



Green Shalom: The New Kibbutz Movement

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There is a Hebrew phrase, tikkun olam, which means the perfecting or the healing of the world. Translated into action, this Jewish concept is essential to the environmentalist cause; as human beings continually evolve, the earth turns on its axis and resonates with conscious energy. A concrete expression of such environmental awareness is making itself known through Israeli kibbutzim, unique communities with a distinctly Jewish ideology and social vision. These small societies have always been utopian in a sense: with equality of education, consumption, production, and property, each member contributes to and cooperates with this contained universe. A response to materialistic living, the kibbutz was originally born as a functioning communist world. Now, in a leaping stride forward, the Green Kibbutz Group is reaffirming the kibbutz's place at the forefront of social innovation by revising their mission statements to directly include sustainability.



Ecological socialism is at the core of the progressive kibbutz. Its communal nature is itself environmentally friendly - sharing of resources makes for far less of an impact on the natural ecology. In addition, determined efforts to reuse and rethink are combined with a lack of materialistic consumerism, resulting in one of the most effective environmentalist projects today. Kibbutz Lotan, one of the greenest in the group, recycles trash by building playgrounds, bus stops, and raised gardens. Its adobe walls are constructed with old tires. The creative solutions don't end with function: ecological artist Frank Kanto creates sculptures and murals out of garbage or scrap metal and paints them, adding to the aesthetic quality of the kibbutz. Constant recycling and composting play a significant role in the lowering of Lotan's water disposal by 70% over the past four years. Impressive accomplishments by the Green Kibbutzim are all around: for example, Kibbutz Samar is working on a Sunergy Project which will soon power the entire commune with solar energy. Kibbutzim promote organic farming and conscious agriculture; from their dairy farms to date orchards, they have had an outstanding effect on the developing desert. Nothing is detached from the ecological cycle - the cows from the dairy farms produce both milk, which is consumed and sold, and manure, which is composted and used as fertilizer for the organic gardens.

Even the architecture of the kibbutzim is infused with an environmental philosophy of rethinking convention. Materializing in the form of sloping, stable geodesic domes, these structures hold strong and are a form of sustainable architecture. Amazingly simple in design and easy to build, the domes are constructed in an exoskeleton of triangles, a concept created by German mathematician Walter Bauersfeld in 1922. Kibbutz Lotan is exploring these domes as a way of significantly utilizing renewable resources in buildings. Not only are the structures constructed with alternative materials such as reusable irrigation pipes and date branches, but they also address the extreme meteorological conditions of the location in the Arava Valley. Conventional construction would require further energy expenses for insulation; however, straw bales provide a sustainable thermodynamic solution.

The Green Kibbutz Group's energy efficient shelters, recyclable playgrounds, and organic agriculture are all the translation of intention to action. The kibbutzim are taking the task of



tikkun olam upon their conscious shoulders. A responsibility is inherent, on all our shoulders and in all our minds, resting on our fingertips and waiting to be translated. The green movement within the kibbutzim goes a step further, articulating this earnest wish to have the world grow gently along with us. The individuals who embody the kibbutzim are constantly working to ensure a green peace in the natural ecology in which they find themselves. In earthly healing, there is neither beginning nor end: only the ebb and tide, the cyclical nature of things. The Green kibbutzim are reaching deeply within and spreading widely around, calling out to the buried concern and tilling the soil until even the desert is in bloom. They are creating a culture and a lifestyle of sustainability, one that flows with the classic kibbutz ideology to contribute to the future.

Young people from all over the world travel to the Israeli desert to get involved with the progressive efforts of these aware societies. Kibbutz Lotan offers the incredible Green Apprenticeship, a 10-week work and educational program in their Center for Creative Ecology. To find out more about how you can be a Green Apprentice, visit <http://www.kibbutzlotan.com>.

Stay clean, stay green, shalom.

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