

Inner transformation and outer transition

Recently I learned of the existence of a local Transition Group in the Blackdown Hills where I live and made contact. ‘Transition Towns’ are a network of groups, typically based on a local town such as Taunton. Following its start based on Permaculture in Kinsale, Ireland it then spread to Totnes, England where Rob Hopkins and Naresh Giangrande developed the concept during 2005 and 2006. As of 2012, it has spread to 35 countries around the world. In the Blackdown Hills we call ourselves a “Group” rather than a town, as we don’t have a town in our area of 40 parishes.

Like so many people I had felt galvanized and then numbed by the sheer scale of environmental impact and loss of species with implications for future generations and our collective failure to respond to the challenges. What attracted me to Blackdown Hills Transition Group is the vision by which we can see this great predicament for the world as an opportunity as well as a crisis. An opportunity to build a more local, more self-reliant, more cooperative and less money centered community, grounded in nature. There are three founding concepts: being local, being resilient and inner transformation. Let me explore this latter concept of inner transformation.

Firstly, the unsatisfactory and unsustainable nature of our impact on the world raises the question ‘How should I live my life? How can I lead it more simply and more in tune with nature?’ That question points to inner transformation, to living more in the here and now, to a life less driven by consumerist accumulation and wanting. This is important for me. Note there are many competent and able people within the Transition Movement who may not agree with me and do not echo my views. What draws me to the Blackdown Hills Transition Group (BHTG) is not only its locality but it has a Heart and Soul group that has a subtle and gentle influence over the whole from my perspective.

Secondly, I’m impressed by the skills that people have in the transition group. The tendency in the modern world is for us to become less skilled as skills are embedded in clever machines or specific experts or professions. This applies to both practical and social skills. For example, driving a car is a less embodied skill than riding a bike. Whereas our grandparents might borrow something they need requiring social skills to negotiate, we may take a debit card down to Argos. Seeing the skill sets in Transition Group people and in the small concrete projects the Group aims to organize, points me in the direction of personal growth and competence.

Thirdly, for any sort of inner transformation, we need the support of chums, of like-minded people looking and working in the same direction. I hope the Transition Group can be this kind of resource for me.

Fourthly, there is an interesting and important relationship between inner transformation and any work that we do to try to change the world out there. This is epitomized by Gandhi “Be the change you want to see in the world”. You can only create peace from a peaceful space within. If we follow a path of inner transformation, we learn to be able to ground ourselves in a space of aliveness and healing and intuitive wisdom where we learn to trust. In that space, even the most negative things can be our teachers and sources of energy. This inner space of trust allows us to move forwards and be engaged rather than be overwhelmed and inert. This path of inner transformation is a crucial resource for social activists. Sometimes, even anger we may feel at the state of the environment can be used to heal ourselves and the environment if used as a driving force for action and thus channeled in a useful direction.

Fifthly, if we are on that path, we will always make discoveries about ourselves that will be interesting and exciting. To be on this path helps us to be excited by the world and evolution of Human Beings. By being more in tune with myself, I retain that ability to be enthused by the world and by the changes that we face, rather than draw away or deny the problems.

Finally, the immediacy of green issues in our world and the ecological issues that we face are likely to have an impact on the sort of inner transformation that we follow. This can bring us in to line with the ancient wisdom traditions of the world such as Taoism, Buddhism and Druidism. Thus underpinning their relevance to the modern world.

The interrelationship between the path of inner transformation and how we impact on the world is fascinating. The Transition Group seems an ideal place to try to work out those issues and I’m grateful for its existence.

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