Our political leaders are often guilty of this – of standing atop the walls of the fortress, high above, shouting encouragement to the foot soldiers below who are fending off the bandits: "Hang in there fellas. Be positive. Don't give up hope. We're pulling for you."

Yeah, right.

Whoops. There I go again with the negativity. See how easy it is to slip into it? Yet this was a relatively minor slip, a mental misstep. In real life we are doused with negativity at every turn. Even the way we govern ourselves is negative. Conflict is the defining characteristic of our political system, and we must go to extraordinary lengths to overcome it. Given the amount of discord there is in politics, it's a wonder that we ever make decisions at all. Yet no one seems willing to address the question of why there is conflict to begin with. And what do we do about the folks who deliberately seek out the negative, grab hold of it, and magnify it for all to see: television programs, motion pictures, the recording industry, the news media? Ever watch a science-fiction film, or a shoot-em-up western, or a movie about mobsters? The casual treatment that Hollywood gives to deadly violence is as disturbing as the violence itself. Even films that are supposedly educational insist on drumming the negative into our heads. Take the recent film *Schindler's List* for example, which documented the Nazi Holocaust. It is filled with unspeakable acts of killing and brutality. The camera zooms in on the minute details of perhaps the darkest and most shameful era in the history of man. What does director Spielberg hope to accomplish by showing us these scenes of horror? What are we supposed to come away with? Disgust? Hatred? Look, we already know how to hate. There ain't no problem in that area. What we need is for people to learn how to love, how to care. Watching as innocent people are tortured and murdered isn't going to bring about instant compassion. Studying the moves of Hitler's henchmen isn't going to teach a person how to look out for his neighbor. And neither is wailing, beating your breast, and dwelling forever on an injustice that was committed long ago.

I suppose you could argue that I am guilty of the same offense; that by pointing out the films that point out horror I also magnify the negative, albeit indirectly. In fact, this entire discussion could be seen as a long, unpleasant excursion through some rather nasty terrain. It's a catch-22. On one hand I am declaring that we must avoid negativity, but the very topic we are addressing, crime, is distinctly and essentially negative. Is there any difference between me subjecting you, the reader, to the unpleasantness of crime, and Steven Spielberg

subjecting his audience to a reenactment of Nazi atrocities? How does one discuss negativity without being negative?

I submit that the way out of this conundrum is to broaden the context. Rather than focusing on the problems alone, we must find a way to include them within a discussion of solutions. Movies don't provide solutions. Neither does television, nor the news media. Although lawmakers would like to think that they are finding solutions, it doesn't appear that they are any closer to the goal than they were when the country was founded. Moreover, if you measure the success of our political system by the degree to which we have eliminated negativity, we are probably losing ground rather than gaining it. Actually, the real problem is that we have no goals. As we suggested before, it seems that the goals we are setting hardly qualify as such. They represent a standard that is far, far below the ideal. You can't move towards a goal if you don't have a goal, and you can't produce a solution if you don't know what needs to be solved. What I've tried to do here is to define crime in a way that points to what the solution must be. I acknowledge that we've had to wade through a substantial amount of negativity to get this far. What I'm hoping is that something positive will eventually come out of this. The positivity will not, however spring from the reading, but from the taking of action.

As it stands, I believe we have demonstrated that maintaining a positive outlook is not quite as simple as it sounds. It seems that as your perspective broadens, and the clearer you can see the whole picture, both sides of it, good and bad, the greater is the challenge to let go of the bad. Clearly you won't forget about crime completely – it will always be there, at the periphery of your vision – but you want to adjust your strategy. The preventive approach requires that you position yourself as high up as you can on the quality of life pyramid and point towards the top rather than the bottom. Establish your island of tranquillity, and if you're able to hold the line where you are, then perhaps you can think about expanding. Get a neighbor to join you, and combine your two small islands into a bigger one. Then advance to the next block, the next street, the next neighborhood, and so forth, pulling in folks here and there as you go. Just keep reminding yourself that a few decent people can make a very big difference when it comes to improving the quality of life.

On the other hand, it's important that you don't retreat too far from the problems you're trying to address. You want to stay within striking distance so to speak. I submit that Camp Springs and Westchester are well situated in this regard. It's true that we see a lot of crime here, partly because we're a stone's throw from some of the worst parts of Washington, but if ever there was a neighborhood and a community that was worth saving, this is it. It's just peaceful enough and just quiet enough to allow you to live here and not be uncomfortable. And when I say live here, what I mean is to make this your home.

There's a big difference between these two notions. Living somewhere could mean anything from renting a hotel room to sharing an apartment to taking a berth on a cargo ship. Making a home involves a great deal more. It means committing to a community, or at least it should mean that. It also means becoming part of the community spirit; participating in the enlivenment of collective awareness. Both of these aspects of life – commitment to community, and enlivening awareness – are faring rather poorly in modern America. A responsible, concerned individual could plunk himself down pretty much anywhere and find that he is facing a pretty big task as far as these things go.

What I would like to suggest is that Camp Springs is just good enough for a thoughtful person to seriously consider putting down roots. To think about buying a house, raising a family, and making this his home for life. Indeed, many people are doing that. The black folks who are moving in are clearly looking for a piece of Eden. They're coming out of D.C. most of them, and discovering how wonderful it is out here in the green suburbs. Not only are families with children coming in, but retired folks as well; people who are obviously intending to stay a while. These folks include some of the most enlightened members of the black community. As for the white folks who remain here, they too have shown that they are more enlightened, because it doesn't matter to them what race their neighbors happen to belong to. Unlike the whites who have fled, they have more intelligence than to judge a person by such a superficial quality as race. Thus from the perspective of establishing a coherent community, and a beachhead for preventive action, we in Westchester have an unusually good mix of people. They are folks who have shown that they're willing to make a long term commitment. Indeed, for many of them it's a commitment for life.

Let me emphasize the "for life" part of this formula. In other cultures people develop strong attachments to the place where they grow up. I had a friend from Laos for example, who although he had adapted well to life in the United States – started a business here, gone to school, raised a family, and so forth – said that he would nevertheless like to some day return to the village where he was born. Even if everyone he used to know were gone, he would still feel a sense of home in that village. Such attachment doesn't exist for most Americans, because we don't have real homes in the same way that a Laotian village is a home. Because people move around so much, our society is in a constant state of flux. We usually find ourselves in the position of having to make a home of wherever we happen to land. When it comes to establishing community, we are always playing catch-up.

But is this a fair comparison? Isn't American culture different from Laotian culture?

Yes, but what we call culture in this country is hardly cultural. You can tell it's not true culture by how quickly it changes. In other populations, in other

parts of the world, traditions and lifestyles have been kept alive for millennia. Here in the West on the other hand, we are beset by fads that change seemingly overnight. Ironically, in this respect the modern capitalist lifestyle resembles its antithesis – Marxism, or Maoism – in that it wipes out tradition, does away with long-practiced ways of life, in the interest of ... what? Trends? Fashion? Entertainment and commercialism are what define it. Fun and games ... recreation ... things that distract us from the real world. I suggest that the American culture is more correctly termed an anti-culture. There is no substance to it, no permanence. For that matter, it's hard to find permanence in any of our institutions. People point to the government, the Constitution and the system of laws that grew out of it, as the enduring aspect of what we call American. But these too lack real permanence. You can't call the legal system permanent when it requires continual modification by lawmakers and never ending interpretation by jurists. When will we finally get it right, one wonders?

5.5 Point To Refinement Of Awareness As The Key To Improving The Quality Of life

This, then is where prevention leads us, to considerations that call into question our very culture. With a preventive mind-set we keep coming back to an examination of ourselves; shifting our attention from what the criminal is doing, and turning it towards what we are doing. Once again we raise the issue of where the responsibility for crime really lies; of who is really to blame for the fact that the quality of life is not what it should be. And when we conclude that our culture itself is suspect, it clearly puts the blame right back on us. But let's be positive about this. Instead of dwelling on the shortcomings of culture, let's try to identify what it is that gives culture enduring value. Keeping in mind that it is the nature of the material world to be in continuous, dynamic change, is there anything we can point to that does endure in the absolute sense? Anything that is truly permanent and meaningful?

The answer is that whatever expresses timelessness, that is what endures. I realize that this sounds like sophistry. It sounds that way because the intellect alone does not yield a satisfactory understanding of timelessness. Timelessness is an expression of the infinite. It is not material. To fully appreciate it you must use a different faculty. It's the faculty that develops during the process of spiritual growth that we discussed above; the faculty that permits us to distinguish the inner and the outer realms. It is most readily recognized as a component of the creative process. With this faculty the great artists of history were able to capture timelessness in their masterpieces. What we need are folks who can capture timelessness in a society, a community, and more specifically for our purposes, a

neighborhood. Someone who can create a permanent, living work of art using the neighborhood as his canvas; and for his palette, the customs, habits, environment and the residents themselves.

So who can we call upon to weave this timeless tapestry? Who might these social sculptors be?

They are the very people who will venture bravely forth to talk to their neighbors. The same people on whom we've already conferred the duties of flower grower, neighborhood naturalist, sidewalk professor, back-porch diplomat, living room legal advisor, unofficial government liaison, weaponless cop, homeless advocate, and litter collector: the Garden Zone Managers. To those responsibilities we add another requirement. A Garden Zone Manager must be able to speak of timelessness; if not verbally, then in other, more subtle ways. By gardening, for example. Clearly the activities of gardening and agriculture are the basis of some of the oldest and most enduring cultural practices. But it's not the gardens or the gardening that create the culture, it's the person, the garden-ER. I submit that this is where the true source of cultural timelessness lies; not in works of art, not in monuments, not in government institutions, but in people, in individuals, who through their carriage, speech and behavior give expression to the infinite.

But you can't give expression to the infinite unless you experience it, and although everyone can indeed enjoy this experience, the clarity of it varies. It varies from individual to individual and it varies for one individual depending, among other things, on the extent of his personal growth. How does it take place, this experience of the infinite?

It can be approached in two ways: from an objective angle or a subjective angle. Physicists approach it from the objective side. They don't so much experience infinity, as draw circles around it. They identify reality by matching observable phenomena to mathematical theory; theory that includes concepts from basic calculus such as the "limit of an infinite sequence", and functions which "tend to infinity". Strangely enough, although the notion of infinity is essential to mathematics, the term itself cannot be mathematically defined. There is no number or form that corresponds to infinity. The best we can do is to say that no matter how large a number you choose, infinity is always vastly larger; similarly, no matter how small an interval you take on the number line, there is always another that is infinitesimally smaller. By describing what it's not, mathematics produces an image of infinity, but not a definition of it. In spite of this obvious theoretical flaw, scientists have discovered that real objects do exist that correspond to the infinite; both to the infinitely large, and to the infinitely small. For example, there is evidence that there are "points of singularity", where space is bent so severely that the matter which occupies it is compressed to infinite density. "Black holes" they call them. It's bizarre enough to conceive of physical ob-

jects that bend space, let alone bend it to nothingness, as if space were not nothingness already, but it gets even crazier. It turns out that the very laws of physics break down at these points, rendering science utterly mute about their nature. Just as mathematics is unable to define infinity, physics is unable so speak of that which is beyond observability, even while acknowledging that something does exist there.

This, then is how the objective approach works. We locate the infinite "out there" someplace, in the environment, away from, and independent of, you the observer. We form a sort of plaster-cast, photo-negative image of it through our understanding of what we see in the finite space. The better our grasp of the finite, the better is the photo-negative of the infinite. Scientists are not much concerned about the fact that the "location" of infinity doesn't seem to be within our universe. Nor does it seem to faze them that they must come to terms with an undefinable abstraction as if it were concrete and rational; a non-material entity that manifests materially.¹

In contrast, the subjective approach to the infinite involves a completely different method, and yields a different kind of experience. Rather than observing and measuring things that are external, you turn your attention 180 degrees, towards the one that does the observing. Perhaps this sounds odd, but it's actually a very natural thing. It's a process in which the mind looks inward and examines itself. True, you may need a bit of guidance in figuring out how to recognize this process, but it's a far sight easier than mastering theoretical physics. It's about knowing the knower; knowing thyself; experiencing that "still small voice" inside you.² Actually, the knower, the experiencer, seems beyond voice, before voice ... before thought even. The knower is where thoughts and voice originate.

So what does this have to do with the infinite? How does knowing oneself translate to experiencing infinity?

This is a tough thing to explain. As I see it, the infinite is what joins the material to the non-material. It's the junction where abstract thought meets quantifiable reality.

Where is it then? Where should we look for it?

¹ Actually, modern physics has indeed tackled these questions. Quantum mechanics and relativity have uncovered the fundamental relationship between abstract and material – connecting the observer to the phenomenon observed. The latest theories have shown that at the most basic level there is no distinction between supposedly "solid" matter and non-solid waves of energy. It's all one unified field; a field that includes us, the conscious human investigators.

² "And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice." *The Bible*, (King James Version) 1 Kings 19:11

These questions cannot be answered by giving a compass direction. The infinite can't be located that way. It's not that kind of experience. The subjective approach does allow you to locate it in a manner of speaking, but it's hard to describe with logic how this works. Then again, the logic of the objective approach, mathematics in other words, also fails when we take it to the infinite extreme. So we're faced with a dilemma. Rational thought is all we have, but rational thought doesn't seem to work when it comes to describing the undescribable. Maybe we should resort to IR-rational thought: black is white, up is down, two plus two is three. Actually, this idea has occurred to others. Some well-known literary works contain exactly this kind of cockeyed reasoning. Listen to these riddles and confictions:

From the *Tao Te Ching*:

The purest is impure;
 The best is flawed;
 The perfect is imperfect.
 The highest virtue is ordinary;
 The finest sound is silence;
 The largest shape is boundless;
 The eternal form is formless.³

From William Blake:

To see a world in a grain of sand
 And a heaven in a wild flower,
 Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
 And eternity in an hour.⁴

From William Shakespeare:

O God! I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.⁵

How can a nutshell contain infinite space? Is this just linguistic ornament? Was Shakespeare merely amusing us with inanity? Possibly, but I'm inclined to believe that he was actually trying to convey something quite profound; something

³ Ray Grigg trans., *The New Lao Tzu, A Contemporary Tao Te Ching* (Rutland, Vermont, Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc., 1995) ch. 3 (41), p. 6

⁴ William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*

⁵ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act II, Scene ii

that seems to produce absurdity when you put it into words.

What about Blake's poetry? What connection can there be between a grain of sand and the world?

Blake gives the answer in the following line, where he explicitly names infinity, telling us that it's right there in your hand. The only way that I can see for something immensely large to fit in your hand would be if it were also immensely small. To be both large and small at the same time implies that the "object" doesn't conform to our ordinary notion of what an object is. This fits with the Tao's description of something that is boundless and formless. Boundaries, forms, infinity ... these are all mathematical terms. Yet it's not a concept, or a theory, or a product of reasoning that these poets speak about, but something of quite a different nature. I suggest that they are all describing a personal experience.

Experience is often described as union of sensations, an amalgam of memories, perceptions and feelings: what a thrilling experience I had while hang-gliding; what an experience it was to meet the President; the concert was a once-in-lifetime experience; etc. But what we have here is not your typical experience. As strange as it sounds, this thing, whatever it is, can't be sensed by the senses. It's a different sort of beast. When you try to express its nature using logic, it comes out sounding like the impossible convergence of radical opposites. The *Tao Te Ching* is full of such paradoxes. Here's another verse:

When inner and outer move as one,
The harmony of wholeness is experienced.
When hardness and softness become the same,
The wisdom of the child is realized.
When living and dying are no longer different,
The nourishing female is discovered.
When thoughts are finally still,
The way of the world is revealed.⁶

"When inner and outer move as one" sounds not unlike our definition of spiritual growth. Recall that we described spiritual growth as a process by which your experience of the inner realm becomes integrated with the experience of the outer realm. As for hardness being the same as softness, and living the same as dying, what we are hearing is a description of detachment. The extremes of life pull us in and take a toll on us. Not only the negative aspects of life, like crime, but the positive things as well. By cultivating detachment you avoid the hard buffeting that is produced by intensely bad or intensely good

⁶ Ray Grigg trans., *The New Lao Tzu, A Contemporary Tao Te Ching* (Rutland, Vermont, Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc., 1995) ch. 54 (10), p. 71

thoughts, emotions and actions. People who have achieved such detachment are able to maintain coolness and equanimity regardless of the circumstances. Their ride through life is smoother. They are not so deeply affected by great pain or great pleasure – emotional, physical or otherwise. Note that this does not mean that one must renounce the world. It's not that you become a hermit. On the contrary, you are fully involved in everyday activity, yet still maintain a connection to the inner aspect of life. This, by the way, is how you achieve a truly non-judgmental outlook. It's where the moral assessments that we continually make give way to that which is amoral, or beyond morality. (There should be no negative connotation associated with the term "amoral". Contrary to common usage, amoral does not mean immoral.)

It may appear that we are contradicting ourselves here (again). We have been arguing that the problem in our communities is that people are not paying attention to what's going on around them, yet here we are promoting a practice that would appear to make the attention deficit even worse; that would seem to bury one's head even deeper in the sand. I must admit that I've had a bit of trouble resolving this point. What I think happens with detachment is that you gain more control over which activities you allow yourself to become involved in. It's not that you are less aware of what's happening around you, rather you can more clearly determine what things will bring progress and fulfillment to your life. When the picture becomes clearer this way, you will naturally gravitate towards the positive, rather than the negative. Detachment is thus necessary in order for the practice of subjectivity to be truly effective. The problem is that when it comes to addressing crime, there are few positive options available to us. Even if people wanted to help, they can't do so without being drawn into some rather distasteful and even dangerous activities; e.g., the use of weapons, forceful confrontation, cloak and dagger detective work, etc.

But we still haven't explained how any of this gives one the experience of the infinite. We might be able to convince ourselves that Blake, Shakespeare and the author of the Tao had an experience of some sort, and that the experience, whatever it was, inspired them to compose their respective verses, but the authors don't give us much information about how they got there. Did they look inward? Did they practice the subjective approach, turning their attention towards the knower? Were they detached? Perhaps they practiced nothing. Perhaps it all came naturally to them. Moreover, how do we know that what they experienced was the real McCoy, The Infinite itself, and not some quasi-infinite pretender?

We can't see what another person sees, so we'll never know for sure what was going through the minds of these folks, but in the case of the *Tao Te Ching*, we have a pretty good clue. The line, "When thoughts are finally still, the way of the world is revealed," gives us a specific instruction: Go to the place where

thoughts are quiet. The answer lies there. This must be where thoughts originate. It's the place that we described as before voice and before thought. But what is left when there are no longer any thoughts? Or should I say, who is left? From the subjective approach it becomes clear. What remains is awareness. Pure awareness on its own. Uncontaminated by sensations, emotions, desires or even thoughts. That's where we find the knower, the silent witness, the "I". It's also where we experience timelessness, the infinite aspect of existence.

I wish I didn't have to ask you to take my word for this, but that's the position I'm in. We're talking here about a purely subjective experience. Since objective methods cannot measure subjective phenomena, strictly speaking you cannot prove with argumentation that experiencing pure awareness is how one finds the infinite. We can however construct an interesting argument that makes use of the fact that the human form is partly material. A person's physiology is composed of organs, among which is the nervous system, including the brain. Thought activity, which is non-material, manifests in the material realm as electromagnetic brain waves. The brain is a conglomeration of cells, molecules, atoms, and at the deepest level, subatomic particles. In concert these particles of matter generate electrical impulses that direct the functioning of the rest of the body, including, it would appear, the activity that we perceive as thinking. To get to the source of thought from the material side then, it seems we must figure out how all of this atomic activity came about. For the sake of argument, let's ignore the fact that most of the cells in your body are regenerated every few months. Let's pretend that the molecular matter that forms a person's body originated with the DNA molecules of his parents. If we follow the course of evolution backwards in time, we ultimately find that the DNA of all living organisms came from non-living dust and rock. The rock in turn came from the formation of the stars and planets, which, according to the physicists, coalesced from huge volumes of hot gas. There is good evidence that the entire universe, and all the material in it, came from the cosmic, balloon-like expansion of gaseous matter out of a single point of singularity several billion years ago. Space and time itself "began" at that one point, which has been nicknamed the "big bang".

But a point of singularity remember, is an abstract element of logic; something that *we created in our minds*. It represents the infinite, and as such has no measurable material form. Thus the entire universe arose from abstraction and organized itself in an orderly way into material units, from which the human body – yours and mine in particular – was formed. Sometime during the growth of this body it began to think. It developed an awareness of its own existence and formed logical ideas about its origin. So, we have the universe coming out of abstraction, forming a body, and then rediscovering its abstract nature through thought. When you realize the implications of this argument, it's very

startling. Mind-boggling in fact. You ... me ... we *are* the universe, and we are having thoughts about it. Each one of us represents the thinking universe. When you, the universe, examine yourself, through self-awareness, you are examining the infinite, because that's where the universe, you, had your origin, in a singular point of abstract infinity.

The conclusion is quite astounding, yet the logic is clearly solid. What's interesting is that even though the argument makes use of evolution, it doesn't necessarily contradict those who say that the human species was created, rather than evolved. In both theories we find that the passage of time is an illusion. To have been created means that man arrived on the scene in a timeless moment. This is entirely consistent with the big bang theory, which says that the universe, meaning us, arose out of a timeless point. Moreover, despite the amazing result, the argument is not terribly complicated. You really don't need to know much about physics or biology to follow it. Yet as simple as the argument is to construct, few people seem to get excited about this. You would think that if one discovered that he or she were the universe, he would at least let the neighbors know about it; maybe throw a little party for himself ... perhaps a barbecue ... the guests could gather round and sing "We are the World" ... something.

The problem, again, is that although it's fairly easy to follow the reasoning, the experience of it is another matter. But oh, what a difference it makes when one does begin to sense the connection between himself and the universe. As the sense of it grows, that's when one begins to live the infinite. It's the "harmony of wholeness" that the Tao speaks of, where one is acting in the ever-changing, finite world, while at the same time cognizant of his existence in the silent, absolute, infinite world. The *Bhagavad Gita* puts it this way:

Yogasthah kuru karmani

-or-

Established in Yoga ... perform actions ⁷

In this context the Sanskrit word "yoga", or union, signifies awareness. It's the union of one's individual awareness with the awareness of the universe. When the mind settles down and pure awareness is experienced, that's when the union becomes manifest. When we spoke about refinement of awareness, this is what we were talking about. There are indeed methods that allow you to get beyond thought in this manner; that bring out the perceptual distinction between the finite and the infinite. Transcendental Meditation does this. It's a technique whose origins lie in the Vedic tradition of India. His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh

⁷ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *The Bhagavad-Gita, A New Translation and Commentary Chapters 1-6* (Fairfield, Iowa, Age of Enlightenment Press, Fifth Printing, 1984) ch. 2, verse 48, p. 96

Yogi, a modern-day sage from this ancient tradition, initially offered Transcendental Meditation to Westerners about forty years ago, and he has been teaching it ever since.⁸ There are actually myriad ways to improve one's experience of the infinite, but Transcendental Meditation is the easiest to perform and the most thoroughly researched. It takes you directly to the transcendental source of thought; to a state of restful alertness where the mind becomes "established in yoga". It's a simple, natural mental exercise. What takes a bit of time and practice however, is the "perform actions" part of the prescription. Usually we are completely taken over by our actions. We are so intently absorbed in activity that we lose our sense of self. Many people live their whole lives this way, with a narrowly bounded, externally directed awareness that never looks back on itself. But through habitual exposure to pure, unbounded awareness a person (and his physiology) gradually becomes infused with the qualities of that unbounded state. One begins to live as though one were indeed the expression of the universe. It's deep stuff, and perhaps more than a little confusing to those who haven't thought about this before, but there's no other way to put it. Your external, everyday activity takes place as usual, but at the same time you don't lose sight of that other part of you, the interior part, the part that connects you to the timelessness of cosmic existence.

Note by the way that there are many issues that this line of reasoning does not address. Even if you believe, and indeed perceive, that the universe, your universe, came into being from abstraction, and that one's individual life is the ultimate expression of that event, there still remains the question of who or what initiated its formation? Was there, is there, an all-powerful creator behind it all? If so, is there a way to have knowledge of that creator? Is this what is meant by God? And why did it happen ... why *does* it happen? What's the purpose of it? For that matter, what is *our* purpose? Say we acknowledge that we are all infinite beings. So what? Where are we supposed to go with it?

I submit that if you can reach the point where you're able to even pose such questions, you have already achieved something that the majority of us never touch. This is ideally where we would like a Garden Zone Manager to be. Established in awareness ... moving in the harmony of wholeness ... bounded in a nutshell yet king of infinite space. If he can maintain this refined state, and still be able to deal with break-ins, stolen cars and insolent adolescents, then he will be setting the best possible example for the neighborhood, and be in the best po-

⁸ Westerners often take Maharishi to be some sort of Hindu priest, but in fact he represents a long line of indigenous Indian masters of the Ved, a tradition that predates Hinduism. "Veda" means knowledge. It's a rich, 5000-year-old philosophy maintained in its purest form through oral recitation. (Actually, it's a timeless philosophy with the same cosmic origin as human beings.) Maharishi's own teacher was His Divinity Brahmananda Saraswati (Guru Dev) who inspired him to offer the teaching outside of his native land.

sition to make real improvements in the quality of life. Truthfully, I don't see how anyone could deal with crime at all if he hadn't achieved some degree of refinement in this fashion. The stress alone would do you in.

Let's take another look at the quality of life table we constructed in the first chapter (see Section 1.3). We determined that awareness was the basis of courtesy, and proceeded to place it at the top of the list. We can now make a couple of observations about this arrangement. Pure awareness corresponds to the field of non-action, or non-doing. But it would seem that non-action is the source of action. Though the distinction between action and non-action is subtle, the idea that the one gives rise to the other feels good to the intellect. Moreover, it's reasonable to think of the purest action as that which is nearest to non-action. Actions that arise out of courtesy are more refined, more graceful and hence closer to the non-doing that characterizes pure awareness. Thus courtesy is located higher up on the list. Actions arising from considerations of safety are the grossest, since they require you to handle the roughest aspects of crime, and of life. Thus safety is at the bottom. The table also provides a representation of the murky area that we term responsibility. I submit that one can look at responsibility as encompassing items (2), (3) and (4) combined. Responsibility includes the myriad of activities that fall beneath the umbrella of the purest action, or as we call it here, the field of courtesy. (Figure 5.1)

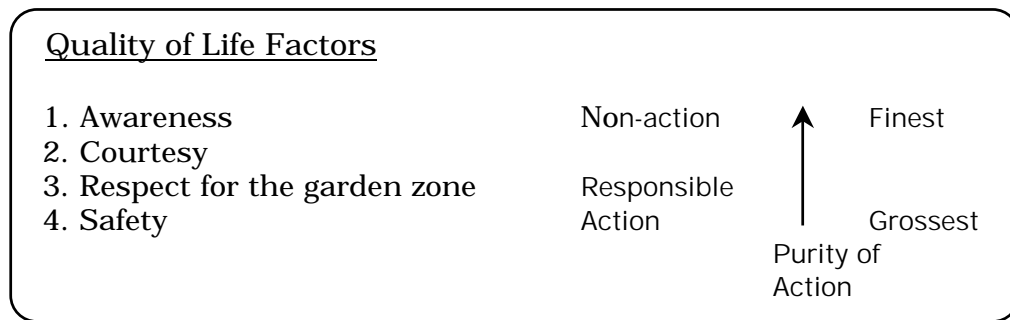


Figure 5.1 Non-action as the basis of responsible action

To review, we showed that the preventive approach calls into question our very culture. We said that the hallmark of culture resides in cultural aspects that express timelessness. Timelessness in turn is based in the infinite aspect of life. The infinite is not easily described with language and logic, but it does exist, and it can be experienced. The way to experience it is by finding pure awareness in oneself. This is what refining awareness means. By adopting a routine of such practice; i.e., by routinely experiencing non-action, a Garden Zone Manager can

permit his actions to become more pure, and more deeply infused with the qualities of timelessness. In this manner he will bring timelessness to the neighborhood. When more people can express timelessness like this, the timeless component of the community becomes greater, the collective awareness is stronger, and the culture is more enduring and more authentic.

Of course, not everyone is going to appreciate this line of reasoning. As we have seen, there are a great number of people who are difficult to even approach; it's a challenge just to get their attention, let alone draw them into a discussion about infinity, the material body, and awareness. You're not going to say the word "infinite" to people, and find that they run right out and learn to transcend. A blank stare is the more likely response. Many folks are simply not going to understand any of this. Not with their intellects at least. It's far too abstract. That's why I believe it's necessary to step back just a bit and find another way to introduce these ideas. To speak of them not with words, but with actions. Courtesy allows you to do this. The ideal of courtesy is impeccable behavior. It's a physical thing. You create ballet steps from ordinary body movements. You dance through life as if your daily routine were choreographed. When you interact with another person, the two of you perform a pas de deux. The environment comes into the picture as well – the sun, the sky, the trees, your street, your house, your yard. They form the backdrop for a stage play where the lead role is acted by you. It's the role of a lifetime. And the ending? It doesn't really matter. The journey is the thing ... the direction and the path ... it's always upward, where up does not mean higher in altitude, but higher in spirit. To act with perfect courtesy requires that you are always pointing in a spiritual direction. It's not easy to explain, but I submit that when people see you point that way, they catch on. On some level they know where you're coming from. This is how I envision Garden Zone Managers behaving. By their actions they would demonstrate courtesy in the light of awareness; doing in the light of non-doing. We've seen how gardeners direct us towards softer, subtler regions. Now we want them to direct people toward the infinite, which is the softest region of all.

5.6 Develop The Natural Community In The Place Where People Live

The program of prevention that we've been discussing has taken on several different guises. We described it as Garden Zone Management, with an emphasis on environmental concerns; also as a grass roots leadership program, as a promotional program for spiritual growth, and as an alternative, non-forceful approach to reducing crime. I would now like to offer a somewhat different formulation. I suggest that what we're really doing with all of this is creating commu-

nity. I want to be able to tell people that Garden Zone Management is basically a community development program, but before I can say that, we must first talk a little more about what community actually is.

At the start of this discourse we asserted that strength of community depends on the awareness of community members. Since then we've been using the term "community" rather freely, without ever offering a definition. Now that we have formed a rough idea about the nature of awareness, we can focus a little more clearly on the community phenomenon. The word "community" is rather like the word "responsibility" in that one can develop a vaguely satisfactory grasp of its meaning without having to think very hard about it. Everyone seems to agree that community does exist, and that there is something valuable in it. Indeed, it is evidently such a compelling notion that people have written entire books on the subject. Movements have been started: Communitarians, Cohousing, Intentional Communities, Ecovillages. Community has become quite vogue. Social scientists speak in reverent terms about it, and their commentary seems to point towards aspects of community that are beyond the normal realm of experience. What they say about community sounds suspiciously like what we have been saying about the experience of the infinite. I would like to flesh out the connection between these two experiences, and take another stab at introducing some precision into my argument by attempting to define community.

What's funny about the recent surge of interest in community is that no one seems to be able to define it precisely. You do find authors who offer something that they label as a definition, but generally speaking their formulas contain behavioral elements. In other words, they observe what people are doing, presently and historically, and identify patterns of activity. Those patterns then become the definition. But this is not how a bona fide philosopher would proceed. Philosophers and mathematicians identify axioms and primitive concepts, and then construct more complex definitions from the primitives. We may not be able to produce such a definition here, but I would like to offer some language that suggests the correct approach; that at least gives the appearance of rigorous analysis. However, I must tell you up front that no amount of prose can convey a full understanding of community. The nature of community precludes it.

The notion that I would like to examine more closely is the "sense" of community that we often hear about. The expression is very comforting. It has a warm feeling to it, and most folks would no doubt tell you that they could readily recognize a sense of community if it somehow happened to come up. But it's quite another matter to define what it is exactly. If one were asked to describe in simple terms what community means, most of us would probably talk about people helping each other ... cooperating, pitching in. Good works, unselfish acts, service: these are what we associate with community. But these are concrete actions; things that we do, not things that we sense. A sense is different.

It's less concrete, more fuzzy, and it is precisely community's fuzzy nature that makes it interesting.

In relating crime to community we customarily think of crime as a community problem, or as a phenomenon that happens *within* the community. What I'd like to argue now is that although crimes such as theft, assault and abuse appear to take place inside the community, they are in fact outside of it. I suggest that when one uncovers the essence of community, it becomes clear that crime happens because community does not actually exist. In the areas where community is in fact so weak that it doesn't deserve to be called community at all, those are the places where crime is the worst. On the other hand, where there is a community in the truest sense of the word, you find that crime is absent. Let us then try to picture this fuzzy, idyllic haven where crime does not occur.

The primary use of the word community refers to a municipality or a population center. You might casually call Camp Springs a community for example. It's not a village or a town, so it might as well be a community for lack of a better term. We also use community to describe a group of people who have shared interests. They might have the same vocation, or ethnic background, or be affiliated with a particular guild or organization. Examples would be the Hispanic community, the boating community, the medical community, etc. Finally, the word community can convey a fellowship or shared spirit. For example, I heard a local minister say that there were people who came to his church "in search of community".

Each of these types of community has a unique aspect that distinguishes it from the others. The first type, the population center, is distinguished by its geographic aspect. The second, the shared interest group, is distinguished by just that, a common interest. The third community type, the fellowship, is distinguished by its shared spirit.

These three elements are not the only things we associate with community. There are others that deserve mention. What about a moral framework? Isn't that something that might be considered fundamental? Possibly, but we've already talked about how difficult it is to define morality in an absolute sense. What is highly moral for one person might be highly immoral for another. The various religious canon notwithstanding, it's not at all clear that there is a set of rules suitable for every person, that applies to each of the innumerable small acts that take place from moment to moment throughout one's life. We cannot ignore morality completely, but I suggest that it should be treated as a secondary component of community, a derived component.

Another aspect that should not be overlooked is leadership. Can there be a community without a leader or leaders? The real question is, what exactly constitutes a leader. Is it a decision maker? Is it the person giving the orders? Is it the person with the strongest "moral voice"? For that matter, must the leaders be

part of some kind of formal governing body, and if so, does that mean a community must have a government? This takes us into even deeper issues about the nature of government.

What I would again maintain is that leadership arises naturally from the basic components listed above. Moreover, leadership does not necessarily take the form of an elected government. Nor is it true that a community leader always occupies a prominent position, politically speaking. In present day society the true leaders of a community are in some cases hardly recognized at all. No. Not in some cases, in most cases. More often than not, the real leadership is practically invisible. That's how it is in this country at least. It is quite possible that the person bagging your groceries at the market is more of a leader than the guy who represents you at city hall. For, the true leaders are the educators, and a leader/educator does not necessarily attain his or her position through the electoral process. He is recognized in a much more spontaneous way. Nevertheless, some degree of recognition is indeed required for there to be leadership. Hence, if the grocery bagger is the true leader and no one realizes it, it does not speak very well for the community.

One might argue that collective memory is a required characteristic of community. Real communities seem to have a history. Also, communities are often associated with sharing – the sharing of property, resources, skills, time. It arises from a desire by individuals to participate in maintaining the group that supports them. It gives them membership. Other characteristics that are mentioned are common lifestyle, particular types of housing, interpersonal communication, and other emotional and psychological factors. I submit that all of these elements – morality, leadership, memory, membership and the rest – are secondary to the three aspects we began with. In other words, when the geography, the shared interest and the shared spirit are present, the other characteristics will automatically manifest themselves.

Looking then at the basic community types: the Geographic, the Common Interest, and the Shared Spirit communities, I maintain that none of these is complete. No matter how strong is its distinguishing aspect, none can qualify as a community in the fullest sense unless it also includes some measure of the other two. Thus a Geographic Community is incomplete without common interest and shared spirit, a Common Interest Community is incomplete without spirit and geography, and a Shared Spirit Community won't be complete without geography and common interest. Let us then postulate a fourth type of community in which all three elements – geography, common interest and shared spirit – are present. We'll call this a "Natural Community".

It would appear that Natural Communities do exist. Indeed, you might expect that all Geographic Communities should qualify as natural. The geographic element is present by definition, and the common interest aspect should be there

as well. As we shall see however, the third element, the shared spirit, is more troublesome.

Geography is a physical thing. To determine how it relates to communities we have to consider the physical distance between people. Other factors are also present in geography – the environment where the community is located, the climate, the living arrangements – but the factor that is most fundamental is distance.

The scale over which we measure community distance ranges from a few yards to a few miles, and perhaps further. At the extreme end one could say that the world community, if there were such a thing, covers thousands of miles. I propose that we use the following terminology regarding geographic communities:

If the members of a community live within a relatively small area, say on the order of a couple of square miles or less, then we will say that the geography of the community has a strong distance factor. As the area covered by the community increases, the distance factor decreases. Thus, remote Alaskan encampments are geographically weak distance-wise, whereas a two-block neighborhood in New York City is strong, distance-wise.

Certainly the density of the population will also factor into geographic strength. However, for this discussion I would like to assume that all of our theoretical communities have a reasonable population density: not crowded to the point of discomfort, nor exceedingly sparse. I'm not sure what this corresponds to in people-per-acre. A population of 500 in a farming region could be pretty widely spread out, whereas the same population could easily fit into a single high-rise apartment in the city. Yet in terms of personal contact, the apartment dwellers might well be more isolated than the farmers, for even a farmer must go into town once in a while. What we're trying to achieve with the distance factor is a ballpark idea of how well the community geography supports physical contact between community members. When fewer people live farther apart, the chance of an encounter with a neighbor becomes less, simply because of the mileage involved.

Implicit in our description of a Geographic Community is that people *live* within the geographic area. Groups that are formed for reasons other than carrying on one's ordinary day-to-day existence do not qualify as geographic. I'm thinking of the temporary associations that are created at events like seminars and retreats, and also at schools, camps, treatment centers and so forth. For a community to be geographic, some of its members must conduct their normal, everyday lives there. What "there" means of course, is somewhere on the earth; somewhere on this orb of green and blue that evolved so perfectly over the eons to sustain life. To truly exist here, on this planet, the Geographic Community must display the sustaining connection between earth and man. To some degree

every community meets this requirement. People must eat, for example, and it is the earth that supplies man with food. However, a community whose produce is grown locally has a closer connection to the earth than one whose food is farmed, processed, and shipped from some distant place. Moreover, the community that actually knows who their farmers are, and how their food is produced, has an even stronger planetary connection.

There are other ways that a person can connect to the earth besides growing food. How about simply orienting your furniture, or your house, to a particular compass direction? Wouldn't that recall something fundamental about our place on the planet? The planet revolves, the sun and moon come up and shine, the wind blows from a certain direction, you walk out the front door and see the rising constellations, or look up and see the north star. Doesn't it all connect? And we haven't even scratched the surface. People in other cultures have produced entire systems of design ... schools even ... complete philosophies ... that are based on such values. Very recently the Chinese art of interior design, Feng Shui, has begun to attract attention in the West. From ancient India there is a branch of the Vedic school called Sthapatya Veda (Vastu design) that also deals with how the living environment, the specific design of homes and communities, affects us.

Let us then submit the following definitions. A community has strong geography when (a) it has a strong distance factor, (b) there is a high percentage of residents for whom the community is their permanent home, and (c) the community has a close connection to the sustaining earth. Conversely a community whose members are spread over great distances, that exists temporarily, and which displays no connection to the earth, has weak geography.

Turning now to the shared interest factor of community, in communities with moderately strong geography there are many things that could create shared interest. You would expect that people living in a particular geographic region would share an interest in a clean water supply, for example. Energy, food, and safe streets should also create common interest. A host of things come to mind when you stop and think about it: the monthly PTA meeting is coming up; the widow Johnson needs someone to take her shopping; the town council voted to raise taxes; your neighbor's kid came down with chicken pox; gypsy moths are devouring everyone's oak trees. The list of potential activities is limitless.

I use the word "activity" on purpose, because it's clear that common interest implies *doing* something. If there is no one in the community who ever actually *does* anything related to the supposed common interest, no one who gets involved in it somehow, then the "interest" isn't really an interest.

Let's try to be precise about this. It's clear that there are degrees of involvement in a common interest activity. At the upper end, a person can be a direct

participant. For example, the folks who monitor and maintain the power grid participate directly in the common interest of energy production. Less involved would be the people who simply pay their electric bills each month. And hardly involved at all might be the children who use the utility pole as a foul line marker playing stick ball. Even someone who just thinks about a common interest is involved in it. Thinking after all is an activity. Furthermore, there are degrees of thinking – anxious thought, analytical thought, deep contemplation – which provide yet subtler shades of involvement. At the lowest end of the scale is the person who never thinks about an activity; who doesn't give it even a passing thought. For that person, his personal universe does not intersect the universe in which the activity takes place. For him, the activity does not exist.

The strength of common interest increases not only as the degree of involvement of individuals increases, but also as the number of individuals involved to any degree at all increases. Also significant is the type of activity that people get involved in. You would like to say that there are good activities and bad activities, corresponding to good interests and bad interests, but you must be careful, because it's easy to get caught up in ticklish moral issues. Let's instead say that there are activities which are positive or life-supporting, and there are activities which are negative or life-damaging. No doubt it seems that we're playing with words here, but we'd like to avoid the connotation of moral rightness and wrongness that comes from the words "good" and "bad".

We will take life-supporting to mean beneficial for the people of the community, individually and collectively, in the most broad and general sense. Life-damaging on the other hand, is harmful in the most broad and general sense. Once again we find that there are degrees of strength to consider. There are common interests that are highly life-supporting, some that are less life-supporting, some highly life-damaging, less life-damaging, and so forth.

It's easy to identify examples. Obviously anything connected with maintaining the health and well-being of the entire community is life-supporting. Activities that provide people with food, clothing, shelter, and medical care all fit this category. On the other hand, criminal interests such as theft, extortion, hate groups, etc. clearly fall into the life-damaging category. There are also a great number of things that are difficult to classify, and perhaps an even greater number that belong to neither the positive nor the negative side; activities that are simply neutral.

It's not just community-wide activities that serve as common interests – PTA meetings, power-line maintenance, and what-have-you – but also the myriad of smaller activities that occupy people's lives: You go for a daily walk and a couple of neighbors join you; the supermarket is stocking wheat bread because folks are switching from white; everyone in town is wearing wide brim hats this summer. Any small thing can become a common interest, and we can classify

each one as positive or negative, life-supporting or life-damaging, according to how it affects the community. And it's not hard to extrapolate even further. What's to stop us from categorizing every little thing that one does, each hour, each minute, from the time you get up, to the time you go to bed? What you eat. How you dress. How you sleep. Colors, sounds, tastes, textures, movements. I would argue that all of this, every action of a person's daily routine, can become a common interest, and will have some value – positive, negative or neutral – on the life-support scale.

Moreover, there are different types of people, and for any given common interest activity the effect that it produces could vary from person to person. In other words, something that may be highly life-supporting for one person, might be just moderately life-supporting, or neutral for another. Some activities are of course generally life-supporting for everyone, but when you consider the more subtle qualities such as colors, tastes, and thoughts, it may indeed happen that an activity can be either life-supporting or life-damaging depending on which person is involved in it. And yes, even involvement by mere thought can affect you: the mere thought of a pie-eating contest at the county fair makes you lose your appetite; the mere thought of your husband having a beer at a topless bar sends you into a rage; the mere thought of a budget meeting with the church deacons puts you to sleep.

Finally, it's possible to distinguish groups of people according to ethnicity, culture and traditions. For such groups, certain activities will have different values depending on which group is involved. What might be a perfectly acceptable, life-supporting practice for one group could bring about civil war in another. Again, we're not just talking about complex customs, but things that are as simple as what you have for dinner, what sort of hat you wear, and so on.

There is a lot going on in this business of supporting life, much more than meets the eye. When you analyze every aspect of an activity, everything that goes into it, and that comes out of it, things can get quite complicated. Even something as seemingly straightforward as, say, the activities of a doctor, which one would almost automatically assign to the life-supporting category – even what a physician does can raise some hard questions. Consider the simple act of prescribing medicine for a patient. Is that a universally life-supporting activity? Maybe not. What if we asked how that medicine was produced, what resources were required to make it, how the product was marketed, how it was packaged, where the profits went? Any of these questions could bring up a host of adjunct activities, each of which has perhaps weaker life-supporting value than the writing of the prescription itself. You could also question whether or not the medicine had side-effects, or if there were an alternative treatment that was perhaps less harmful than the one prescribed. Why, for example, would an obese person require prescription medicine when he or she could lose weight simply by eating

less? One wonders whether the doctor who writes the prescription thinks about any of these things before he hands out the pills. Moreover, if he does give consideration to these issues, and concludes that he still feels okay about what he's doing, does that negate whatever life-damaging effects that might exist? Does that make it into a purely positive activity, if not for the whole community, then at least for the doctor personally?

I'd like to suggest that the correct way to look at these questions is to ask how natural the activity is, where natural means two things: natural with respect to the planet, and natural with respect to the type of person you are. It's fairly clear how one determines how planetarily natural an activity is: things that are easy on the environment, that conserve resources, that maintain the diversity of the ecosystem, etc. Such activities are certainly more natural than those which pollute, which are not sustainable, and so forth. Determining what is natural for you, however, is a different matter. There is subjectivity involved. The qualities of the internal side of one's existence come into play. Yet I maintain that there are still rules – laws, if you will – that apply, and that the clearer your experience of the inner side of reality, the clearer the rules become. If you want to think of these as moral rules, I won't stop you, but realize that there are distinctions to be made. Whereas laws of morality tend to apply equally to everyone, laws of nature reflect the differences in people. Moreover, moral laws appear to have been invented by man, whereas natural laws seem structured within man. Notice, by the way, that this suggests that there is a genetic component to the laws of nature. But that's no surprise, because there is after all a physiological aspect of man; there is the body side of the mind/body equation.

Let us offer the following definitions regarding strength of common interest. First, an activity is not a common interest unless more than one person is involved in it. A community has strong common interest if many people are involved, thought involvement included, to a high degree in common interest activities that are highly life-supporting (which also means natural) for the individuals, and also for the group. A community has weak common interest if there is little involvement on the part of individuals in activities that are personally or collectively life-supporting. Finally, a community has zero common interest if there is no involvement at all in any life-supporting activities.

Clearly more can be said about which activities, qualities, thoughts, etc., are life-supporting, and to what degree, and for what types of people. However, in this discussion we will stick to the most broad and general categories of common interests.

Let's take a quick look at one simple example. Let's consider the way we talk to one another. It's an area of interest that can produce widely variable readings on the life-support scale. For example, have you ever visited a place where it seems like everyone is shouting? Where the language is rough, the profanity is

abundant, and even the laughter is a bit too loud? The first thing that comes to mind is a bar room, but I maintain that you can identify whole populations where it's customary to speak in this fashion. I believe we could agree that people who so casually address each other in this manner are engaged in a moderately life-damaging activity. Now if a stranger came along and began addressing these folks in a softer, more civil tone, it might confuse them at first, but his vocal expression could very well change the atmosphere of the gathering. The mere sound of that quiet voice could have a calming effect. Moreover if someone else in the group responded in kind, an instant common interest would be created. I'm not sure how one would term this interest – perhaps we could call it an interest in quietness – but it's clearly an activity that falls on the positive end of the life-support scale. In light of what we've been saying about the importance of courtesy to the quality of life, it's clear that the life-supporting activities that concern us in this discussion are those which reflect softer sentiments such as this; activities which display refinement of action. We'll talk more about this shortly.

We have until now been treating the words common interest and activity as if they were interchangeable. It is not unreasonable to say that activity creates the common interest, or that common interest exists because of the activity. Indeed, the discussion so far has implied that this is so. However, this view is somewhat misleading. I submit that it's more correct to think in terms of the *person* as the creator of the common interest. It is the individual community members who create it. One could very well argue that the activity, and our involvement in it, comes *after* the interest arises within the individual. So where does the interest come from? To answer this question we need to address the third aspect of a Natural Community, the shared spirit.

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Apart from attempting to clarify my own thoughts about community, I confess that I haven't done all that much actual research on the subject; that is to say, research into how other commentators describe it. You would think that for a topic of such fundamental importance, there ought to be a wealth of written material. Yet it seems that there aren't all that many insightful quotations to be found. In fact, there don't seem to be many quotations period, insightful or otherwise. At least not from the great writers of the past. You get the idea that previous generations didn't give community much thought, that they took it more or less for granted. English philosopher John Stuart Mill seemed to confirm this when he wrote in 1863:

The social state is at once so natural, so necessary, and so habitual to man, that, except in some unusual circumstances or by an effort of voluntary abstraction, he

never conceives himself otherwise than as a member of a body ...⁹

The American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson also described community as an automatic, effortless thing:

My doing my office entitles me to the benefit of your doing yours. This is the secret after which the Communists are coarsely and externally striving. Work in thy place with might and health, and thy secretion to the spiritual body is made. I in mine will do the like. Thus imperceptibly and most happily, genially and triumphantly doing that we delight in, behold we are communists, brothers, members of one another.¹⁰

Writers of today, in contrast, are quite effusive in their treatment of community. They fill volumes with lofty expressions like this one, from psychologist M. Scott Peck:

In and through community lies the salvation of the world.¹¹

And this staggering statement is just the beginning. In his book *The Different Drum, Community-Making and Peace*, Peck follows with seventeen chapters on the importance of community in modern life. Clearly Scott Peck has latched on to something fundamental. He has identified what appears to be an essential component of social structure. Peck goes on to say that community is "impossible to describe"¹², is "currently rare"¹³, but that we humans must nevertheless come to

⁹ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch. 3

¹⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson, Journal entry, December 1845

But a short thirty years later, the great Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky, speaking as the elder, Father Zossima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, offered this observation:

"For in our age all men are separated into self-contained units, everyone crawls into his own hole, everyone separates himself from his neighbor, hides himself away and hides away everything he possesses, and ends up by keeping himself at a distance from people and keeping other people at a distance from him. ... Everywhere today the mind of man has ceased, ironically, to understand that true security of the individual does not lie in isolated personal efforts but in general human solidarity. But an end will most certainly come to this dreadful isolation of man, and everyone will realize all at once how unnaturally they have separated themselves from one another."

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. David Magarshack (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1979) bk. 6, ch. 2, p. 357

¹¹ M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum: Community-Making and Peace* (New York, Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1987) Intro., p. 17

¹² *Ibid.*, Intro., p. 17

¹³ *Ibid.*, Ch. 1, p. 25

terms with it if we are to prevent "self-annihilation".¹⁴ He could scarcely express the point more strongly. You would like to jump up and start doing something, yet it sounds like there aren't many people who would even grasp what he's talking about. That's how mysterious this force of community appears.

Where Peck exhorts us to take action, sociologist Amitai Etzioni goes ahead and acts. In 1990 he and a group of social scientists formed the Communitarians, a social reform movement founded on the need for community in American society. Explaining how the group got started, Etzioni writes:

... we were troubled by the finding that many Americans are rather reluctant to accept responsibilities. We were distressed that many Americans are all too eager to spell out what they are entitled to but are all too slow to give something back to others and to the community. We adopted the name *Communitarian* to emphasize that the time had come to attend to our responsibilities to the conditions and elements we all share, to the community.¹⁵

Etzioni declares that "free individuals require a community", and calls for "a new social, philosophical, and political map."¹⁶ This too has a ring of urgency to it.

Poet and farmer Wendell Berry observes that the process of community disintegration has been going on "for at least two hundred years."¹⁷ He calls community an "indispensable form" that acts between public and private interests:

The concerns of public and private, republic and citizen, necessary as they are, are not adequate for the shaping of human life. Community alone, as a principle and as a fact, can raise the standards of local health (ecological, economic, social, and spiritual) without which the other two interests will destroy one another.¹⁸

Berry makes a direct connection between the decline of community and the rise of modern industry:

The triumph of the industrial economy is the fall of community. But the fall of community reveals how precious and how necessary community is. For when community falls, so must fall all the things that only community life can engender and protect: the care of the old, the care and education of children, family

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Intro., p. 17

¹⁵ Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda*, (New York, Crown Publishers, Inc., 1993) Intro., p. 15

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15

¹⁷ Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*, (New York, Pantheon Books, 1992) ch. 8, p. 117

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 119

life, neighborly work, the handing down of memory, the care of the earth, respect for nature and the lives of wild creatures.¹⁹

He explains that even something as basic as the relationship between man and woman, and everything that goes with it – courtship, sexual love, family life – is profoundly altered by the lack of community.

Though they approach the subject from different directions, all three authors have arrived at the same place: a state of alarm about the current condition of society. And there are others besides who have sounded a similar warning. Somehow we have moved from the natural, habitual state that Mill and Emerson described to a situation that is so markedly unnatural that it raises thoughts of societal annihilation. Obviously something vital has popped up on the radar screen. People are sensing an element of man's social existence that hadn't been noticed before. Does this sudden awakening mean that community is a new notion? Can it be that it took until the latter part of the twentieth century for the more astute among us to "discover" the phenomenon of community? It's an interesting thought, to think that, like the objective sciences, subjective research too can yield new discoveries. I'm saying "subjective research" as if I actually know what that means. What I'm wondering is, are there laws that govern the subjective? Moreover, is it possible to determine those laws, and verify them, just as you would the laws of physics? Given the intelligent connection between the physical and non-physical universe, it would seem that this must be the case.

One thing that is certain is that the substance of what we have discovered about community is not material. It has its foundation on the subjective side of life. This is the shared spirit that we postulated. Shared spirit is in a different class from the other two aspects of community. It doesn't sit on the same plane with them; rather, it underlies them. It is not an activity and it is not geographical, nor does it have properties in the usual sense of the word. Emotional, behavioral and psychological qualities that you might be inclined to associate with community shared spirit – like brotherly love, for example – seem to reside in some other field, on some other level. Shared spirit seems deeper, broader. Yet it does have a structure of some sort. The only thing that fits this description is the silent self ... the observer ... the subject. The question is, have we only just found this out? That community is based in the subjective? I think we have. I believe that it was only recently that Westerners began to recognize this side of community.

I should point out that what we are saying here does not constitute a proof. Simply declaring that community is subjective doesn't qualify as anything more than just that, a declaration. But again, what we're referring to is a real-world

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 133

experience, not an abstract notion. Throughout the discussion we've been toying with the idea that a strict, "mathematical" approach could yield some useful conclusions. Mathematics is built on primitives, axioms and concepts that are taken to be irreducible. I'd like to suggest that this shared spirit experience, if not a primitive itself, is close to something fundamental and irreducible.

By saying that the sharing of spirit takes place in the subjective, we are making a connection between shared spirit and awareness. I submit that shared spirit and collective awareness are the same thing. They are simply different ways of expressing the sum of the internal sides of the individuals in the community. It is this collection of internals that forms the spiritual neighborhood. But how does this work exactly? How is it possible for my awareness to be shared with yours; for my internal universe and your internal universe to intersect? Say you and I were isolated from each other. You lived on the east coast, I lived on the west, and neither of us knew that the other existed. In other words, there was neither geography nor common interest to connect us. Let's also say that the activities of each of us had become well infused with pure awareness; that we were each spiritually strong as individuals. Is it reasonable to state that you and I have a shared spirit community between us, even though we live thousands of miles apart and know nothing of the other's existence?

There are several things to be said about this. In the first place, man is a gregarious animal. He was not intended to live in isolation. Nature didn't organize things that way, and it's not really useful to speculate about arrangements that don't occur in nature. We have a hard enough time understanding the laws of nature as they are, without creating hypothetical worlds. That said, we should realize that distance has no meaning relative to subjective phenomena anyway. Whether you and I are a thousand miles apart, or sitting across the kitchen table, it is equally hard to fathom the connection between our two awarenesses. And I suppose you could go a step further and say that since time is also illusory, it doesn't even matter that we are living contemporaneous lives. You, your great-grandmother, and Confucius could be sharing spirit at this very moment. It's bizarre, isn't it? It sounds like we're describing one of those spirit-medium sessions, where people join hands and contact the dead. Believe me, that's not at all what I'm trying to describe. To tell the truth, I'm not certain what it is we're asking here. This seems to be a problem where you have an answer, but you're unable to form a meaningful question to draw it forth. I know that each individual being is the ruler of his own, private universe. I know that other beings like me exist, and that there is some sort of interaction between me and them. But the essential substance of that interaction is quite elusive. There may indeed be paths of communication among us which occur deeper in the subjective, but since I can't fathom them, I have to stick to talking about how things work on the gross level, the tangible level.

On the tangible level then, we must describe subjective communication in terms of action; specifically, responsible action. We showed before that responsible action comes out of refined awareness. I now submit that such responsibility naturally implies a heightened concern for the health of our planet. When an individual has greater concern for the planet, his lifestyle is affected; his actions more closely reflect the connection between earth and man. In other words, his actions contribute to stronger community geography. Furthermore, responsible action clearly includes all of the strongly life-supporting activities that take place in a community; activities that provide us with food, water and so forth. You and I may live far apart, but we must each survive somehow. We have to eat at least, and food comes from the earth. Although we may not know each other, we nevertheless have a common interest in the management of earth's resources. This is how the unmanifest, subjective aspect of community becomes manifest in a natural way on the material side, regardless of the separation in space or time between community members.

In developing the Natural Community these are the elements we must work on: improved awareness, stronger geography, and stronger common interest. The reduction in crime will result when: (i) people with refined awareness come together, (ii) take responsibility for the health of themselves, their neighbors and the planet, and (iii) spontaneously engage in life-supporting common interest activities. You aren't going to ask people to pick up and move somewhere else to work on these things. You would like to develop the community in the very places where folks are living at this moment. Granted, there may be good reasons why some people ought to move – those who are living in a dangerous part of the city, for example, should probably get out of there – but for most other people everything we've discussed thus far can take place in their current home, their current neighborhood.

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I'm sure it's apparent by now that what we've been driving at in our discussion of Garden Zone Management and Natural Community is how to define an ideal social structure. Not some grand, global utopia, but a low level, grass roots organization that works for a relatively small group of people, and from which, maybe, possibly, in the very long term, if we're extremely lucky, a ripple effect will emanate that will bring about social improvements on a wider scale. At present neighborhoods like mine, where something like a 1500 people live, don't have any structure at all, let alone an ideal one. And although people speak fondly about "traditional" communities, I submit that it has been a long time since there has been a grass roots structure in Western society that was even remotely ideal. Longer perhaps than it's possible to determine. As far back as the ancient Greeks, wise men have commented on how there are key qualities that

are missing in human society.²⁰ A strong argument could be made that as civilization supposedly progressed, things actually got worse instead of better in this regard.

Here's what I believe has happened. I think that for centuries most of mankind did enjoy some measure of community, mainly due to the strength of the geographic and common interest factors. However, I suggest that here in the West the shared spirit has been weak since before the time of Christ. As modern industrial society grew, geographic strength declined, and with it a good measure of common interest was lost as well. But there was no shared spirit to make up the deficit, and by the middle of the twentieth century, all aspects of community had become so weak that we saw social problems on an unprecedented scale. I don't think many people would disagree that the period surrounding World War II – the rise of communism, the Nazi Holocaust, the bloody dictatorships, the nuclear build-up of the cold war, the threat of global annihilation – that this period could be regarded as the lowest point of human evolution. One can scarcely imagine human activities more life-damaging on a global scale than those were. However, sometime during the late fifties or early sixties the pendulum began to swing the other way. The materialism of mankind had reached such an extreme state that the perceptive social observers among us were able to sense the lack of a key ingredient in society. They detected the non-material component of community that had been dormant for so long: the shared spirit. Just by a few people detecting the existence of this ingredient, the slow process of restoring it came about.

It's interesting to note the similarities between the discovery of shared spirit and the way science located the infinite through the evidence of black holes and the big bang. In both cases the researcher peers at the limits of material reality in order to picture non-material reality in photo-negative form. In physics you observe the behavior of matter. In social science you observe the behavior of man. At the extreme limits of the large and small in matter, you realize the existence of the infinite. At the extreme limit of the materialism of man, you realize the existence of the non-material. When geography and common interest became so small as to be negligible, that's when people woke up to the shared spirit factor

²⁰ In *The Republic*, when asked which of the existing societies are suitable for the development of the rare person who has a truly philosophic mind, Socrates answers:

"There isn't one ... which is just my complaint. There's no existing form of society good enough for the philosophic nature, with the result that it gets warped and altered, like a foreign seed sown in alien soil under whose influence it commonly degenerates into the local growth. In exactly the same way the philosophic type loses its true powers, and falls into habits alien to it. If only it could find a social structure whose excellence matched its own, then its truly divine quality would appear clearly, and all other characters and ways of life stand revealed as merely human."

Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 2cd Edition (revised), 1987) section 497b, p. 293

of community. Now that we have woken up to it, it's time to figure out how to expand it, to grow it. By growing shared spirit we will grow community.

5.7 Establish Simple Trust Among Neighbors. Eliminate Anonymity.

I suggested above that there was no limit to the range of responsibility assumed by this gardener/advisor figure that we created; that no matter what the issue, a Garden Zone Manager could become involved in a way that improved the chances of a successful resolution. He may not have all the answers, but he ought to at least be able to channel community resources towards the problem; to coordinate help; to get the right people together. But it's not hard to imagine circumstances that would require delicate handling, or that raised questions about whether it was appropriate for a Garden Zone Manager to address them at all. Here's an example.

A lady whom I'll call Carol told me recently that she was concerned about her new neighbors up on Westchester Drive. A thirty-something couple with a young daughter, they had arrived a few months back, buying the house from a long-time resident who had gone to Florida. Carol took them flowers from the garden when they first moved in, introduced herself, and offered to help them get oriented. Carol's husband works on cars as a hobby, and the new neighbor started coming over to talk about car repair. Carol and her husband went out of their way to make the new folks feel welcome. The old neighbors had been dear friends, and it hurt to see them leave, but Carol wanted to make the best of it by becoming friendly with the new family.

Things were fine for a while, but at some point Carol began to notice that the new couple was having arguments. The arguments became more frequent, and would get quite loud; loud enough that it attracted not only Carol's attention, but the other neighbors as well. They didn't witness any physical abuse, but Carol did hear some rather nasty verbal abuse, coming from the husband in particular, and on at least one occasion the police were summoned. What eventually happened was that the mother and daughter moved out, leaving the husband behind to live in the house. Carol later told me that since his wife left him, the husband had been having friends over, and that some of them looked a bit shady. Anyway, she wasn't exactly thrilled to have this abusive guy living next door to her.

The question that arises here is whether the Garden Zone Manager could have played a role in this situation. Is there anything to be accomplished by sticking your nose into a touchy domestic dispute? My initial thought is that yes, you can do something useful, and that furthermore you are obliged to get in-

volved if you think that physical abuse is taking place. I say this because too often these days we hear horror stories about family members who are confined, beaten, sexually abused, and even killed, because no one took notice of what was going on. It's true that this stuff usually happens behind closed doors, but when there is evidence that something might be amiss, as there was in the case of Carol's neighbors, you have to figure out a way to open those doors. Lives may depend on it. On the other hand, we must realize that if we intervene in a case like this, we are taking a primarily reactive tack. If a man is abusing his wife, it means that something went wrong long beforehand. The guy was never taught that hitting a woman is something that you don't do. And I don't mean to imply that it's always the man who does the abusing. There are certainly instances where the wife is the abusive one. But it's up to the guy to show restraint, to walk away. In any event, the right way to handle a situation like this is to reduce it to a courtesy issue. Call it the "courtesy reduction" technique. You can always do this. Courtesy applies to virtually everything – to every action, every circumstance. In this case, the Garden Zone Manager could have asked the couple to go about their fighting a little more quietly. He could have pointed out that they were disturbing the neighbors with their shouting; that they were contributing to noise pollution and offending people when they cursed each other so loudly. By appealing to the finer sentiments of the parties involved, you take the problem to a higher level. Such reasoning is very easy to understand. All but the most brutish can grasp where you're coming from. But to deliver this message you must first approach your subject, and that's the tricky part. How you approach depends very much on what kind of relationship you have with the parties. How well do they know you? Can you call them on the phone? Do you have access to their house? Are you on friendly terms? If not, can you find someone who is? Maybe you know the man's (or the woman's) parents, or boss, or pastor ... someone who might take an interest. There are a lot of factors and a lot of options. The worst case scenario is that of a husband and wife who are having a huge brawl and a stranger wades in to break it up. That's how the police handle these things, and without question they take a chance when they do. Not only do they put their own safety in jeopardy, but there is also the risk that the fight may be momentarily stopped, but that the couple go back at it later, with perhaps even greater intensity.

For courtesy reduction to be effective there must be some preparation. There must be an element of prevention in the formula. In a neighborhood like mine one of the most basic aspects of prevention is the elimination of anonymity. Until this barrier is removed, none of the non-violent techniques that we've been discussing can work. How does one eliminate anonymity? It's quite simple. You come together. Acknowledge one another. Work together. Eliminating anonymity requires that there be friendly, outgoing people living in the commu-

nity; people with developed character and refined awareness, and who have a sense of commitment and responsibility. These are the qualities that a Garden Zone Manager should have. It's part of his role. But he still needs help. He needs there to be others who are responsive and supportive. The more support there is, the easier the job becomes. In this case Carol and her husband did the hard part beforehand. They right away got the attention of the couple when they moved in. They breached the wall of anonymity by establishing good relations with them. Furthermore, they demonstrated how decent people acted: how to be cordial, how to be neighborly. Just by interacting civilly with people you can affect the way they think and the way they act. It's the environmental influence that we discussed. People do things differently because of it. In the case of Carol's neighbors you could very well pose the following theory:

The wife was a little naive. She had overlooked the abusive side of her husband, and submitted to his bullying for a long time, because she had no standard against which to measure his behavior. When they moved to Westchester and she witnessed how decent people behaved – Carol and her husband, that is – it opened the wife's eyes. She realized that her own husband was a jerk by comparison. When his abuse continued, she finally had enough of it and left, taking their kid with her.

I'm making all of this up of course, but it's quite plausible that it happened this way. The fact that this lady ended up leaving her husband was probably the best outcome, for her and the neighbors both. The fights and commotion stopped, which was good for the neighborhood, and the woman was no longer being abused, which was good for her. Indeed, you could theorize that Carol saved the lady's life with her actions; that if the couple had taken a home in another community and didn't have someone like Carol living next door, they would have missed out on Carol's positive influence. The stress between them would have continued to build until something terrible took place. All of that was avoided by simple friendliness and a few flowers from the garden. And best of all the Garden Zone Manager didn't have to lift a finger. As for the fact that the abusive husband is still here, and is having John Dillinger and the gang over for beers, that's a different problem.

But let's address that for a moment. Carol didn't provide many details about her neighbor's friends, but let's assume she was correct. Let's assume that these folks were indeed shady characters. Let's even say they were dangerous criminals. What does one do about it? What do you do if you suspect that John Dillinger is living next door to you?

First let me point out that when people live anonymously, this situation doesn't come up. You never get to know a person well enough to recognize the kind of character he has. Killer or saint, what do you care? It's just the neighbor. But everything changes when you introduce just the smallest amount of interest

and concern. Carol was alert enough to spot signs that the guy wasn't all that cool, and now she's a little worried about having him next door. She can't call the authorities, because he hasn't done anything wrong, at least not that she knows about. The police won't take action until someone breaks the law. So she has a bit of a dilemma. She's got this creep living ten yards from her doorstep, and there's nothing anyone can do about it. Some might argue that Carol asked for it; that she brought on her own problems by being too nosy. Better to mind your own business. That way no one gets hurt. My answer to this is that when we all ignore each other, it creates exactly the kind of atmosphere in which the John Dillinger types thrive: darkness, fear and ignorance. But when someone shines the light of intelligence on them, their souls, or essential nature if you will, are opened to public view. They can no longer circulate unnoticed and unchecked in the community.

Nevertheless, Carol does have a problem. Frankly it stinks to have a crummy neighbor. When you can't have confidence in the people around you, it really puts you in a bind. Your doors are locked at all times. You can't go out of town without worrying about your house. You can't leave the kids home by themselves. You're even wary about coming home after dark. Everything is more difficult because of the additional burden that lack of confidence puts on you. This applies not just to neighbors, but to associates, colleagues, tradesmen, and everyone else that you come into contact with. Being able to trust people is so obviously important that I have a hard time understanding how people fail to see it. Trust is more valuable than gold. It's another one of those aphorisms that is repeated over and over, yet which no one seems to grasp. Or if they do grasp it, they are not putting the principle into practice. We are obsessed with security in this country, yet we ignore what is by far the best security measure there is: trust. Trust blows away all other security devices. It renders them superfluous. Lack of trust is why lawyers are so rich. It's why the courts are so full. It's why spy satellites orbit the earth and hidden cameras peer through department store ceilings. Lack of trust is such a huge problem that even if you wanted to do something about it, it's hard to know where to start. People throw up their hands and blame human nature, saying we'll never change the way man behaves. But this is a cop-out. To blame human nature is way too vague to be a valid argument. The nature of a human is like the nature of the universe. Correction ... it *is* the nature of the universe ... we just showed that. It is so complex that you could spend a lifetime studying it and barely scratch the surface. Moreover, the point that people miss is that human nature doesn't stay the same, any more than the universe stays the same. Not only does the human race develop and evolve over generations, but individuals develop over the span of their lives. The change in a person from, say, age eighteen to age forty can be dramatic. Thus it's quite erroneous to claim that people are "bad" by nature, just as it's er-

roneous to say that a person is born a cheat, or a thief, or a liar, and stays that way for life. He only stays that way if he does not grow. And by grow, we of course mean in a spiritual sense, including the four aspects that we mentioned in the last chapter: preventive mind-set, refined awareness, distinguishing the inner realm and character growth. When a person grows in this fashion, the immature qualities of his character – lying, cheating, pettiness and so forth – gradually give way to the qualities of a developed person, including confidence, openness and trust. Thus to solve the trust problem, we must solve the problem of how to cultivate growth in individuals. I submit that such cultivation must begin where people make their homes and raise their kids; in the streets, blocks and households that form our neighborhoods and communities. That's where the most critical confidence gap is right now.

5.8 Provide A Structure Through Which People Can Demonstrate Grass Roots Responsibility

Getting back to Carol, we have a situation where there are two households in the neighborhood that require attention. There is Carol, who is feeling a bit uncomfortable living where she is, and there is John Dillinger, a murdering robber, or so we imagine, who should probably be locked up. As much as we would like to clap Dillinger and his cohorts in jail, I suggest that the preventive approach requires us to leave Dillinger alone for the moment, and to instead put our attention on Carol. Understand that there is nothing to stop Carol from pulling up stakes and leaving town; from putting as much distance as she can between herself and the character next door. Many people have already done that. They long ago decided that there were too many criminals operating in this area for their liking, and they headed for places where you didn't have to worry about these things. In other words, when faced with a tough problem, they ran away from it. It's a common reaction. Carol however, is still here. She and her husband have called Westchester home for many years and you can tell from talking to them that they have no desire to live anywhere else. Other folks have stayed, of course, but few of them have the qualities that Carol has. Carol is fully cognizant of the crime problems we're facing, and indeed has a man living next door who may well be a criminal, yet she apparently sees enough good in this neighborhood to want to remain here. What's more, she has demonstrated that she is one of those rare people in whom you can have confidence. Such people as she deserve all the support we can give them. Her value to the community is such that we should want to make her troubles, our troubles. We should not be comfortable until she is comfortable. The problem is that there is no arm of the government that provides this kind of support; no agency that reaches this far

down into the grass roots; that concerns itself with this level of detail regarding the lives of individuals. Indeed, the government seems to work in just the opposite fashion. Rather than getting more involved in people's lives, we aim to be as little involved as possible. Rather than learning as much as we can about personal situations, so that we can serve folks better, we build legal walls to shield one's life from public scrutiny. We institute privacy laws and what-not that protect your right to be left alone. Enforcing rights ... that's what the system is good at. But enforcement, as we've seen, is of little value when what you're looking for is plain, ordinary decency.

How then, are we going to support Carol? What can we do to make her more comfortable living where she is? The things that come to mind first, of course, are the devices which provide us with physical security: dead bolts, alarm systems, German shepherds. With a modest investment you can easily transform your house into a veritable fortress. Most of Westchester's residents have already taken these measures, myself included. But although such devices give us a sort of instant gratification, they don't come close to the security that a trustworthy neighbor provides. How could they? No matter how strong are the bars on your windows and the locks on your doors, no matter how big your dog is, when you're surrounded by people whom you know nothing about, and who have no interest in your well-being as far as you know, you might as well be living in prison. Indeed, this is exactly how people live these days. Everyone, from janitors to CEOs to the President of the United States, we all have a personal bunker where we can ensconce ourselves from a threatening world. And the wealthier and more powerful you are, the more inaccessible that bunker becomes. But do security devices really give you more security? How does it feel, for example, to visit a shopping plaza where the supermarket entrance is framed by a metal detector, and the liquor store next door is covered by a metal grate at night? Or where the banks tellers, the motel clerks, and even the sergeant at the police desk work behind bullet-proof glass? These things have become so commonplace that we hardly notice them anymore, but I'd like to suggest that the feeling they convey is not one of safety, but of potential danger. People clamor for more police, as if that were the solution, but how does it look to see policemen everywhere you go? We even have them in the schools now. They're supposed to be there to improve our sense of security, but it seems to me that they have just the opposite effect. A cautious parent would think twice about enrolling his kid in a school where armed officers must patrol the corridors.

How safe do you feel when you have to keep every garden tool, lawn mower and patio chair chained and padlocked whenever you're not using it? Or to have to lock and alarm your car, and install a "Club" every single time you leave it unattended, even if it's just for five minutes? What impression do you get from a neighborhood where every other house has an alarm company sign

out front? Or where the backyards are converted into dog pens for Rottweilers and Doberman pinschers? And I won't even speculate about how many people are keeping guns in the house these days. I apologize for reverting to my negative view, but when I said we are doused with negativity at every turn, this is what I meant. We are surrounded by security, so how come we don't feel any more secure? Clearly we're not going to do away with metal detectors and window bars anytime soon, but we need to adopt some balancing measures; something that provides a true sense of security; that points towards improving, rather than deteriorating conditions; that makes you feel better, not worse, about the community where you live.

I'll tell you what makes me feel more secure: not having to face things alone. Even when it looks like the tide is going to swamp us all, it feels better to have other people with you in the boat. There are any number of vehicles that can bring folks together; that can create a common ground for us to stand on. I'm thinking of the various associations, clubs, social organizations and church groups that you commonly find in communities. But there is one collaboration that stands out as the perfect way to address the concerns of people like Carol. It's the one program that brings folks together for the specific purpose of reducing crime: Neighborhood Watch.

In Prince George's County where I live, Neighborhood Watch is a program that the police administer. I say administer, but there isn't much that they do in the way of administration. Each police district has a designated Neighborhood Watch officer. To get started you must provide him with some proof of minimum support in your area for the program. Once this is done, he approves your application, and a letter is written to the Department of Public Works, which is authorized to install two standard Neighborhood Watch signs at the places you designate. It used to be that in order to qualify for the signs, you had to conduct what the police call a "Home Security Survey". You inspect people's homes, checking off a list of items pertaining to the physical security of the property; things like what type of door locks are installed, what kind of windows, outdoor lighting, shrubs that can conceal a burglar, and so forth. "Block Captains" were designated to do this. To become a Block Captain you watched a short training video about home security. It seems the procedure has changed, however. I believe all you're required to do now is to get enough people to take an inventory of their valuables and engrave them with an identification number. They call this "Operation ID", and each resident who participates gets a sticker to put on his window. Again, if enough residents take part, two Neighborhood Watch signs are installed.

It doesn't sound like much, does it? Marking your valuables and installing better locks on your doors are good things to do, but they hardly seem like the remedy for all our ills. Moreover, such actions belong to the bunker-building

style of security. They don't necessarily bring people together. However, there is a third aspect of Neighborhood Watch that falls more in line with the preventive approach to crime. The police call it the "Nosy Neighbor" principle. They instruct you to get to know the neighbors who live closest to you – on either side, behind you, and across the street. Find out who they are, who lives with them, what cars they drive, what their routines are, and so forth. The idea is that the better you know your neighbors, the easier it is for you to spot things that are suspicious or out of place. Nosy Neighbor is where we find a better opportunity for interaction. It gives us an opening to establish a relationship with people who might otherwise remain inaccessible.

These three components – Nosy Neighbor, Operation ID, and Home Security Survey – form the basis for the police-defined Neighborhood Watch program. They suggest that there be a Watch Coordinator who holds meetings and communicates with the police, and Block Captains who visit homes and distribute printed materials. What usually happens is that there is a start-up meeting where a county officer gives a short talk to your group about the principles of the program. The signs are approved and installed, and from there you're pretty much on your own.

In Westchester we have gone a step further. There is a group of about forty of us who participate in a Community Patrol. Each patroller is assigned one day per month to drive the neighborhood. He sticks magnetic "Patrol" signs on the car, picks up his partner if he has one, and cruises the streets for an hour or two. We use a cellular phone for communicating. Any suspicious activity is noted in a log, and if necessary, reported to the police. Patrollers are instructed that they must never try to intervene if they see a crime taking place, but to instead call it in. I should tell you, however, that we almost never witness crimes in progress, not serious ones anyway. Occasionally you might come across an abandoned car that turns out to be stolen, or witness young people drinking beer. But otherwise the Patrol works mainly as a Nosy Neighbor on wheels. It's a public relations tool. The Patrol allows you to approach other residents in a non-threatening way. It gives you the opportunity to exchange a wave and a hello, and to perhaps strike up a friendly conversation. It's a good way to discover what has been happening on a particular street or block. Moreover, it allows neighbors to get involved in crime prevention in a concrete manner. You can only talk about a problem for so long before eventually it comes time to take action. In the Patrol we have a specific action for people to perform. People need this. They need something explicit, something that doesn't make them think too hard. A patroller is required to set aside an hour or so of his time each month, and the rest is taken care of. Someone else writes up the schedule. Someone else worries about the gear. Someone else pays the phone bill. You just show up on your day, pick up the stuff and drive. It couldn't be more simple.

Truthfully, the most important aspect of the Community Patrol is not crime prevention; rather, it's the effect that the Patrol has on collective awareness. It grabs your attention, not in a flashy way, but quietly. Attention is a subtle thing. It is not completely under your own control. With the right moves you can handle someone else's attention; you can take over the reins of his or her mind for a moment or two. That's what the Patrol does. At the very least it shows that people are awake, alert and taking notice of what's going on in the vicinity of their homes. If we never prevented a single crime – and I do believe that crimes have been prevented – but even if that weren't so, the Patrol would at least have the effect of making people feel better about living here. Folks have told me that seeing the Patrol gave them a tangible sense of reassurance. It changed the atmosphere on their street. But imagine being reassured by a pair of seventy-somethings, cruising up and down with their bifocals and their hearing aids. Imagine residents getting a greater sense of security from a pokey senior citizen, who smiles and gives you a tip of the hat, than they do from a burly uniformed officer with pistol and nightstick at the ready. What a contrast ... what a lesson ... it's fabulous! And it's exactly what communities like this need. Not an increased police presence, not more security cameras, not a show of force, but a show of concern, a demonstration of responsibility, by those who are closest to you. Such reassurance is invaluable. And it can only come from ourselves. Only we friends and neighbors can create it.

I'd like to suggest that at a very basic level, Neighborhood Watch is the perfect vehicle for establishing trust within the community. It meets all of the key criteria:

- It is a true grass roots operation.
- It puts community attention back on itself.
- It promotes self-sufficiency.
- It does not involve force.
- Participation is completely voluntary.
- It is conducted in, and concerned with the garden zone.
- It influences the inside environment, while acting from the outside environment.
- Although not purely preventive, it has a strong component of prevention.
- It is an essentially positive rather than negative activity.

The last point is particularly important. Crime is a deeply negative issue. As we have seen, dealing with it can be very stressful. You want people to get involved, but at the same time you want them to find the positive path, to practice subjectivity, to be involved yet detached. I submit that the combination of Neighborhood Watch and Garden Zone Management can fill the subjectivity gap

left by the traditional approach to crime, because instead of dwelling on short-term problems, it points to long-term solutions. In this respect Neighborhood Watch is actually just a beginning. It's a temporary measure, a rough framework that we can build on. Eventually, ideally, if real progress is made, we will have eliminated crime from the neighborhood altogether. But we won't eliminate Neighborhood Watch – not entirely at least. It will grow into something broader, greater in scope, less concerned with gross criminal activity, and more concerned with the finer aspects of community life. It will become less of a security tool and more of an educational one.

The other aspect of Neighborhood Watch that is crucial is that it is purely voluntary. You don't ever force people to participate. You can suggest, you can cajole, you might even nag, but if you compel people to take part, you deny them the opportunity to show that they are able to take the initiative, to come forward on their own. When we speak of providing a structure for grass roots responsibility, this is how we start – with a program of voluntary service to the people with whom you live; that is to say, to your immediate community. I submit that Neighborhood Watch is a service that fits the broadest definition of responsible action. We've seen how hard it is to define the word "responsible". The more you think about it, the deeper you are drawn into a tangled thicket where one must decide which of the countless actions we take are morally right, and which aren't. What we concluded was that responsible thinking means first of all that you are able to distinguish what choices are available to you. When the options are more clearly laid out, you can make a better decision about which one to select. A person who is not required to help his community, but does so anyway, demonstrates that as a minimum he recognizes that the community has needs, and that there are indeed paths of action that can serve those needs. This alone distinguishes him as a person of greater development, of refined sensitivity. Moreover, Neighborhood Watch is as purely and spontaneously civic-minded as you can get. You really don't have to do much to be part of it. Just exercise your attention a little; allow your focus of concern to broaden just a tiny bit so that it includes your neighbor. You can't get more basic than that when you talk about community service. Yet the effect is quite far-reaching. It shows that you and I are on the same side; that I can count on you. That's a rare circumstance in this age of conflict and confrontation. When we have folks living together who have greater sensitivity, who look out for one another, and can count on each other, that's where we find the foundation for trust.

There's one thing that worries me, however. Are we asking too much of people with this program? Is it too much to expect from a person that he show concern for the guy next door?

It's a disturbing thought. To think that this minimum degree of participation, to merely cast an interested glance now and then towards your

neighbor's home, that even this smallest of gestures might be beyond the ability of one's fellow citizens. But I have to tell you, this is probably the case for most people. I've seen it myself. In a way it's like dealing with kids. Kids don't have a sense of caring. It hasn't developed yet. They might pretend that they care; we have them practice make-believe, kissy-caring exercises, and recite stock, caring phrases, but none of this gets to the heart, the spiritual heart, of what constitutes genuine caring. As we've already discussed, the average kid is more likely to laugh and jeer when another person is hurt, and you can't seriously expect a kid to keep an eye on another person. I submit that in exactly the same way most of the adult population is also unable to experience genuine, personal concern for their neighbors. More precisely, the ability is there, within them, but it hasn't yet been uncovered. Kids though, are innocent about their undeveloped character. They're not at all ashamed of themselves, and they can easily be forgiven. However, when it happens that a kid grows into adulthood, but his character doesn't grow with him, weird things result. The grown-up kid is a bit uneasy. On some level he recognizes his shortcomings, but he doesn't know how to come to terms with them, and if challenged about it, he might get angry or defensive. We've already gone over this in some detail, so I won't repeat the argument. The question we must address is whether there is a way to fix this problem, a way to draw out a person's caring side. Again, my contention is that people can change, they can grow, but you don't get them to grow by upbraiding them, or condemning them. It has gradually dawned on me that it does little good to keep on pointing out the problems; to keep on repeating how bad things are, and how pathetic people are. The enlightened people already know, and the unenlightened don't understand anyway. This is one of my own shortcomings. I have difficulty resisting the urge to rant about these things. I would like to point out, however, that I'm not the only one who makes this mistake. Educators, political leaders, and members of the clergy in particular are also guilty of hammering us with this caring business. I've sat through sermons where the preacher literally screamed at his congregation about their lack of "love", and he was exactly on target with his criticism. But I guarantee you that not one of the folks sitting in church that day was changed one iota after listening to that sermon. Furthermore, they could hear the same sermon every week for twenty years and not be changed by it. When I say changed, I mean spiritually changed, as in sustaining some degree of spiritual growth.

A clergyman may be skilled in the interpretation of, say, Bible passages, and he may also be quite eloquent about explaining the complexities of such material to the rest of us, but intellectual understanding is only half the story. There also has to be *experiential* understanding in order for knowledge to be complete. Forgive me for beating this point to death, but it is so fundamental that, like lack of love, it is a topic that merits at least a sermon, if not a tirade. Lord Christ himself

seemed to be making this point, particularly when he spoke so harshly of the "scribes and Pharisees". In certain New Testament passages Jesus is reported to have called these law experts blind.²¹ What's a little frightening is that after two thousand years nothing has really changed; the world is *still* run by lawyers. That's because most of us still haven't gotten the point. Clearly Christ and his evangelists were contrasting one's ordinary, intellectual understanding of scripture with something deeper, and what else could that deeper something be other than experiential knowledge? People talk about experience in a way that connects it to past events; things that happened before that left them with impressions and memories. However, the kind of experience we're trying to get a handle on in this discussion is much more immediate. The past after all doesn't exist. Even the events of a few seconds ago are now only memories. The experiential knowledge that complements the intellect is not a memory, but something altogether different. It's direct. It's right here, right now. I have also attended church where the service included a short period of silent prayer. The whole assemblage gets quiet; no singing, no shouting, no organ music even. I would argue that the people in attendance were more deeply affected by that brief minute of silence than they were by anything else in the service that morning. It was probably the only time all week where they were able to sit quietly with themselves, awake yet at rest, and experience nothing at all, just silence. That's what the infinite sounds like. Like nothing. It's interesting to read verses that describe how the voice of God said this or that to various biblical characters, yet you can't help but wonder how that voice must have sounded. What I'm starting to think is that if there is a voice of God for us to hear, surely it must be contained within that silence that we experience during the quiet moments.

²¹ Matthew 15:14 "They are blind leaders of the blind."

Matthew 23:17 "Blind fools!"

Luke 6:39 "One blind man cannot lead another one."

John 9:41 "If you were blind, then you would not be guilty; but since you claim that you can see, this means that you are still guilty."

The Good News Bible Today's English Version, 2nd ed. (New York, The American Bible Society, 1992)

Compare this to Plato:

"But surely 'blind' is just how you would describe men who have no true knowledge of reality ..."

Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 2cd Edition (revised), 1987) section 484c, p. 277.

5.9 Use Courtesy As An On-Ramp To The Path Of Spiritual Growth

In order to coax people into joining the Neighborhood Watch program we need to forgo the frontal assault on their character and look for a different angle of attack. If as we've suggested, people are like kids, then we should work with them as we would with kids. I have two techniques in mind: positive reinforcement and gimmickry.

Have you ever looked on during the practice session of a youth sports team, say a soccer or a baseball team, and observed how the coach handled his players? Some coaches are caustic and derisive: "You wimp! You loser! My grandmother could do better than that!" Others are no-nonsense disciplinarians, drill sergeant types. I'd like to suggest that the best coaches are the ones who are demanding, but at the same time positive and encouraging. No matter what the level of a youngster's ability, or what the outcome of the competition, they are always able to find something good about his or her performance. They use praise rather than abuse to inspire a kid. My swimming coach buddy Charlie Taylor is an expert in this method. Parents watch in fascination as he puts the children through their workouts. They study his technique to see how he manages to get the best out of the swimmers without showing a hint of anger or impatience. Taylor is able to do this because he is naturally positive, not only about swimming, but about everything in life. He doesn't brood about things, but instead dives into activity with innocent enthusiasm. Kids soak this up. They haven't yet developed the judgmental attitude that we grown-ups have, so when an adult leader shows enthusiasm, about anything at all, the kids are enthusiastic too. But Taylor's methods require work. He devotes a great deal of individual attention to his swimmers. That's the kind of attention that we need to be giving to neighborhood residents. We need to enthusiastically engage them in a crime prevention program such that whenever someone shows the smallest amount of support for it, we acknowledge and reward them somehow. If necessary, we have to *pretend* that people are doing a good job, and that things are getting better, even if they aren't. The Patrol lends itself well to this sort of positive reinforcement, because it gives you immediate feedback. People wave at you, they smile, they even thank you for it.

The positive signs that Charlie uses to encourage his kids occur on the individual level. He identifies the things that a swimmer is doing that improve his personal performance – his stroke, his kick, his lap times – and he provides feedback to the swimmer so that he or she can further refine those areas. We on the other hand must come up with positive feedback for an entire community. Let me point out that merely thinking in these terms, that what is good for everyone is good for me, having that thought alone is a big step for a person. It takes you

out of the field of competition, and moves you into the realm of cooperation. I know ... competition is vital to the economy ... it keeps America growing ... we need the competitive spirit, blah, blah ... sure. Look, it's fallacious thinking. When competition is for fun, for sport, it's great. It's a pleasant diversion. But when it comes to real life, competition defeats people. It wipes them out. Am I wrong about this? Isn't it true that in our present society the losers are left behind, to struggle on their own? Perhaps it wasn't intended to work that way, but that sure is how things have turned out. If you want evidence of this, take a short ride through some of the poorer neighborhoods of D.C., or of any big city for that matter. Or turn on the TV and witness the poverty of folks living in other countries, our neighbors even, just across the Rio Grande. Is there any doubt that the people living in those areas wound up on life's losing side, and that the "competitive spirit" put them there?

Creating a community requires that you adopt the opposite view; not the view of a competitor, but that of a collaborator. It requires that people acknowledge that we're all in it together, where "all" includes everyone, and "it" means (pick one): life in general, the survival of the planet, the evolution of mankind, or all of the above. What I've been trying to tell folks here is that we're all in this *neighborhood* together. We can talk about the planet later, but for starters people have to recognize that we, the people of Westchester, are alone in our concern for this obscure corner of the world. No one else gives a rat's tail about it. We must at least acknowledge each other's existence, and know that there are compelling reasons to look out for one another. When people understand this, it opens up a much wider range of possibilities for positive reinforcement; not just crime statistics, but anything that impacts the quality of life; i.e., that affects safety, respect for the garden zone, courtesy, and ultimately awareness. There are countless things that can serve to reward the efforts of the Neighborhood Watchers: Old man Bolduc finally cut his lawn. Young Ronnie Jones is back in school again. We haven't been seeing so much trash on the road. Mrs. D.'s vegetable garden came up nicely this year. Home values are creeping back up again. All of the Westchester eighth graders made the honor role. If it happened in the neighborhood, and it was positive, let's take credit for it. So what if it wasn't directly connected to Neighborhood Watch. Let's start looking at the achievements of everyone as if they were our own. Even a kid's grades. Hell ... especially a kid's grades. Clearly a kid who is doing well in math and English is less likely to be out stealing cars at night.

The strengthening of Neighborhood Watch activities, like the development of a swimmer's strokes, requires refinement of action. In both cases we see that in order to progress, one's actions must become more pure. For our purposes, relative to the quality of life scheme, pure action and courteous action are pretty much equivalent. Pure action is just that, action alone. Courteous action is pure

action with just the slightest positive spin to it. Raise your hand twelve inches and put it down. That's pure action. Now raise your hand six inches, and put it down. That action is more pure. Now raise it three inches; then one inch; then one-half. Now look at your hand and imagine that you're going to raise it, but don't go anywhere. Feel the motion internally; feel your muscles tense up and relax. Now close your eyes and just think about moving your hand. Have the thought of instructing your arm muscle to tense up, but don't actually tense it. Send the mental signal down there, but don't follow through with it. An exercise like this gives us a rough idea of how action can become more pure. You are exploring the territory where mind and body connect; taking your attention closer to the source of the action.

Going a step further, to add spin to an action means that you introduce a non-physical component to it. This is not the same as the spin that politicians apply to their public disclosures. It goes deeper than that. There is an entire spectrum of emotions and intentions attached to the things we do. We can perform an action sweetly, angrily, joyously, maliciously. We can do something cautiously, eagerly, grudgingly and so forth. All of these shades of intent belong to the non-material realm of existence, the inner realm. Since the non-material "half" of the human form is infinite in nature, you could say that there is a universe of spins available to us. Strange though it is to say, the less spin on your action, the better. Less spin creates a larger effect. A technician who can tweak the right screw at the right moment can produce a result that a hundred others might not accomplish in a year of effort. Likewise the highest form of courtesy involves the smallest of gestures, the least amount of positive spin. (I must again acknowledge that there is imprecision in my argument. The term "positive spin" is not very well defined. The lack of definition stems from the fact that such notions arise from the subjective side of life. As we've already seen, subjective phenomena don't readily lend themselves to the rules of logic.)

Normally everything you do has some type of spin attached to it; every action is associated with some intent, some emotion, some flavor and feeling. But what would happen if we practiced an activity with no spin at all, positive, negative or otherwise? Say we did little tricks for our neighbors? Stunts ... feats of illusion ... something that had no apparent moral value; action just for the sake of action. Say we performed these tricks in public view, perhaps not right in front of people, but just off to the periphery of their vision. No one would have a clue what it meant, but it would certainly get their attention, and I'll bet that if we did it enthusiastically enough, folks would join in. Pretty soon you would have everyone in the neighborhood cutting capers on their front lawns.

How about this: A group of us assemble on a street corner, and we all balance flower pots on our heads. I submit that such an act would have a sublime effect on collective awareness. If these were folks who, apart from their loony balancing act, otherwise behaved normally, the effect would be even deeper. And if the most respected members of the community joined in, then folks would really sit up and take notice. You wouldn't offer an explanation for why you were doing this trick. You would just do it, making sure you had extra pots handy should others get the urge to join you. Think of it as a sort of human pronking – the playful leaps that African gazelles perform which seem to have no purpose (but which might actually serve to distract predators.) I suggest that such harmless, seemingly inconsequential stunts, if done innocently, would demonstrate two things: (a) what it means to come together, and (b) what it means to perform pure action. Not responsible action, not action filled with stress and anxiety about one's obligations, just action alone, for the pure joy of it.

Once people start to join in, some of them will no doubt wonder what the true aim is. You might tell them that it was part of crime prevention program, but generally you let folks figure it out on their own. Let them develop an experiential appreciation for the purpose. Let them understand from the experiential angle the distinction between non-action, pure action, and courteous action. The intellectual understanding will come later. Or it may never come. Let's face it, there are many people who will not grasp the logic of these arguments. But it's not that important. The main thing is to orient folks towards more refined areas of activity. Eventually it may dawn on them that what these gimmicks are really about is the introduction of a tiny amount of positive intent to one's action. In other words, they are about courtesy.

Since people aren't getting an explanation for why we are doing these things, they would have to participate on faith alone so to speak. That's why the most respected community members have to be involved. Say that Elaine is a model citizen. She helps at the shelter, volunteers at school, sings in the church choir, etc. Many people know Elaine, and she is highly regarded as a solid contributor to the community welfare. Now we notice that Elaine is balancing geraniums on her head. On one hand it appears that she has lost her marbles. On the other we know that she is among the sanest and most responsible people in the neighborhood. Clearly she takes this flower pot thing seriously: getting up early on Saturday, getting down to the corner with her potted plant, balancing the thing ever so carefully. And furthermore, she wants the rest of us come down there too, and to bring pots for ourselves. I wouldn't do it otherwise, but this is after all Elaine who is suggesting it ... so hey ... why not!

A person who reasons this way has already introduced a certain amount of positive spin to the stunt. Why? Because he is doing it out of recognition and respect for Elaine's character. This alone transforms the act from pure action to

courteous action. It adds a new dimension to a seemingly meaningless performance. Others who are perhaps more innocent in their thinking will join Elaine because of her infectious enthusiasm. Still others might join because they don't want to be the oddball on the block, the only one who doesn't have flowers on his or her head. And there is of course the possibility that a few folks might actually understand the real purpose of the exercise, and participate simply for the blissful pleasure of practicing pure action with a few of their friends. Any reason at all will do. It is the act itself that matters. The flower pot will do the teaching.

Maybe you think I'm kidding with this idea. Perhaps you're wondering whether I myself haven't lost a marble or two. But what if I told you that I have already induced people to execute a stunt of sorts? Not in the same league as the flower pot act, but a stunt nevertheless, the Community Patrol requires folks to don some conspicuous head gear, and to go forth into the neighborhood to perform for the public. Wearing the green "Westchester Watch" ball-caps and carrying their cell phones, the patrollers don't look quite as odd as a pot-bearer might, but they aren't exactly dashing either. Folks who see them must surely wonder who they are and why they are out there. The difference between patrolling and balancing flower pots is that the patrol act has more spin to it. Certainly the people who participate in the Patrol must do so out of a sense of responsibility. It's impossible to know for sure what each person feels while he is cruising the neighborhood, but initially at least, he is motivated by a desire to do some good for the community. Such motivation constitutes a goodly amount of spin. Too much spin in fact. If you're trying to demonstrate how finer levels of action can produce a greater effect, you want your exercise to be as spin-free as possible. I wonder if we could perhaps get people to patrol *and* juggle pots. Now *that* would be a neat gimmick! It would combine two kinds of action: one that is unmistakably positive and responsible, and another that is closer to our spin-free ideal. This is in fact what I would like to propose: to have one guy driving a patrol car, and another guy on the roof doing the flower pot trick. Or if a car roof is too precarious, perhaps we can use a pickup truck. We'll have the main group of pot handlers on a prominent street corner, a few others here and there on front lawns, and two or three folks seated on folding chairs that have been set up in the back of the truck.

As crazy as this all sounds, I submit that it would not be the least bit crazy if the most enlightened and respected community members, the leaders, were involved.²² Unfortunately however, we're faced with some rather large obstacles in this regard. We have already determined that in the first place, there doesn't

²² Apparently these ideas aren't as novel as they might seem. This past summer a group of concerned Prince Georgians invented a new dance called the "Pride Slide" and they've been practicing it alongside the busy Central Avenue artery. That's right ... some of our most respected and responsible community leaders are out dancing in traffic!

exist a community here in the suburbs, because we're all living anonymously, and furthermore, there are no real leaders to speak of either. And it's not at all clear that a gimmick like this would serve to establish leadership. If just one or two people came forward, and no one else in the community knew who they were, or understood where they were coming from, surely they would be looked on as crackpots or fanatics, and maybe even locked up. Yet isn't it ironic that we view folks wearing potted plants as weirdos, but it's perfectly okay for a group of teenagers to be loitering in the park – lighting marijuana "blunts", sipping cans of beer, and tossing their trash behind them as they leave. Isn't it depressing that we would look askance at the actions of a few concerned neighbors who are trying to improve community awareness, yet we fully accept the normality of people with time, money and brain cells to burn who spend hours playing Bingo at the firehouse, buying lottery scratch-offs at the 7-Eleven, or staring mindlessly at a Keno screen. And if you really wanted to expose the flimsiness of what we consider normal in Western society, you could raise questions about almost everything: from food to clothing to television; from nail salons to baseball cards to canned soda. From the perspective of certain other cultures that exist on this planet, the customary practices of us Americans must appear downright bizarre.

But the most bizarre circumstance of all is our alien form of living arrangement: sprawling stacks of concrete bunkers that allow virtually no communication or cooperation among occupants; closed, private studios where urbanites pass their entire lives with barely a hello to the guy in the next dwelling; impenetrable hideouts that spring from the fearful, suspicious mentality of the modern age. These aren't homes, they're isolation chambers. A prison convict has better connections to the outside world.

In any event, what I'm trying to come up with is some means by which we can nudge people into a new frame of reference; to wake them from their slumber, yet not frighten them too much. But I'm afraid that until we make some progress in overcoming anonymity, and until we can identify some clear neighborhood leadership, say in the person of a Garden Zone Manager, we'll have to settle for a gimmick that falls somewhat short of the ideal, and employ leaders who don't actually have much leadership authority. Among the gimmicks that might work as an intermediate step in refining neighborhood action is a walking patrol. A walking patrol is similar to a driving patrol in purpose, but fairly distinct in terms of how it operates. In the first place it involves more people acting together in a group; I'm thinking that a half-dozen or so would be a good number. Also, the action of a walking patrol would be a degree or two more pure than driving, because the physical movement required, strolling instead of sitting behind the wheel of a car, is arguably a more natural action. Walking also provides more public exposure and personal interaction for the people who participate. A person's gait reveals a lot about him. It exposes your soul to public view

more than any other body movement. Community leaders striding along neighborhood streets, putting their strength of character on display, will excite awareness and create a positive influence on the inside environment. Moreover, a walking patrol would lend itself more readily towards the formation of a ritual type of activity. I submit that this is essentially the direction we're headed with all of this – towards the creation of community rituals that exhibit finer levels of action. You might say that by establishing such rituals we are redefining what courtesy means. But it's not so much a definition as it is a discovery. If it's true that real courtesy has been lost in our society, then what we're doing here is like prying open a box of relics that was hidden in a dusty attic. It's an attempt to make folks see that a key ingredient in interpersonal relations has been missing. The missing ingredient is the non-action of awareness, from which the pure action of courtesy arises.

If this reasoning sounds too abstruse, you can look at it this way: Everyone would agree that inquiring after the health of a friend or family member is a courteous thing to do. Now we're proposing a refinement of that activity; we're suggesting that it would also be courteous to look in on the neighbors once in a while. Furthermore, with the walking patrol you would not only check up on the guy next door, but also the people on the next block, and in other parts of the neighborhood, and you would do it not just for friends and family members, but for anyone. I suggest that by these methods we are raising the standard of courtesy just a bit. Or, since smaller acts represent greater courtesy, you might say that we are lowering the standard of courtesy with this scheme. A ritual like the walking patrol could offer some concrete support to Carol in her situation with John Dillinger. When the Patrol looks in on Carol, it is demonstrating that Carol doesn't just live in a house on Westchester Drive, but that her home includes the entire neighborhood, and that we patrollers are part of her household. Carol would no longer feel as though she were stuck on an island with this Dillinger guy. With the introduction of a patrol her island becomes instantly larger, and she is suddenly surrounded by friendly natives. Moreover, the friendly natives have friends on other islands, and those friends have other friends, and so on. Thus Carol finds that she is connected to a wide network of potential support.

Dillinger too would find himself surrounded by this network, for the Patrol would look in on him as well. As a criminal he might not welcome outsiders taking such a keen interest in his personal life, but it's important to extend to him the same consideration that we give to any neighbor. He too would be included in our extended household, at least initially. I submit that when you treat people straight like this, that it works strongly to your advantage relative to crime prevention. One would ordinarily think that having someone like Dillinger in the neighborhood would be a detriment to the community, but that's only the case when you don't have a real community; that is to say, a Natural Community,

with strong common interest, strong geography, and significant shared spirit. In a real community we would be happy to have Dillinger in our midst. It's in our best interest to have him here. With intelligent people looking in on him periodically, it would quickly become clear that he was a person who posed a potential threat, just like the slasher Skip that we talked about (see Chapter 2). Clearly people like Dillinger and Skip are best kept under close supervision, and what better way to supervise them than to have them right here with us. You don't want to give a guy like Dillinger the opportunity to commit crimes. Having him in the community allows us to learn more about his character, and thus to perhaps anticipate what his moves might be. Moreover, HE will know that WE know what kind of person he is. If his mind works like a typical criminal – in other words, as a child's mind works – this knowledge alone will serve to modify his behavior. Just as a kid sees and responds to the aura of a responsible adult, John Dillinger would respond to the aura of a responsible community.

5.10 Elevate The Status Of Community Service. Create A New Profession

The difference between the program we would use to refine the action of neighbors and the program that Coach Taylor employs with kids on the swim team is that in the case of swimmers, all of the participants inevitably leave the club. They graduate from high school and move on to other endeavors. Rarely does a swimmer stay involved in the sport once he or she becomes too old to compete. A few become coaches themselves, and some may swim in college, but almost no one stays in touch with the community where they were raised, to work with other youngsters who are coming up behind them. It's as though Taylor only takes the kids so far, and then everything comes to an abrupt halt. You end up asking yourself, what now? What was that all about? Now that I'm facing life for real, what does swimming have to do with it?

I'd like to suggest that Garden Zone Management can fill the need for something lasting and meaningful. It can provide a program of development that will involve a kid for his entire life, and which doesn't require that you be an exceptional athlete to participate. The thrust of the program is to develop people who will specialize in grass roots community service, who will make community service their job. It centers around crime prevention, but as we've seen, a truly preventive approach to crime encompasses a wide range of activities. It goes far beyond the "crime fighting" measures employed by the police.

The program would focus very narrowly on parochial, neighborhood-level service, and would initially operate in areas that were relatively crime free. You wouldn't try to institute Garden Zone Management in a troubled, inner-city area,

not unless there was a serious show of support from a goodly number of people who were willing to dedicate themselves to it. Nor would you employ it in a desperate, famine-stricken rural encampment, unless, again, people wanted to move there and stay there until the basic necessities of life were established, and the community was able to sustain itself. However, I am convinced that the program could indeed work anywhere provided that enough folks were ready to make a long-term commitment to it. For that's what the program would require, a lifetime commitment essentially. Not that you would be chained to your house, but it's expected that you would adopt the neighborhood as your permanent home. You might take a leave of absence, a trip, go off to college, etc., but as a Garden Zone Manager you would always return to where your roots were. It is this high level of commitment that distinguishes Garden Zone Management from other community service programs. That plus the spiritual aspect of it.

There are thus two main messages that we want to convey to people about this program. To potential neighborhood leaders the message is: commitment and spiritual growth. In order for the program to succeed we must find people who will recognize and respond to the call for lifelong membership in a community and for lifelong spiritual development. Not only must these leaders recognize the importance of the community, but conversely, the community must eventually recognize them.

Whether or not this recognition is forthcoming will depend on the success of gimmicks like a walking patrol or a pot juggling trick. It is with the Patrol that we would convey the second message, the message that ordinary residents should be getting. The message for them is: courtesy above all else. This point we will get across by physically – and spiritually – demonstrating it.

You can start a walking patrol with pretty much anyone, kids even, but it's preferable that we draw our patrollers from the potential leaders, from the pool of recognized community members. However, identifying committed, civic-minded adults who have leadership qualities, and who also have some degree of spiritual advancement is not a simple matter. Certainly the Garden Zone Manager would participate since his job description requires that he reach out to people, and that he display purity of action, refined awareness and so forth. Where the manager himself will come from is a whole other problem. But assuming that we have one, once we get beyond him, the prospects are somewhat cloudy. I suppose that if we think in terms of having to satisfy a spiritual need, the people who would come to mind first are the local clergy. There aren't many folks who make it their business to be concerned with spirituality at the grass roots of American society, but among the few that do are the church pastors. Yet these local pastors don't get out very much. Not that I've seen. We do have the Jehovah's Witnesses, who go door-to-door proselytizing, but the Witnesses are not much interested in civic responsibility. Other Christian denominations –

Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists – are not quite so civically disconnected, but they too have very little presence in these neighborhoods, other than the fact that some of their congregations happen to live here. I would argue that the Garden Zone Management program would provide an excellent opportunity for church leaders to establish a neighborhood presence; to truly lead the community, including people who don't necessarily attend their church. The pastors could lead not only from the pulpit, but in a more down-to-earth fashion, as a patrol walker, say.

The closest place of worship to Westchester is a Baptist church (First Baptist of Camp Springs, Reverend Robert L. Jordan, Pastor), and I have indeed listened to sermons up there that advanced the idea of extending the reach of faith outside the walls of the church. It's an idea that differs somewhat from the traditional Baptist view, which viewed religion as a boat on a stormy ocean, and the faithful as folks who climbed on board. Preachers in other churches have echoed this message, saying that the works of religion should not stop at the church doors. However, with Baptists, and perhaps with other faiths as well, there may be a philosophical hurdle to deal with. Baptists are strong advocates of the separation of church and state. What this means is that they don't want governments forcing religion on people, or giving folks favorable treatment based on which religion they practice. What I'm wondering is, does becoming a Garden Zone Manager cause a conflict of interest in this regard? For example, if a minister/manager led a group of neighbors in a prayer, would that violate the separation rule? What if a cleric began suggesting to neighbors that they not have sex before marriage, or that they not eat meat on Fridays? A host of possibilities comes to mind when you think about what kind of influence a clergyman could have as a neighborhood manager. You might even argue that turning religious leaders into community leaders could actually be dangerous. Given the array of weird groups out there today, we might end up with a neighborhood of kooks and crackpots, people waiting for space aliens to pick them up. However, concerns such as these are moral in nature, and the whole idea is to avoid getting mired in moral issues. We're trying to refine action to the extent that we go beyond right and wrong. That's what spirituality entails. If the clergyman is indeed spiritual in this way, we don't care if he also happens to fast on Fridays, abstains from sex, or even hunts for aliens. None of that matters in the cosmic scheme of things. What does matter is the depth of his experience of the infinite aspect of life. Now certainly, you wouldn't recruit a machine-gun toting, radical fundamentalist to be a Garden Zone Manager. You want to stick with folks whose practices are clearly life-supporting. In this respect we may indeed favor some religions over others. Perhaps we could make it up to the radicals by offering them jobs with the police. That's the place where they fit in best, with the forceful, reactive guys.

Not only does the separation of church and state present a potential roadblock to recruiting clerics into Garden Zone Management, there may be another philosophical issue to deal with. People are undoubtedly going to raise the question of which religions, and which religious leaders, get top billing; of who among them should occupy the position of highest authority when it comes to questions of spirituality. This may turn out to be an even thornier problem than the other. What I've discovered is that members of the clergy tend to guard the tenets of their particular faith quite vigorously against the perceived threat of outside influence. Many Christian believers, for example, seem to hold strongly to the notion that there cannot be a valid discussion of spirituality without reference to Christ. In other words, it is only in their church and through their church that one can come to grips with questions like the nature of existence, the meaning of God, and in particular, the question of what constitutes spirituality. Undoubtedly some folks would dismiss the arguments we've presented solely on the grounds that they did not originate from a source within their own religion. And it's not just Christians suspicious of non-Christians, it's one Christian denomination denouncing another. Given the long history of conflict among the world's religions you would think it was time for people of faith and good conscience to set aside their differences, especially in light of the tough challenges that man is facing in this modern age.

Now clearly this is not an earth-shaking pronouncement. Pretty much everyone understands the concept of religious tolerance. It's even written into the law. But I would suggest that we need to go further; that mere tolerance is not enough. I submit that community members should actually *agree* with each other on something of religious substance; that one ought to find in the religious doctrine of his neighbor some basic truth of life that you and he can concur on, regardless of which church you attend. Moreover, I submit that there exist areas of religious agreement even among faiths that appear to be in conflict with one another. In the spirit of uncovering such agreement, I have made a point of attending Sunday service at various churches in and around Camp Springs, and I can now expound a bit on the philosophical underpinning of the different religions. Keep in mind that the sermons delivered by local pastors are the closest that most ordinary folks ever come to an intellectual treatment of questions like, what is existence, what is God, and so forth. Yet despite the diligence of their practice, many people remain quite uneducated about the deeper aspects of their own religion. What I have found is that from a purely academic standpoint, the pastor usually stands head and shoulders above his flock. In comparing religions at the grass roots of society then, our best course is to listen to what the pastors have to say, and try to sift out basic elements of the theology from their words. It is as an attentive parishioner then, that I would like to offer a compilation of quotes that I gleaned from the sermons and lectures of local clerics during the past year or so.

(Figure 5.2) Obviously these few short quotations cannot begin to define a complete philosophy, but I offer them as evidence that it is indeed possible to locate common ground among the various churches and denominations.

I'd like to make one other point about the disagreements among religions. In the final analysis, it is only what you do that matters. Not what you think. Not what your principles are. Not your theology. Yet it seems that many in the religious community are missing this point. They get caught up in theoretical entanglements and lose sight of the real world. They snipe at one another rather than searching for the cosmic thread that links us all. Nevertheless, I'm confident that there are members of the clergy who rise above the theological disputes; who recognize that something deeper is at play. I'm certain that those folks will indeed see the value of what we're proposing with this Garden Zone Management plan. Besides, even people who wish to distance themselves from the abstract aspect of the program, who want to keep the intellectual stuff at arm's length, even they cannot object to the idea of promoting simple courtesy. I would think that the courtesy angle would receive at least tacit approval, if not outright endorsement, from anyone, regardless of their professed philosophy.

.....

Apart from the clergy, the other potential managers that come to mind are folks who grew up in the area, and whose occupation involves some sort of community outreach, particularly people who work with kids. I'm thinking specifically of school teachers who live locally, or recreation department folks – Boys & Girls Clubs, Maryland Parks and Planning employees, and so forth. A man like Charlie Taylor fits this description nicely. Having trained swimmers and managed pools in Temple Hills and Camp Springs for 25 years, he has a tremendous number of local contacts, and is highly respected not only as a coach, but as a counselor, mentor and overall community-oriented guy. So you see, when it comes to my own neighborhood, I can come up with specific candidates based on my personal connections to the community, and my own ability to assess a person's character, intelligence and civic-mindedness. In addition to Taylor, I could probably name six or eight other people who live or work nearby, including a priest or two. Nevertheless, I'm not all that confident about my power to attract support. You have to command a good amount of respect to get people to carry out some of the the gimmicks we proposed, even a relatively innocuous exercise like the Patrol.

Although people can't be forced to come forward, it sure wouldn't hurt if we got a boost from the political leadership. If for example, the supervisors of the civil servants who live in Westchester encouraged their employees to participate

in Neighborhood Watch, we might see a better response. In fact, why couldn't the civil servants go to their bosses and request that they be supported in their participation? I submit that this tack would bear fruit in a community like this one, because as a suburb of Washington D.C. there are many federal workers who make their homes here. For that matter, since this neighborhood was created specifically for the purpose of serving Andrews Air Force Base (the old Camp Springs Army Air Field), it seems logical that the base commander would throw his support behind the effort. Not only could he put the word out to active duty personnel, but also to the many retirees who frequent the base.

The areas right around Andrews have really started to look bad in recent years: rough looking apartment complexes, abandoned commercial tracts, crumbling buildings, vacant store fronts. This is all within a stone's throw of perhaps the most famous military airport in the world; the port where presidents, heads of state, and dignitaries come and go daily. Why is it that large federal complexes are surrounded by the most run-down, crime-ridden communities? Just up the road in Suitland some of the shabbiest neighborhoods in Prince George's are located in the vicinity of the sprawling Suitland Federal Center, where the Census Bureau is located. You would think that government leaders would be concerned, but it's pretty obvious that they have no desire to improve the quality of life in the surrounding neighborhoods. There is very little connection between the operation of the facility inside the fence and the affairs of the community outside the fence. It's hard to accept such disinterest knowing that the government exists for the purpose of serving the people, the citizens. You look at those neighborhoods and you want to shout at someone, "Come on! Get busy! Who's in charge here!" But who do you shout at? Who's listening? You're faced with the same collective attention deficit that we see in the neighborhood, and it's twice as hard to overcome when it occurs in the bureaucracy, because not only must you contend with the lack of attention on the individual level, you must also deal with the government's rigid legal structure. Laws and regulations don't have consciousness. When you must interface with people whose every move is dictated by the law, it's like talking to an automaton. The responses are pre-programmed. Nevertheless, one ought to at least attempt to gain the support of the government. I think it's important to show at least that much deference towards the public will, such as it is.

Naturally when you start to consider potential sources of support, you find yourself wading into political waters. Still, in our case the situation may not be so bad, because we clearly have a program that folks from all sides of the political spectrum can endorse. Indeed, there are people in the Patrol who are strongly "right wing", as well as those who would call themselves "liberal". That's the beauty of it. Neighborhood Watch cuts through the political rhetoric. It gets to the nuts and bolts of life at the grass roots. Everyone agrees

Points of Agreement Among Camp Springs Clergymen

Follow the example of Jesus

Every Christian minister without exception bids his congregation to follow Lord Jesus. Clearly to emulate Jesus means taking responsibility, taking the blame.

- Your life "should be the model of Jesus Christ." Rev. Matthew J. Sine, Allentown Baptist Church, Fort Washington
- "Pick up your cross," if you want to follow Jesus. Rev. Philip Van Wort, Grace Baptist Church, Camp Springs
- "We're here to be the body of Christ." Rev. Duane Salisbury, Oxon Hill Church of Christ, Temple Hills
- "True ministry must bear the mark of Jesus himself." Rev. Franklin L. Ways, Bells United Methodist Church, Camp Springs
- "Embrace the least of us, the starving, and you are embracing Jesus." From video by Rev. Tony Campolo, shown at First Baptist Church of Camp Springs

..... Jesus the man

- "Jesus was not a timid wimp, but a tough, forceful person." Rev. Robert Degges, Bethany Christian Church, Camp Springs
- John helped Jesus know who he was, but "Jesus went beyond John." Rev. Terry Minchow-Proffitt, Broadview Baptist Church, Temple Hills
- "My interruptions ARE my work ... Jesus didn't mind being interrupted." Fr. William D. Underhill, Christ Episcopal Church, Clinton
- "Jesus was always partying ... Jesus was a party person." Ways

Humans as divine beings

Several pastors describe the intimate connection between God and man. They talk about how the presence of God is manifested in each of us; how the acts that we perform are divine acts.

- "God is intimate with us behind our masks." Rev. Robert L. Jordan, First Baptist Church of Camp Springs
- "Get to the divine image within." Jordan
- Pastoral prayer: (Dear God) who "created us in your own image." Ways
- "Are we all willing to ascend, to become royalty, to be God's mentors for each other?" Minchow-Proffitt
- "The works that I do, you shall do and even greater." Campolo video

Figure 5.2 Agreement among Camp Springs clergy

Comments regarding the infinite aspect of life

The notion of eternity, of eternal life or infinite existence is a recurrent theme in church sermons.

- Prayer: (Lord) show us how to "live eternally in the here and now." Rev. Leroy E. Schauer, Corkran Memorial United Methodist Church, Temple Hills
- Jesus showed people how to "go from where we are right now to live ... for eternity." Church deacon, Oxon Hill Church of Christ
- "Eternal life begins now." Jordan
- "Get beyond my egotistical being, the 'me', to the presence of eternity." Jordan
- "Jesus knelt to share with thee the silence of eternity ..." United Methodist Hymn (Whittier)

Be fully in the present, the here and now

It's often said that we must live for today, that tomorrow never comes. Several Camp Springs ministers have recognized that this is more than a cliché; that something deeper is involved.

- "All God gives you is today." Fr. Thomas Pollard, St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, Clinton
- "Today is the first day of God's new creation." Pollard
- "Learn to live happily in the present.... life is a continuous succession of present moments." From newsletter, Christ Episcopal Church
- *Seize the day - Carpe Diem*, Title of Campolo video.

Turning one's attention toward the self

There is an internal "me" at the basis of one's being. Some local pastors have suggested that we need to find out what that is.

- "We need to discover our own true identity." Ways
- "Remember who you are." Minchow-Proffitt
- Speaking of wisdom, "Christ turns such questions back on the questioners. Back on themselves." Jordan
- Listen to that "still small voice" inside you. Jordan
- "Speak through the earthquake, wind and fire, O still small voice of calm." United Methodist Hymn (Whittier)

Figure 5.2 Agreement among Camp Springs clergy

Distinguishing action from non-action

Many ministers make at least indirect reference to this distinction. They usually contrast talking and doing, marking the difference between abstract ideas and concrete activity.

- Be both a "hearer and a doer." Service leader, North Clinton Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses
- You must "grow in spirit ... get out of the book and into your heart." Rev. Calvin H. Gittner, Unity Presbyterian Church, Camp Springs
- Conventional Christians come to church; genuine Christians "put words into actions." Schauer
- Should we "let go, let God" or should we do something? It's a "human and divine collaboration." Jordan
- "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day." Ways

Distinguishing the material from the non-material; the mind from the body

Clearly we must grasp this distinction in order to understand the nature of human existence. More than one cleric has touched on this point.

- "The spiritual created the physical. We can't feel it or touch it." Rev. Jack Cain, Evangel Assembly, Camp Springs
- "We live in duality ... physical/spiritual." Ways
- "The temple referred to by Jesus was the temple of the body." Degges
- "Shalom – wholeness of mind, body, spirit. We are all the expression of shalom." Underhill

Regarding the notion that heaven is here on earth

Heaven can be experienced on earth; we make the world the way we want it, either a heaven or a hell. I've heard this message from several local preachers.

- Jesus taught, "You can see the kingdom by what I do." Minchow-Proffitt
- "Without forgiveness, life is not worth living. Life is a living hell. ... 'Gahena', means hell. It was actually a smoldering garbage dump on the outskirts of Jerusalem." Minchow-Proffitt
- "We are each our own devil, and we make this world our hell." Ways quoting Oscar Wilde (from *The Duchess of Padua*)
- "Here and now ... create the kingdom of heaven." Campolo video.
- *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, Title of booklet, Jehovah's Witnesses

Figure 5.2 Agreement among Camp Springs clergy

Comments regarding courtesy

You don't often hear sermons that specifically address this topic, but it's clear that kindness, generosity and decent behavior are fundamental to every religion.

- "Kids, ask yourself, are you Mr. Courteous or Mr. Careless. Perhaps the adults in the audience should ask themselves this also." Gittner
- "Sweat the small stuff." Sermon by Jordan
- "Someone gracious has become part of our lives." Ways
- "Be honest and fair ... be cordial to neighbors." Jehovah's Witness leader.

The importance of community and civic involvement

Many clerics make the point that religion and community life are not separate at all, but closely intertwined. They urge parishioners to get involved and be active.

- "People today are looking for the old, mythological neighborhood." Rev. Donald Cameron-Kragt, Davies Memorial Unitarian-Universalist Church
- "Love your neighbor." Sermon by Cameron-Kragt.
- "Use your gifts not for personal gain, but for the community. Pull together. Spend time with those less skilled. ... Those with greater ability are aware of the needs of others." Fr. Charles McCann, St. Philip the Apostle Catholic Church, Camp Springs
- "How many times did you visit the homeless?" Rev. Kerry Hill, New Chapel Baptist Church, Camp Springs
- "Some Christians are hermits, drop outs, ... they distance themselves from (the world) Can we rise to the heavenly citizenry?" Ways
- "Most merciful God we confess that ... we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves." Episcopal confession from *The Book of Common Prayer*.
- We must "look at people in their face, strangers too, in your neighborhood." Jordan quoting a member of the congregation.
- "May God's love go beyond the walls of this church into the community." Schauer

Figure 5.2 Agreement among Camp Springs clergy

that it's a valuable program. The challenge is to get folks to see just how valuable it is, and how valuable it can become. For, ultimately we're going to have to figure out a way to compensate the participants; we're going to have to convince people that this is something that the community ought to pay for.

We've been saying all along that participation must be voluntary, but I believe that as a minimum the Garden Zone Managers will have to be paid. There are two reasons why this is necessary. First, you can't be a Garden Zone Manager and also hold down a job. If he is to truly serve the community in the fashion that we've described – that is, to give each household individual attention, to maintain a high profile presence in the garden zone, to monitor every aspect of the quality of life, etc. – to fully carry out all of the tasks that we've been discussing, there will simply not be enough time left for a manager to be employed elsewhere. Managing the neighborhood will take up his or her entire schedule. This is the complaint that I often hear from residents when I make suggestions about how we can improve our own neighborhood of Westchester. Everyone tells you that they have no time. They are too busy working, and when they do come home, they simply want to relax. For some folks even the hour or so per month that the Patrol requires is more than they can spare. (Although I must say, if a person can't make this minuscule contribution to his community, and he is not (a) a brain surgeon, or (b) the President, then his excuses start to sound somewhat weasely.) If the world didn't require that people have money, things would be different, but as it stands, unless you can find someone who can support himself without having to work, and who is willing to serve the community for purely humanitarian reasons – a possibility that we shouldn't rule out, by the way – unless such a selfless person steps forward, the community will have to come up with a way to pay for this service.

The second reason why we ought to compensate people for their contribution to Garden Zone Management is so that we can generate some respect for these activities. Community service does not receive nearly the recognition it deserves. It gets a lot of lip service from politicians, but compared to other vocations community service doesn't rank very high. Consider for example whether a judge would ever sentence a criminal to one hundred hours of service at, say, a biotechnology lab, or the office of a Washington lobbying firm. They would never even consider it. Yet the courts routinely send convicts to work at community service organizations. What makes them think that communities want thieves and drug addicts working for them? Why would we want the dregs of society doing a job that should instead be performed by the most intelligent and compassionate citizens? It's insulting to send convicts into the community for this purpose. The very idea merely reinforces the argument that true communities don't exist in our society, for if they did, the indignant community members

would ship the criminals right back to the courthouse. We're never going to get people interested in community service when we treat the job as convict's work.

There are however, indications that the political leadership has begun to pay attention to this issue. In 1997 for example, there was a "summit" on volunteerism in Philadelphia that was attended by several renowned political figures, including four presidents, a vice-president, two first ladies and the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, who organized the event.²³ There are several positive things to be said about Powell's effort. First of all, it was a non-partisan event. Anytime you can get representatives from all political parties to agree on an issue of this importance, you have definitely accomplished something. Moreover, the fact the Powell wasn't running for any office adds legitimacy to his initiative. Second, the goal of the program was to recruit mentors for at-risk youth. Clearly the idea of youth mentoring fits well with much of what we've been discussing. Third, Powell was able to line up endorsements from some very influential political names, including current and former Presidents of the United States. You can't do much better than that when it comes to having respected figures back your program. Finally, Powell managed to get these guys to shed their three-piece-suits, and had them out on the mean streets of Philadelphia for a day performing neighborhood clean-up work. Apparently he too recognizes the value of gimmickry.

The problem with all of this of course is that none of Colin Powell's high-powered supporters actually live in those rough Philadelphia neighborhoods. At the end of the day they all return to their private mansions and their exclusive, gated communities. We all know very well that none of these bigwigs would be caught dead on those streets at any other time, and that includes Powell, who is black. So then, what example, are they really setting? Don't just look at a president wielding a paint roller for a day, but look at the whole picture. The lesson for the ghetto kids is clear: get rich, get out of that place, and don't ever go back.²⁴ If Colin Powell wanted to set a real example, if he wanted to make a sincere impression on people, he wouldn't just talk about mentoring, or tell other people to go and do it, he would sell his mansion and buy a house in that same Philadelphia neighborhood where the presidential brigade picked up trash. And

²³ Jimmy Carter, George Bush, Gerald Ford, Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Nancy Reagan, Hillary Rodham Clinton and Colin Powell. "The Presidents' Summit on America's Future", Philadelphia, April 26-29, 1997.

²⁴ It does not appear that was much trickle down effect generated by Powell's summit. Not in Prince George's at least. The author has detected no interest in his outreach efforts from the county's political leadership. It does not appear that the bureaucrats are even aware of our existence, let alone what we were trying to do here in Westchester. There remains a cavernous separation between the universe in which the government functions and everyday life in the neighborhoods and subdivisions.

he wouldn't spend just a day there, but the rest of his life. He would become a grass roots organizer, a community leader ... a Garden Zone Manager. I submit that it is only by making such a commitment that one will ever understand just how much is really involved in improving the quality of life in a neighborhood. And to those folks who do in fact stay and work with inner-city kids, my hat is off to them. They're doing something that few people have the courage to do. What I'd like to suggest is that for the rest of us who aren't quite so self-sacrificing, we can position ourselves in an environment that isn't nearly so decrepit, and yet make a significant contribution. Powell and his friends could move to a place like Camp Springs, which is a far cry from the Philadelphia slums, and still do a hell-of-a-lot of good. There wouldn't be any sacrifice involved. If you wanted to keep your maid and your chauffeur, fine, keep them. Keep your Mercedes too. But make this your home. Make this the place where you and your family put down roots and live your lives. Moreover, make it your job. Show people how serious you are about community service by actually joining and serving a real community.

It seems then that we may have found a third source for neighborhood leaders. In addition to the local clergy and the folks with community connections, we might also be able to recruit people who have become successful through other avenues, and who now want to give something back to the society that allowed them to achieve their success; people who want to do something more substantial than writing a check to a charity, yet who aren't quite up to following Mother Theresa to the slums of Calcutta. If they are wealthy enough, and interested enough, these same folks might also provide an interim source of funding for the project. But ultimately the financial support for Garden Zone Management must come from the residents of the community. I'm thinking that even if the Garden Zone Manager is well-off and doesn't need the money, the neighborhood should still contribute to his or her support. It doesn't have to be much, enough to give a manager a living wage. The manager could very well turn around and give the money right back to the community. Nevertheless, there must be some token of support, otherwise the job won't ever get any respect. After all, we're not talking about a day or two of volunteering, but a lifetime vocation. Furthermore, I'd like to suggest that there should be a program that develops local youngsters coming out of school, out of college, say, for this job. There would thus be a fourth source of neighborhood leaders: the ranks of the local school kids. If the program works, I submit that eventually all of the leaders would come from this source. In baseball they call this, bringing up prospects through the "farm system". What I'm suggesting is that we need a baseball-style farm system for Garden Zone Management. In our case, when the players are ready for the big leagues, instead of taking them *off* the farm, we would send them back *to* the farm. Whereas managers who come in from elsewhere might take years to be-

come known and respected by their neighbors, young people who grow up in the neighborhood will have the advantage of instant recognition. And if they show any promise at all in the pursuit of a community service career, the respect should be there as well.

I suppose to some folks it might appear that sending kids off to college just so they can run a Neighborhood Watch group is a waste of an education. Some might argue that it makes more sense to hire security guards to patrol so that the college kids can do something more useful.

In the first place, managing the garden zone involves much more than just patrolling. But more importantly, there is the spiritual aspect of neighborhood management. We've already determined that the solution to our neighborhood quality of life problems will depend on the degree of spiritual development of individual community members. Given how we've defined the terms "spiritual growth" and "quality of life", it's not hard to extrapolate that the solution to the entire world's quality of life problems depends on spiritual development. What more important endeavor could one undertake than to improve the world? Obviously none. Thus if a student wants to put his education to the best possible use, he need look no further than his own backyard. If he applies himself towards the task of deepening community awareness locally, he will simultaneously contribute to the evolution of man globally. I'm tempted to say that this job is so important that we don't just want college graduates doing it, we want Ph.D.s, professors, the best minds of society. We certainly don't want security guards in this position. Now it may indeed happen that the community does want to hire a security guard, to keep watch at night for example, but that guard could never take the place of a Garden Zone Manager. Employing security guards is the same as hiring more cops; it's a reaction-based measure rather than a prevention-based measure. If we were going to hire cops, then we would need to invent a new type of cop. A super cop. One who is brilliant as well as fearless. A warrior Einstein. The super cop has no need for weapons. His intelligence, his presence, and his aura alone are enough to cow a would-be criminal into submission. The cops we have now would like to think that they meet this standard, but clearly they don't come close. The problem is that cops approach their job from the warrior angle, which is fine, but they don't take their pursuit of warrior perfection far enough. They don't get to the place where one integrates the internal side of existence with external actions. In other words, they don't know what it means to be a spiritual warrior.

To sum up, there will be three levels of garden zone leadership:

- Paid, full-time Garden Zone Managers
- Part-time gardeners and patrollers

- Neighborhood volunteers.

Possible sources for such leadership are:

- Local clergymen.
- Teachers, coaches and others with close community connections.
- Committed people coming from elsewhere who want to join the community and share their resources.
- Local youth who come up through the Garden Zone Management farm system.

Naturally a fifth potential source of leadership would be adults who already reside in the neighborhood. However, how you would assess the qualifications of these folks is not at all clear. In particular it seems quite impossible to judge whether a person is spiritually qualified. You hear the term "spiritual leader" used a lot these days, not just to describe members of the clergy, but for persons involved in very diverse, and sometimes strange, activities. Yet I wonder how many of these folks are spiritual in the manner that is described in the *Tao Te Ching* and the *Bhagavad Gita* – experiencing the "harmony of wholeness"? I suppose we could just ask folks ...

"Hey Edna. Pass me the pretzels. By the way, you aren't spiritual are you?"

Not only is it difficult to determine the spirituality of another person, it's hard to be sure if you are spiritually advanced yourself. We've talked a great deal about what spirituality is supposed to mean in this discourse, but it is such an elusive thing that I dare not venture to say how spiritual I, myself, really am. The most I can say is that I might have glimpsed the nature of life's inner side on a few occasions. The best we can do then is to start our program and see who volunteers their service. If there are folks with more refined awareness out there, my theory is that they will come forward naturally. Even if it's unspoken, the spiritual angle will draw them out in a spontaneous way. Later on, when the farm system is operating, there shouldn't be as much of a problem, since people will theoretically be trained for the job.