

# Permaculture in Practice

## *Healing ourselves, healing our planet*

Motivated by a slew of relatively recent bad news flashes ranging from global warming to the honeybee disappearance, and from the mortgage crisis to peak oil, peak food and peak water, we would be wise to develop a plan for dealing with the emotional stresses currently percolating through modern society. Fortunately, by way of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' "Five Stages of Grief" and John Bowlby and Colin Murray Parkes' "four phases of bereavement," I've derived a Handful of Steps toward Sustainable Community.

Kubler-Ross' model starts with "denial" and moves through "anger," "bargaining," "depression," and, finally, "acceptance." Bowlby and Parkes' system begins with "shock/numbness" and then evolves through "yearning/searching" and "disorganization/despair" before landing firmly on "reorganization/recovery." Typically, the former describes individuals diagnosed with a terminal illness, while the latter focuses on our reactions to the death of others, particularly the passing of loved ones. My paradigm concentrates on our lovable, though ailing, civilization and what individuals can do to prevent the devolution of culture.

Looking back over the first couple of decades since Rachel Carson's hit *Silent Spring*, it seems that mainstream society launched immediately into a long period of "numbed-down denial." Then, when President Reagan removed former President Carter's auspicious solar panels, we moved forcefully into "angry denial." In the 1990's, when recycling and organic food became popular, certain "yearnings" were sated by a little "bargaining." Now, after Dubya's "depressing" and "despair"-filled war (not to mention Al Gore's triumphant eco-campaign), it looks as if our species might have finally "accepted" our serious situation.

The question then becomes: how do we get to that place of "reorganization/recovery"? I believe it all starts with an increased understanding of our most precious resource, water. It is simply unsustainable to pump aquifers and watersheds faster than they can be replenished. This is what our species is doing all over the world and right here at home, but fortunately there are other options.



I used to think that the key to sustainability would be a major re-education program in the schools (and our neighborhoods and backyards) revolving around gardening and food preservation, but several years ago I realized that, since water is *a priori* (even to food for our survival), we should really set our course first toward creating local, sustainable water supplies. Of course, I'm still a big fan of gardens-in-the-schools programs, but this would also almost require year-round schooling (for which our society is not yet ready).

Spreading information to a water-ignorant culture becomes critical. To this end, I highly recommend Brad Lancaster's newest book *Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands and Beyond, Volume 2*. It focuses on almost every passive, water-harvesting technique known to humankind and can be purchased locally at Plants of the Southwest, Collected Works and other astute booksellers. In the same breath, I will soon be recommending the Office of the State Engineer's new book, *Roof-Reliant Landscaping: Rainwater Harvesting with Cistern Systems in New Mexico*. By August the manual (of which I was the principal author) should be available free of charge at [www.ose.state.nm.us](http://www.ose.state.nm.us).

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