

# Desert Creek House

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## INSTRUCTION MANUAL FOR A SHARED HAPPINESS

### 7 x 10 commitments for our daily life

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#### 0) COMMUNITY AND SELF-LIMITATION: starting a move towards change

- 1) Reality beyond appearances: Life is not only matter; it is subtle and deep; it is mainly about values like justice, peace, equity, love. We believe that it has a mysterious meaning which remains always beyond our representations, always unfathomable. We want to put our search for meaning and for depth at the core of our personal and collective life, while practising ethical values and integrating into the wider web of life with other sentient beings, in harmony with nature and its laws. We can rely on traditional philosophical and spiritual teaching as the heritage which tells us about the past experience of humanity in its relationship with life and the Unfathomable; nevertheless it has been rigidified by institutional transmission; and we need again and again to test it through our own experience, while yet remaining open to the Reality we never can grasp.
- 2) The chain of transformation: Our representations arise out of our experiences with life, out of a chain of understanding which transforms facts into perceptions, perceptions into interpretations, interpretations into choices, choices into acts and attitudes, which in turn generate new facts. Everybody has another perception (one's own truth), yet there is only one Truth. We believe that change is today urgent because of the collapse of our environment and of our society; yet change cannot happen for merely practical reasons; it has to be guided by immaterial or spiritual choices for a better future. We believe that this necessary change is in fact the ideal opportunity for a better quality of life based on less material and more immaterial values, and we want to make these qualitative choices now.
- 3) The power of our choices: Individualism leads us into regression and conformity, and not to freedom. In order to be made free from egocentric perceptions, choices must concern our common future as a human community which takes its concrete shape in our local communities. Democracy (concern of all) and marketing (involvement of all in subsistence and exchanges) are the means for our participation in making the world what it is. The Eichmann's syndrome tends to lead us into blind conformity, even when we are aware that our society practises harmful values, attitudes and behaviours. We want to become aware of the power of our choices and to empower our community to practise this opportunity for choices, even if there is a price to pay for it whether a price for truth, discomfort, marginalization or soft repression. Change can only happen from bottom up, in our own way of life.

- 4) The new paradigm: Market has inverted our values and practices. As we believe in the power of our choices, we want to restore the true form of a living community, practising self-limitation (small is beautiful), co-operation (competition mainly generates losers) and control of the laws of market by the (local) community (predominance of social choices over economic laws).
  - 5) Natural cycles and equity: In nature, there is no exhaustion of resources and there are no wastes, because everything is integrated into cycles of transformation where "wastes" become simply the resources of the next stage of the process. First, we want to respect the basic law of natural cycles and adapt fully to its logic and constraints. Equity is the second law we want to practise, because it is the key for harmony. There can be no peace without justice.
  - 6) The anchorage in the place: The place where we live is not an enclosed territory we have to defend against the others but a subtle open network of existing and potential inner and external relationships between people and actors who live or act in the same space. We want to become aware of the nature of this network which involves everybody and to develop its potential in order to allow all local members to find means for their own expression and needs.
  - 7) Community consensus: We believe that consensus inside a social group describes the leading dream of the community, the myth of the ideal realm; consensus is objectively very difficult to reach; yet what cannot become the topic of consensus will be controlled by others in their own interest, probably against local interest. Hence consensus is a fundamental condition for empowering the local community. We want to help it growing slowly, step by step, first in a marginal way, later about more central issues, escaping the influences of forces which have interest to avoid it to happen. Local community seems to be the best place for consensus to take shape, because it is the level of best understanding, competency and transparency where problems can find their solution.
  - 8) Starting a move towards change: The main difficulty is not to find solutions (we know them already more or less) but it is to start a move towards change, in breaking our own resignation and inertia. We want to practise the 17 quantum leaps or thresholds of consciousness described by the laws of change: the laws of qualitative gain of self-limitation, of priorities, of necessity for change, of breaking of resignation, of corruption, of whitewashing, of (self)-destruction, of compassion, of freedom, of community, of priority of service over profit, of weaning, of modernity, of positive exclusivity of commitment, of cumulative effect, of responsibility, of each choice = a vote.
  - 9) Self-limitation: Our society tries to exacerbates needs and excesses. We want to resist this tendency and to practise self-limitation, as a reduction of negative impacts, but also as an opening onto a new quality of life: small is beautiful. Cartographic self-limitation makes us aware of our ignorance; technological self-limitation makes us aware of our awkwardness; strategic self-limitation makes us aware of our illusion in involving others in our plans; psychological self-limitation makes us aware of our own games with appearances, and free to recognise them.
  - 10) Power of Truth: "Be the change you want to see in the world" (Gandhi). The world is what we make it, through the cumulative effects of our deeds, which cost us a lot when we renounce on something we wish, yet of little effect when it is considered alone, but powerful in its addition to other similar deeds. We want to practise Satyagraha (the power of Truth) in living truly according to our beliefs and values.
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## **1) EFFORT AND COMFORT: towards a reconciliation between nature and humanity**

- 1) Part of nature: Mankind is part of nature, without exception. We want to reintegrate this fragile yet powerful body, which is our nourishing Mother, despite her apparent indifference towards us. Nature is not a landscape nor a garden of Eden; it is a living body torn between love and destruction.
- 2) Eco-theo-logy: The Ojibway tradition shows how as mankind we stand at the periphery of nature because we depend on other species but they do not depend on us. Yet human beings contribute to the evolution of the universe through their own form of consciousness. We want to recognise traditional people as our guides and teachers for helping us reconnecting with nature, and showing us how to find harmony with the universe. We want to rediscover the mystery which guides the universe in an unknown yet real orientation.
- 3) Force and virtuality: Our society tries to escape the power of nature through technology, into denial and illusion, into domination and destruction, into accumulation and exploitation, into uprooting and isolation. We want to practise self-limitation, choosing the way of minimum comfort and breaking our bubble of insulation; confronting ourselves with the material reality of our world: distance, weight, height, effort; privileging the use of renewable non polluting energies and of tools over machines; using technology with restraint, as the art for the adequate aims and means; reinventing cars and their use as well as a new practice of mobility; trying even not to use any fossil fuel.
- 4) The 6 questions of the Tibetan monk: Our society has lost the measure of needs and desires. We want to choose a form of simplicity (spiritual poverty) which opens us to life, to rediscover what our true needs are in order to privilege our personal and collective growth; facing our greed and ignorance. Is it true? Good? Right? Beautiful? Necessary? For spiritual progress?
- 5) The integration into natural cycles: Nature provides freely anything we need and we have to respect and adapt to its rhythms, cycles and variations. We want to integrate all our activities into natural cycles and adapt our needs to what is available and has to be shared in order to practise equity (golden rule).
- 6) Peak oil and reconversion: Peak oil is the announcing sign of a general collapse of our society before probably 10 years. Our present crisis is the crisis of our ways of life. We want to take this opportunity for a deep reconversion towards less material and more meaning, in our local community, according to the 2 principles (cycles and ethics), the 5 practical paths (parsimony, imagination, choices, incidences, management), and the 15 points about climate change; converting before 10 years (2020) our local community into a society without fossil fuel.
- 7) Vernacular subsistence: Our society practises the “virtues” of accumulation and individualism. We want to practise a form of fluid exchanges where wealth is shared and circulates, where the *commons* are the collective property of what cannot be divided, where basic goods and services are made available for all. Everywhere when it is possible, patterns of subsistence and reciprocity have to replace market exchanges; avoiding even to use money, every time it is possible (LETS).
- 8) Local community: The tendency is now to globalisation. We want to give shape to our local community as a place for empowerment and consensus about our common future, a place of resilience (self-reliance). We want to consume local goods and services, to restore our faculties for creativity (trades) and for sharing, making our place a place where to live fully for our youth and the future generations; especially restoring the systems of regulation of our land and climate (forests, water, soil, ocean, sun, wind).

- 9) Praise of slowness (present): Speed and hurry are the dominant values of our society. We want to rediscover the intensity of being (being is more than doing; doing is more than having); here and now, yet in relation with our heritage upstream (reinterpretation of our past) and downstream (perspective of the future); time makes us free from unsolved issues when we accept to look at them; time is our life and our liberation, on the way for our inner transformation.
  - 10) Harmonisation with the universe: Our universe is one living body. We want to be inspired by and adapt to its orientation towards more complexity and deeper consciousness, towards differentiation, subjectivity, communion and depth; working with the 3 antagonisms of resistance (inertia / resilience), of energy (entropy / inner growth), of dreams (reification / choices); practising diversity and complementarity, choices and commitment, co-operation and sharing, in a search for the deep hidden meaning of life.
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## **2) VOCATION AND SUBSISTENCE: towards a reconciliation between SIMPLICITY AND WEALTH**

- 1) Social control: In our modern society the logic of market is the leading energy which shapes our life and imposes its power upon all people. Other aspirations such as human and spiritual values, however beautiful and inspiring they can be, are believed to have to adapt and submit to the "realism" of the materialistic world we have created. Capital (power of finance) controls work (human creativity and liveliness) although it should be the contrary. We want to reverse this trend because we want to live in a world built for the expression of humanity. We want to practise a form of radical control of economic forces by the awareness of society, i.e. of local communities which defend their own ability to decide about the quality of their present and future. We believe that this control necessitates a local consensus about priorities and the means to achieve it. We think that this is the pre-eminence of politics over economics, where politics is not understood as a struggle for power but as a common vision of the form of society to be implemented. Although it is the aim we have to focus on, this aim of a common vision can never be reached, because this search consists in the dynamic process of discovering together the meaning of life and making it possible for all to access this special quality of experience.
- 2) Free resources: All natural and social resources we need for our subsistence are provided gratuitously by nature (life, water, air, food, energy) or by the social context (basic learning, education, social link, knowledge, spiritual teaching, social recognition, justice, peace, love). Only work to make these resources and qualities available (at the tap, in the shops, in books, at school or at work, in relationships) needs to be paid for because it has to provide the means for subsistence. We want to recognise this fundamental gratuity of resources and qualities as the fundament for our exchanges. We want to learn how to marvel about this gratuity and the unending discovery of its true nature. We want to base our exchanges on the gratefulness for these gifts and we want to care for these resources as a common wealth which has to be used in respect for the natural and the social contexts which provide them, i.e. in adapting to the laws of natural cycles and social harmony.
- 3) Subsistence as duration: Work is usually understood as a means for earning an income that is more or less proportional to the time invested into working. Yet needs for our subsistence are more or less in fact proportional to the time we live, and not to the time we work. This statement means that, once we have satisfied our needs for a given period of time, we do not need to earn more than we have for this same duration. In other words, work has for first function to provide subsistence (basic needs as well as immaterial ones); as soon as this is done, we can offer our work and creativity freely (by analogy with Chayanov's law) because these energies (work and creativity) are by themselves free gifts of nature. Although all resources are free, goods cannot be free, for the simple reason that they include a defined part of incorporated work which has to be paid for, because work is time of subsistence and subsistence costs. We believe that there has to be no profit and no speculation on the prices of goods and services but these prices should represent only the part of cost which corresponds to the incorporated part of work. In consequence we want to offer freely our creativity as soon as our basic and simple needs are covered.
- 4) Work as creativity: There is no such thing as production, but only transformation. Creativity is only the mode of finding new forms. Transformation is an endless process of adaptation of what is given into what is needed or desired, in endless cycles. Work is the force of transformation. Instead of being sold on the market as workforce, work is meant to constitute our main faculty for discovery, expression, creation of social link, gift of generosity. We want to free work from the power of capital. We want to make it a true way for personal expression and social recognition which encompasses all aspects of life, without

distinction between shadow work, paid work, self-employed activity, subsistence work, leisure, recovery, etc.

- 5) Four categories of goods: We want to practise a clear distinction between the four following categories of goods and act accordingly, it means in sharing freely the goods that sharing makes more available: 1) The goods which cannot be divided unless destroyed, such as the natural laws and the systems of renewal of all the resources necessary for life, have to be cared for as whole systems and remain part of the commons (seasonal cycles, biodiversity, energy, land, climate, forests, water, etc.). 2) The goods which take shape when they are shared, such as the qualities of life, find their expression in the relationships and in reciprocity between people (peace, justice, equity, love, etc.). 3) The goods which multiply in the same proportion as they are shared, such as the accumulated teaching out of human past experience, have to be shared freely (knowledge, wisdom, imagination, etc.). 4) The goods which diminish in quantity when they are shared, because they are material entities, can nevertheless be made more easily accessible for use by all when they remain as part of the commons (buildings, infrastructure, tools, etc.). This other way of sharing that we want to implement for these four categories is based on the evaluation of our true needs in regard of the understanding that we have of the meaning of life. We believe that true needs can only be understood and truly perceived if no publicity, no fashion, no want for profit, no form of speculation or exploitation come to distort our personal or common views.
- 6) Extension of the commons: The commons are the goods which cannot be owned privately and have to remain in common free access because they belong to one of the categories of goods which are necessary for subsistence. We want to extend the field of the commons as much as possible because, the more the commons are extended, the more people have access to many facilities: resources, energy, peace, silence, space, land, knowledge, wisdom, health, respect, love, tools, subsidies, etc. And the distinction between what is mine and what is yours becomes blurred, allowing a wider category to take shape: what belongs to nobody, such as the sun, the air, water, life, etc. We believe that the commons constitute the true wealth of a community. We want to be committed to the extension and protection of the commons which are based on the practice of attitudes such as cooperation, equality, care, self-limitation, generosity. Equal societies are more thriving than unequal ones.
- 7) Money as a means for transfer of value only: Money has been originally invented to make exchanges easier than barter (money is my ox in my pocket). The necessity to convert goods into a currency (an amount of money called price) has opened the door for speculation. Profit is theft because it retains for oneself (detaches) part of the value which should indeed remain attached to the good. The intention of profit and accumulation replaces today the purpose of satisfying needs and distorts our economic relationships. Exchanges have to be based on the gratuity of resources and on the minimal cost of work, which has to be limited to the covering of the costs of subsistence (incorporated work) for the corresponding duration of time. In accepting this rule for the calculation of prices, we want to leave no space for speculation or accumulation; it means that money has to remain only a means for transfer of value and not a tool for profit; and capital has to be used only as a neutral tool and not as a power. In eliminating profit and speculation, we want to enable the best circulation of goods in our local community in order to make them available for all. We believe that debt has to be avoided, interest rates to be kept to the level of cost index, investments to be financed by the law of numbers, wealth to be redistributed.
- 8) Life as an art of giving: The subtle energies of the Trinity [i.e. 1) the Father as the self-giving love and endless creation, 2) the Son as the form and expression that make the invisible energy of life perceptible, 3) the Spirit as the inspiration and life giving energy of transformation] are fundamentally negated by the destructive forces of the Anti-Trinity that fascinates us so much [1) the self-obsessed Power of domination, 2) the controlling illusion of Technology, 3) the competitive and destructive forces of Market]. Because we are aware

that these two models are not only antagonist but also incompatible, we want to choose to be nourished by the life energy of the former and to oppose the destructive practice of the latter. We believe that culture (kinship or the understanding of our relationships to others and to life) consists in the art of living together rather than in the power of accumulation. We want to practise self-limitation and simplicity because they offer the necessary conditions for remaining open to the harmony of life and the experience of our true identity as persons and human community.

- 9) Five main choices: We want to practise economic activities in a spirit which ensues out of the five main following choices: 1) Being aware that our world is at the edge of collapsing, we want to adapt urgently to the laws of nature and to the cycles of transformation, instead of trying to dominate what we cannot control. 2) We want to practise work as the main form of expression of our humanity that takes shape in all aspects of life, from the most basic wants to the most creative and spiritual needs; work is the principal opportunity for creating social links in diversity, interdependence and complementarity. 3) We want to practise a form of common sharing rather than to stick to the narrow-minded system of strict private ownership; sharing makes accessible for all what is available in the community and makes the community more prosperous. 4) We want to practise mutual care, instead of competition, as the basic rule of our local community; we choose to be on the side of the victims; care, attention and solidarity with victims are the true forms of compassion; equality and liberation are the factors which allow trust to become the vector for healthy relationships. 5) We want to practise non-violence as a spirit and strategy to face disagreements, tensions and conflicts; non-violence is the antidote to most of the destructive aspects of our present society (competition, greed, domination, exploitation, fear, destruction, etc).
- 10) Social option, redistribution, gift's relationship and reciprocity: Money and prices have become in our western society today the main criteria for our decisions. We believe that exchanges should avoid the use of money as much as possible in order to be focused on human values rather than being motivated by greed or aiming at profit. We prefer to practise all possible forms of exchanges which do not use money as their main objective. Social money, such as the LETS system, allows people without cash to become contractors and to integrate the network of economic and social exchanges. We need to implement a form of social option where attitudes and behaviours are led by ethical values and spiritual search, by a vision of what human relationships can be at their best. Redistribution, gift's relationship and reciprocity are the true ways for practising exchanges when no precise account is kept of what has been given and when exchanges rely on the moral obligation for returning the value of what has been received, which consists mainly in the spirit of the act of giving, rather than in the material value of goods. Reciprocity focuses on the person and the relationship instead of on the object. Reciprocity is a form of exchange of unlimited acts of generosity which call for more exchanges because the equilibrium is never reached and the intensification of exchanges generates new relationships which call for more sharing. Generosity and the need for social recognition become the vectors of more intense and more generous acts of giving. The produce of reciprocity is grace and "grace makes the face of the other shine".
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