

Earthcare

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and some quite advanced, as well as a series of designing processes to map environmental constraints and resources. A good PDC can empower a person to become her/his own contractor. You don't have to do all the work yourself—all you need to know is what's right for you.

I've seen the process lead to unexpectedly sensible projects. In rural Germany, instead of building the water storage tank that the fire department demanded, a community created a lovely large natural swimming pool with a small sandy beach to hold the water to be pumped in case of fire. On Lotan a wastewater treatment system irrigates a pasture for goats and has become a resting spot for migratory birds.

How can city dwellers practice permaculture?

Mike: Cities are the most exciting places where permaculture can have an effect. There is an advantage to having many people in a small area, if everyone works together toward a common goal. You can begin with areas of agreement, such as: *Everyone in our city has a right to clean air. If we all use cars in this small area, it can cause a lot of pollution.* Then it's about being creative, turning problems into solutions.

In some cities, the solutions are ingenious. For example, the Curitiba region in Brazil, which is home to 1.6 million people, has become an international model for sustainable development, despite challenges during the planning stages, in this case a military dictatorship and an economic crisis. There's a rapid, cheap, all-bus transit network running on bus-only avenues that's so efficient, auto traffic has dropped significantly, and Curitiba now registers the country's lowest rates of ambient pollution and per capita gas consumption. Curitiba also boasts 52 square meters of green space per person, up from fewer than one square meter in 1970; residents planted 1.5 million trees along city streets and builders received tax breaks for projects that included green space. Recycling is integral to city functioning. Through the "green exchange" employment program, low-income families living in areas unreachable

by truck bring trash bags to neighborhood centers, where they're exchanged for bus tickets and food, resulting in less city litter, less disease, less garbage dumped in rivers, and a better life for the poor. Children, too, can exchange recyclable garbage for school supplies, chocolate, toys, and show tickets. Moreover, 70% of the city's trash is recycled by its own residents, and the city employs the homeless and recovering alcoholics in its garbage separation plant.

While not every city may be ready to become a Curitiba, we can do more. We can grow food in communal gardens, and we need to plant more trees—the answer to many global problems. Trees clean the air, regulate air temperature, prevent soil erosion, offer food and shelter to wildlife. They give back a lot more than they take.

Will saving the earth require mainstreaming the Lotan and Curitiba models of communal cooperation?

Alex: Let's look at the larger picture. For most of human history, we lived and shared resources within our tribe. In the *shtetl*, the Jewish community offered a safety net to all. Why? Because everyone knew everyone else and mutual responsibility was a *mitzvah* for all.

Today, too, when you know your neighbors, sharing is possible. When my wife, two children, and I lived in an apartment building in Rehovot, I didn't need to buy a single tool because I made friends with Haim on the fourth floor who had them all. I didn't need a car either, because once a week I got a ride to the supermarket with Karen or Yaron from the second floor.

There is so much unused wealth all around us into which we can tap, so long as we don't think we have to own it all by ourselves. We gorge our houses with stuff

we don't use. Nature, on the other hand, shares every atom, recycling it constantly.



Mark Naveh, General Secretary, Kibbutz Lotan; member, international Ecovillage education curriculum board

Community is both a value and a human need. Unfortunately, the destruction of traditional communities that occurred with the advent of the modern age has resulted in a whole range of social and environmental problems. The traditional community helped to create trust and a sense of belonging, and fostered respect and responsibility amongst people and toward the environment. When human beings are torn away from community, the result can be alienation, ultimately even violence, toward other human beings and toward the earth.

Ecovillages—human-scale communities that integrate a supportive social environment with low-impact living and a strong spiritual dimension—attempt to rectify this situation. While different ecovillages follow diverse paths, all share the understanding that spirituality is the essential ingredient that gives us purpose, and the glue that holds us together. True, the ecovillage model is currently outside the mainstream, but communities on the cutting edge of developing sustainable social, economic, and ecological solutions are having an ever-increasing impact the world over. Their ideas can be put into practice anywhere people live. All it takes is goodwill and a little creativity. Community is the key. And, of course, the synagogue as a spiritual community center has a vital role to play in this process.

Is there anything else you'd recommend to our readers?

Alex: Go outside and find a place where you feel comfortable. Make a list of what makes you happy. Consider if there are enough resources on the planet to give you and everyone else the same things on your list. Then reassess your needs and goals.

And if you want someone to talk to, give us a call (011-972-54-979-9009) or send us an email (kibbutzlotan@gmail.com). It's our *avoda* (all meanings of the word intended) to help. In the spirit of Rabbi Hillel: "Just do it, now." □

One-Stop Green Resource



The Union for Reform Judaism's "Greening Reform Judaism"

web portal www.urj.org/green offers Jewish teachings on the environment, steps to reduce your carbon footprint, educational programming, social action ideas, models of "green synagogues," and more.