

Ascension Notes



Community Education

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Last fall a good friend of mine died. He had been a practical engineer. That means he had contracted projects in a number of industries to build the physical systems that created products. He rather facetiously called himself a plumber because pipefitting was a significant part of many of his projects. In his personal life he was a meticulous craftsman who spent years crafting his home and much of the furniture in it.

When he died he left behind a marvelous shop. The possibilities present there were endless — woodworking, metalworking (including plumbing/pipefitting, welding, mill and lathe work), common electrical work and an auto bay. I loved visiting and occasionally working there and started to imagine how a resource like that might be used as a community educational center for industrial arts.

Six months later I was chatting with a new neighbor. He was in the conceptual stage of planning some sort of agricultural education program, perhaps a school. I listened to his thoughts carefully. We agreed during that conversation that there were many highly skilled people living in our rural community who might be wonderful teachers given the opportunity. With that thought we parted company. I kept thinking.

To me education is a lifelong endeavor and has one primary goal. That is to allow individuals (ideally everyone) to discover and develop their potentials so they become capable of initiating the actions that support their lives. Creativity strengthens the community. True education requires that physical skills, intellectual expansion and spiritual growth all be addressed. Each is an important aspect of human development. Physical skills yield beauty and material support for our lives. They provide the freedom from want that allows us the time for of the intelligent pursuit of truth, which, in its turn reveals the spiritual values discovered in the pursuit of goodness.

In more down to earth terms a personal desire to achieve a specific goal is the most fertile ground for the process of education to flourish. Active pursuit of an objective instantly creates the context in which the necessity for various studies becomes obvious. Information is easily comprehended when we can see the relevance to our projects. Development of skills becomes more play than work. Each bit of learning incorporated into the realization of our goal yields an enthusiasm that builds inertia to keep the undertaking exciting and moving toward the satisfaction of completion.

How might a community educational system work? It would simply be a function of putting together people needing help with creative goals and those of greater experience and resources willing to help foster their projects. It would be decentralized and individual in scope rather than institutional. Physical things could be created in shops. Suggesting approaches and resources would be an avenue in the development of intellectual aspirations. Teachers would be students and students would be teachers.

Generosity is the spiritual foundation of this plan. The result would be growing a more vital community, which is simply the network of our individual connections. We would be building strength and trust into those links. That is goodness in action.