

TOWARD THE ONE, THE PERFECTION OF LOVE, HARMONY, AND BEAUTY, UNITED WITH ALL THE ILLUMINATED SOULS, WHO FORM THE EMBODIMENT OF THE MASTER, THE SPIRIT OF GUIDANCE.

AGREEMENTS CREATE REALITIES

On every level of being it is agreement between beings that create realities. We see this in our human relationships. To the degree that there is agreement between beings there is a shared and manifest reality. To the degree that there is disagreement between beings, there is a shared and manifest unreality. This is true on every level of being, from the agreement between atomic particles to form molecules which form elements and so on, to the agreement between cosmic beings (all the stars and all the galaxies) to form the one song of the universal harmony, the music of the spheres.

This is reflected in the Sufi philosophy of love, harmony, and beauty. In the words of Hazrat Inayat Khan, “Love is the *essence* of life; harmony is the *means* by which life attains its purpose; and beauty is the *result* of life.” Sirkar Van Stolk, in *Memories of a Sufi Sage, Hazrat Inayat Khan*, gives some examples. “One could say that love is the *essence* of a lifelong friendship; harmony is the *means* by which it is sustained; and beauty is to be seen in the acts of kindness and thoughtfulness *resulting* from it.” “As the Sufi mystic sees it, God’s *love* is the force which makes the plant grow; and the *harmony* of its development – the balance of colour, the symmetry of petals – manifests as *beauty*.”

The principle of agreement or harmony underlies Lama Foundation’s process of decision-making and guidance through consensus. In the spirit of the Quakers meeting in silence, waiting upon the Lord, to hear the spirit of guidance, consensus is more than agreement between beings to pursue mutually beneficial interests; consensus is seeking agreement with reality, to live in harmony with nature, with the way things are in the creation.

Lama Foundation is an experiment in consciousness. Given the impermanent nature of reality, the experiment, to be viable, must continually and subtly adjust to the way things are in the present moment. Therefore, guided by our statement of purpose and living spiritual tradition, the most effective way to adjust to the present moment is to “as-is” the situation, to affirm the principles that are actually working and to let go of principles that no longer serve us.

BACKGROUND MATERIAL

New Mexico law requires a non-profit corporation to have a Board of Directors who constitute and are responsible for the operation of the corporation to fulfill its statement of purpose. The Board of Directors appoints the officers of the corporation (who may or may not be also Directors) to take charge of the practical functioning of the corporation. Generically the officers may be President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer.

A corporation is a legal person with all the rights and liabilities of a natural person. Unlike natural persons, corporations exist in perpetuity. The corporation itself is responsible for its liabilities. The individual Directors, protected by the “corporate shield,” cannot be held personally liable for the debts, etc. of the corporation, except in cases of extreme malfeasance and gross neglect of duties.

The original members of Lama Foundation expected, consciously or unconsciously, to live their entire lives on the land at Lama Foundation. The original By-laws invest all decision-making powers on the consensus of the (resident) continuing member body. Once granted, continuing membership continued for life, as long as the member chose to renew membership at annual meeting. This self-governance bears more similarity to native American tribal councils than it does to democratic “majority-vote” institutions. At a later date, caretaker members were added, the necessity of unanimous vote on all occasions was diluted, and other refinements were made.

A Board of Directors is required by law. The original By-Laws provided for a Board of Trustees(Directors) with very limited powers of advice and counsel to the continuing member body, basically a rubber-stamp Board of Trustees. In accordance with new Mexico law, the Board of Trustees has the power to appoint officers (rubber-stamping decisions already made in community) and has to have the power to unilaterally change the By-Laws. In an irresolvable crisis, the Board of Trustees does have the power to take over, to completely revise the By-Laws, to dissolve the corporation, etc. – but the original set-up was that the Board of Trustees through the By-Laws was basically delegating all of its powers to the continuing member body.

What was not fully anticipated was that Lama Foundation would become primarily a spiritual school, a mystery school as some of us call it. And the nature of any valid spiritual school is that it is a temporary phenomenon, existing for a certain time in a certain place to serve the movement of spirit in a certain group of people. It can be seen that Lama Foundation is a physical and social framework, which has nurtured and supported a succession and variety of spiritual schools. (This is only one way to look at these things.)

Two of the founding members of Lama Foundation, after building their own house with their own money to live in for the rest of their lives, experienced rapid spiritual transformation and left permanently within the first ten years (and the house was struck by lightning and burned down.)

Later on residential impermanency was institutionalized in the By-laws by limiting the continual residency of a member to seven years. Although a member is free to come back and resume residency after a hiatus of a year, so far no one has done this fully. For the last twenty-five years, the resident community has been experienced as an impermanent and changing body.

Over the years the continuing member body has grown to something like fifty souls, of which no more than a handful are resident on the mountain at any one time. The continuing member body as a whole is widespread over space, and the majority of continuing members are not actively involved in Lama Foundation at any one time. The decision-making powers invested in the continuing member body have been constantly questioned by the resident community. At last annual meeting there was not even a quorum of continuing members present and decisions could not be made.

FOREGROUND

In this unique experiment called Lama Foundation there is a need to balance the immediate power and authority of the current (impermanent) resident community with the long-term vision and guidance, not to mention active support and involvement, of the greater circle of trustees, continuing members, free radicals and friends of Lama Foundation.

Because this experiment is so unique it takes a period of time, often several years, for a new resident to fully understand, embrace and support the purpose and function of Lama Foundation. This is a natural result of the spiritual transformation that takes place over time of residency and service. The period of time is relative to the spiritual station the person comes in with and the degree of agreement or harmony with the spirit of Lama.

This has led to the concentration of authority in the resident core group of longer-term members. Before the fire this was the group of resident continuing members and caretakers. After the fire my impression is that this authority is concentrated in the core winter community. It seems to me desirable that a solid core group of resident continuing members and caretakers be responsible for long-term decisions.

The resident community must be involved in all levels of decision-making because in most cases they are the actual beings implementing the decisions. However, the resident community has a high degree of turn-over (especially since the fire) and individuals are limited to seven years of continuous residency. Along with the successful building and rebuilding of Lama Foundation structures and programs, the resident community concurrently has a history of shortsighted, poorly thought-out and implemented, decisions and projects, with the originators of the projects sometimes leaving the land before the projects are complete. This has been true all along and is part of the nature of the experiment.

So there is a need for the active involvement, guidance, and authority of the greater circle in long-term decision making, land planning and use, structure design and siting, curriculum development, fund-raising, major financial commitments, etc.

Beginning with the fund-raising for the Community Center and continuing with fund-raising and rebuilding after the fire, the Board of Trustees has become more actively involved not only in making but also in implementing decisions. The profile of the Board of Trustees has shifted from an honorary rubber-stamp group of advisors to a council of elders actively involved in fund-raising, project planning and implementation, curriculum formation and implementation, and increasing hands-on personal presence on the land. The Board of Trustees is now comprised primarily of continuing members and certain members of the Board of Trustees spend a considerable amount of time on the land with the resident community every year.

More and more the Board of Trustees is functioning as a Board of Directors (legally) and filling the functions once thought to be proper to the continuing member body. Furthermore, the Trustees are the legally elected representatives, if we want to use that terminology, of the continuing member body. The direction we are moving in is of a strong, active and involved Board of Trustees providing long-term guidance for Lama Foundation. It may be time to revise the By-Laws to reflect that.

BRAINSTORMING

One way to solve the continuing member quorum conundrum is simply to reduce the quota of members required for a quorum. (St. Johns College Board of Visitors does this – something like 120 members, quorum of 5). But this is avoiding the issue.

The Board of Trustees should be granted the authority and responsibility to be actively involved with the core group of the resident community in all long-term decisions at annual, regular or special meetings.

It is not necessary that all Trustees be involved in all long-term decisions, or even that a majority of Trustees be present. What seems necessary is that one or more Trustees be present for long-term decision and that their consensus is required. This assumes that the Trustees as a whole are in active communication and relative agreement about current issues.

What constitutes the core group of the resident community could be defined.

What constitutes long-term decisions could be defined.

The Board of Trustees should be renamed the Council of Elders, which more accurately reflects their nature and role.

The Council of Elders (Board of Trustees) would continue to be elected by the continuing member body, but would assume most of the decision-making power of the continuing member body – in actually reclaim its inherent governing power which was delegated to the continuing member body at the beginning – and relieve the continuing member body of authority it is no longer exercising responsibly.

The Council of Elders could be elected to serve longer terms, say three-year terms. Elections could be conducted by mail if desired.

The size of the Council of Elders could be looked at, perhaps enlarge.

There will then be a dynamic of active enrollment of Elders, whether continuing member or not, to join in this Council of Service.

Annual Meeting would continue to evolve in the direction it has been taking of Reunion, Renewment and Blessing rather than heavy decision-making.

Concurrent with defining or redefining what constitutes the core of the resident community, it might be useful to look at summer staff involvement in decision-making – specifically summer staff who are former residents who are also continuing members or caretakers. Of course such summer staff members might be just as happy not to be involved in decision-making, but the resident core group might benefit by inviting them to participate.

By Ahad Cobb