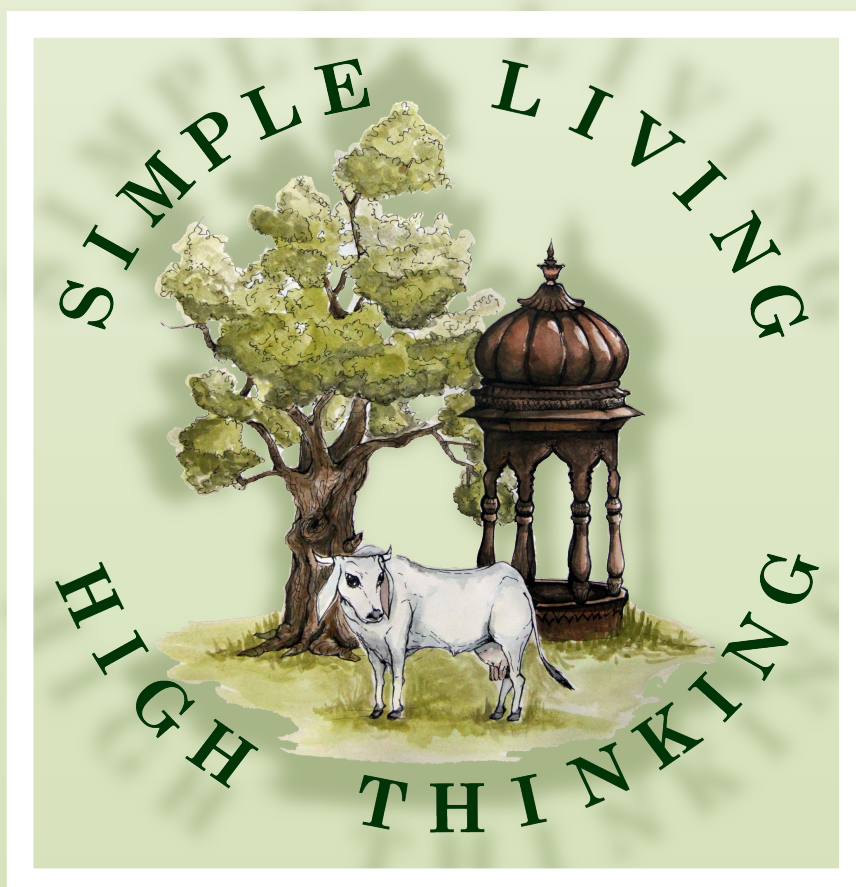


Simple Living, High Thinking

Project Manual

Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships



Simple Living, High Thinking

Project Manual

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Introduction

Simple living means a number of various voluntary practices to simplify one's lifestyle, which generally promotes living a simpler lifestyle, learning how to produce food and other necessities and refraining from luxury. These may include for instance reducing one's possessions, or increasing self-sufficiency. To be satisfied with what one has rather than what one wants characterizes simple living. Of course, one has to understand that not all those who practice simple living are ascetics. Simple living is a voluntary lifestyle choice.

Someone may choose to live more simply for a variety of reasons, including spirituality, personal health and taste, to increase quality time for family and friends, to achieve work-life balance, or to reduce stress. Simple living can also be a reaction to materialism and excessive consumerism. Some people even refer to simple living as a means to achieve socio-political goals such as environment protection, conservation ethic, degrowth, social justice, and ethnic diversity, too.

High Thinking is a concept originating in spiritual cultures, both East and West, and can be traced back to Vedic culture as well. Mahatma Gandhi was once asked to describe an ideal lifestyle and he responded by saying "Simple living and high thinking". High thinking is an intellectual process and frame of mind, aiming at spiritual self-realization, implying that only a simple way of life encourages one to think beyond social strivings, great deeds and achievements, and materialistic goals. On the contrary, a simple lifestyle encourages one to think about spirituality, whereas earthly desires can be innumerable and the process of achieving them can make humans selfish. Earthly desires also prevent one from thinking of high ideals and solely urges one to follow the narrow cycle of worldly pursuits.

In order to practice high intellectual thinking and a change of consciousness, Vedic literature recommends spiritual practices, and among them reading, studying and adopting the value system recommended by those scriptures. By adopting those practices and theoretical principles one could transform its way of thinking and focus not only on material existence, but spiritual upliftment and transcendental goals.

This manual is an introduction to some of the thoughts and practices of the vast subject of simple living and high thinking lifestyle. We hope the reader will be inspired to take up some of the ideas presented herein.

Project Summary

“Simple living-high thinking” is a Strategic Partnership project involving 40 youth workers and youth from 5 partner organisations from Sweden, Belgium, Hungary, Slovenia and the Czech Republic. All the organisations are active in youth work connected to areas of self-sustainability, healthy lifestyle and youth employment. The partners have expressed their mutual interest in creating a network based on strong partnerships aimed to cooperate more and exchange the good practices in relevant areas of their work.

The project's objectives

- 1) Creating a platform for a European network of organisations active in the areas of youth work, healthy/spiritual lifestyles, youth unemployment and social entrepreneurship;
- 2) To address the problem of youth unemployment in modern society, suggesting alternative ways for youth engagement by changing the urban-rural paradigm and empowering youth by helping them connect with nature;
- 3) Engaging youth in solving social problems by promoting social entrepreneurship through a variety of incentives – engaging youth in producing environmentally friendly products and selling the products on the business market;
- 4) Promoting healthy lifestyles via organic gardening, production of environmentally friendly products, and raising awareness about healthy relationships. These topics are very important and are stressed by the “Food group” in the European Parliament, so this project offers added value in finding high-quality achievable solutions locally and globally;
- 5) To professionalize the development of key competences and skills in youth workers;
- 6) Improve the managerial skills of youth workers through the exchange of good practices, which will result in better quality work and increased motivation for their work;
- 7) Learning improved innovative ways of operating towards target groups, by providing up-to-date attractive programs for young people, volunteers and young NEETs in line with their needs and expectations;
- 8) Increasing participants' experience and knowledge in the area of EU/local project management and grant writing on the local, regional and international levels;

The project's intellectual results

- a) An educational movie inspired by the main idea of the project: simple living and high thinking which will be distributed as an educational tool for free to various stakeholders and interested parties. The movie will be made by the partners from the Czech Republic.
- b) A manual (in hard and digital format), which would provide valuable theoretical and practical knowledge in the areas of self-sustainability and entrepreneurship for young people throughout the EU and the world. The manual provides educational tools about developing organic gardening, production of environmentally friendly products and opportunities for product distribution on the business market. The manual was made by the Hungarian partner.
- c) A website containing information on the project's central theme, including articles and the project manual. The website will have theoretical and practical educational

information on: the project and good practices in our organizations, and how to produce organic vegetables, fruits and products made from these raw ingredients. The website will explain how to bring products to the business market, and what are the best ways to enter the market and find customers. The visitors of the site can use the information therein for future employment opportunities. Made by Swedish, Slovenian and Belgian partners.

After the presentation of the intellectual outputs and training activities, all the partner organisations will hold public dissemination events in their countries where the intellectual outputs and other results of the project will be shown. Local stakeholders (NGO's, educational organizations, and local municipality) and media will be invited to these events.

Partners of project

1. ISKCON Korsnäs Gård, Korsnäs Gård 1, 14792 Grödinge, Stockholms län, Sweden (leading partner, coordinating organization).
2. Öko-völgy Alapítvány, Fő utca 38, 8699 Somogyvámos, HU232 – Somogy, Hungary.
3. SANGA-projekt prateľstvi a spolupráce, Nove Sady 63, Nove Sady, CZ080 - Moravskoslezský kraj, Czech Republic.
4. Radhadesh ASBL, Petite Somme 5, 6940 Septon – Durbuy, BE34 - Luxembourg, Belgium.
5. Duhovno Društvo za dušo, Cesta v Polico 31, 04207 Cerklje na Gorenjskem, Slovenia.

Principles of Simple Living, High Thinking

The Concept

The concept of simple living, high thinking originates from the ancient Vedic culture and its texts. In Vedic culture, rural life and spirituality were closely connected and intertwined. Basically, all aspects of life were connected to spirituality and it was believed that the cultivation of the intellect and of mindfulness is compatible only with a simple austere style of living. In other words, a simple way of life is most conducive to elevated levels of thought and contemplation. As a result, Vedic spirituality has been largely nurtured in rural settings, and Vedic literature recommends a simple life, free from unnecessary complication.

Varnashrama-dharma, the term used for the Vedic social system, is closely associated with an agrarian culture, which fosters a mood of dependence on God. According to this culture and social structure, the village demonstrates the influence of goodness (*sattva*), the town is compelled and driven by passion (*rajas*) and sinful places are bound by ignorance (*tamas*). The social system of *varnashrama-dharma* is designed to bring everyone to the level of goodness, which is most easily attained in a rural setting. Sustainability and a peaceful, regulated lifestyle are principal characteristics of *sattva*.

As Vedic texts indicate, one does not get lasting satisfaction or happiness by living an opulent lifestyle. If we reduced our needs to a bare minimum, we would reduce pressure on the Earth's limited resources, which would benefit all life on earth – humans, animals and plants. By reducing our demand, we would improve the conditions of life on Earth and help make things more sustainable for everyone.

According to Vedic texts, more elevated forms of thinking will help us truly understanding ourselves. Human life is considered advantageous, because humans can use their intelligence in an elevated way compared to other sentient creatures. We can use this faculty to find out the real purpose of our life and what we need to do to reach our goals of life. In Vedic culture, high thinking also refers means rising above materialistic issues and seeking the ultimate goal of life. As someone's spiritual growth increases, they tend to be able to avoid getting overly absorbed in common worldly matters and can think about transcendental things.

The urgency of following the adage 'Simple Living, High Thinking' has never been so evident as in the world now when society misuses and exploits environmental resources and the scale of environmental degradation increases day by day.

There is no action without a reaction. Every resource consumed has hidden costs. Materialism and consumerism thus take a heavy toll on the planet. For example, limited cultivable soil loses its fertility due to misuse. Fossil fuels, used in engines and power stations, are decreasing at an alarming rate. Unless we curb our use of finite natural resources, human society cannot continue in its present form.

Simple living and high thinking is essential to safeguard the interests, materially and spiritually, of both present and future generations. Therefore, the precept of simple

living, high thinking suggests lifestyle led in consideration of the above-mentioned principles, which do not harm, but help conserve and regenerate nature in general. Moreover, they help to shift focus from worldly affairs to spiritual goals.

Ecological Footprint

How to determine if the lifestyle of a society one is living in is really sustainable — be it a big or small community, city or even country? The reply is by determining the ecological footprint...

The idea of ecological footprint was developed by two scientists, Mathis Wackernagel and William Rees in the early 1990s. In 1996 they published their book on *Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth*.

But what is the ecological footprint? Fundamentally, the ecological footprint measures the *supply of* and *demand on* nature. The supply side means the biocapacity of a particular place or the globe in general. This means the planet's biologically productive land areas including forests, pastures, cropland and fisheries. These areas, especially if left intact, besides being biologically productive can also absorb much of the waste we generate, especially our carbon emissions.

Therefore, biocapacity can be compared with our *demand* on nature – the ecological footprint. This concept represents the productive land required to provide the renewable resources humanity uses and to absorb the wastes of the average global citizen. It must be noted though that the productive area currently occupied by human infrastructure is also included in this calculation, since built-up land is not available for resource regeneration.

When scientists first calculated the ecological footprint of each country, they were astonished by the results. There is no doubt: we are using the resources of the earth so unreasonably and irresponsibly that it will lead to ecological disaster in a few decades. The purpose of the ecological footprint is to transform the measurement of complete sustainability (including environmental, social and economic sustainability) into numbers to show how devastating our behaviour is. The idea was to encourage people to take action and change their behaviour.

Human society's ecological footprint can be calculated by taking into consideration all the biological materials consumed and all the carbon dioxide emissions generated by society per year. The ecological footprint can also be calculated for one person, one family, or even a community, a city, a country, or the whole world. It shows that every form of consumption is based on the capacity of the biosphere, and thus the existence of mankind depends on the very condition of it, no matter what wonderful technical development humanity has developed....

The average ecological footprint for one person is 2.7 acres (this is 2½ times more than in 1961). In 2015 the Earth had about 11.2 billion acres of biologically active soil and sea, and a population of 7.3 billion people. That means at that time there was 1.53 acres for each person. The global ecological footprint should not be bigger than the size of the planet, and so we should not exploit nature just to extract more than we need.

Nowadays people need so many resources that we would require 2 earths to fulfil that demand. Furthermore, if everyone on Earth wanted to live at the standard of Hungarian citizens, we would then need 3 planets.

If we wish to find solutions, if we want to find patterns for sustainable lifestyle, and create sustainable communities, then eco-villages are a great example for that.

According to recent studies, residents of eco-villages like Krishna Valley in Hungary have a much smaller ecological footprint than the average Hungarian. The size of the ecological footprint can be sustainable if we live according to what the area can support.

Measuring Your Ecological Footprint

Measuring the one's footprint with scientific elaboration accurately is quite a elaborate process. It can be done so with a deep analysis of the used resources by a certain community, village, town or country. However, there are simpler measuring methods -, for example by the following test. Completing this you will learn more about the size of your own ecological footprint.

| <i>Category</i> | <i>Points</i> |
|---|---------------|
| I. YOUR HOME | |
| a.) Where do you live? | |
| Flat | 20 |
| House | 40 |
| b.) How many people live in the household? | |
| 1 | 30 |
| 2 | 25 |
| 3 | 20 |
| 4 | 15 |
| 5+ | 10 |
| c.) What form of heating do you use? | |
| Gas, central heating | 30 |
| Electricity | 40 |
| Oil | 50 |
| Renewable energy | 0 |
| d.) How many taps are there in the home (kitchen, bathroom, toilet, garden, etc.)? | |
| Less than 3 | 5 |
| 3-5 | 10 |
| 6-8 | 15 |
| 8-10 | 20 |
| More than 10 | 25 |

| <i>Category</i> | <i>Points</i> |
|--|---------------|
| II. EATING | |
| a.) How many times a week do you eat meat or fish? | |
| 0 | 0 |
| 1-3 | 10 |
| 4-6 | 20 |
| 7-10 | 35 |
| 10+ | 50 |
| b.) How many times a week do you eat homemade food (including lunch that you take to work)? | |
| Less than 10 times | 25 |
| 10-14 | 20 |
| 14-18 | 15 |
| More than 18 times | 10 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| c.) Do you try to buy your country's and local products? | |
| Yes | 25 |
| No | 125 |
| Sometimes | 50 |
| Rarely | 100 |
| I don't know | 75 |

| <i>Category</i> | <i>Points</i> |
|--|---------------|
| III. TRANSPORT | |
| a.) What vehicle do you use regularly? | |
| Motorbike | 15 |
| Car (small) | 35 |
| Car (medium) | 60 |
| Car (big) | 75 |
| Sports car or van | 100 |
| Truck | 130 |
| b.) How do you usually go to work? | |
| By car | 50 |
| By public transport | 25 |
| By school or company bus | 20 |
| On foot; by bike/roller-skate | 0 |
| c.) How many times a week do you use public transport instead of a car? (If you don't use any of them, it's 0 point.) | |
| 0 times | 50 |
| 1-5 | 40 |
| 6-10 | 30 |
| 11-15 | 20 |
| more than 15 times | 10 |
| d.) Did you travel last year? | |
| No | 0 |
| In my own country | 10 |
| In Europe | 20 |
| Outside Europe | 30 |
| On the other side of the world | 40 |

| Category | Points |
|--|---------------|
| IV. SHOPPING | |
| a.) Last year, how many large investments did you make in your household (buying a television, video, computer, furniture, car, fridge, stove, etc.)? | |
| None | 0 |
| 1-3 | 15 |
| 4-6 | 30 |
| More | 45 |
| b.) Have you chosen energy saving equipment? | |
| Yes | 0 |
| No | 25 |

| Category | Points |
|--|---------------|
| V. WASTE, GARBAGE | |
| a.) Are you trying to reduce waste in the household (by shopping in big scale, rejecting flyers, etc.)? | |
| Always | 0 |
| Sometimes | 10 |
| Rarely | 20 |
| Never | 30 |
| b.) Do you compost household waste? | |
| Yes, always | 0 |
| Sometimes | 10 |
| Rarely | 15 |
| Never | 20 |
| c.) Do you recycle newspaper, boxes, plastic and glass bottles and other forms of waste? | |
| Yes, always | 0 |
| Sometimes | 10 |
| Rarely | 15 |
| Never | 20 |
| d.) How many litres of waste do you produce weekly? | |
| 0 | 0 |
| 30 | 5 |
| 60 | 10 |
| 120 | 20 |
| More than 120 | 30 |

Evaluation

| Points | Ecological Footprints |
|---------------|---|
| Less than 150 | Under 2 acres. Congratulations! This is the ecologically sustainable category. |
| 150-350 | 2 acres. With some reduction you can attain an ecologically sustainable footprint. |
| 351-550 | 3-4 acres. You would need two Earth planets! You have to reduce waste. |
| 551-750 | 4-5 acres. With this footprint size, you would need more than two Earth planets! You have to reduce waste. |
| More than 750 | More than 5 acres. If everyone had an ecological footprint of this size, mankind would ruin the planet in 40 years. |

Now, after completing this test on the ecological footprint, and learning about the size of your footprint, we hope you are inspired to try to reduce your footprint, if needed.

Pillars of Sustainability

In general terms sustainability is the endurance of systems and processes; and from an ecological perspective it is the capacity to endure, relating to biological systems that remain diverse and productive indefinitely. We all understand that healthy ecosystems and environments are essential to the survival of humankind as well as other living beings.

Unfortunately, despite the popularity of the term 'sustainability', the possibility that societies and humanity at large will achieve environmental sustainability continues to be questioned. The reasons behind misgivings surrounding sustainability are continuing environmental degradation, climate change, population growth, overconsumption, and societies' striving for indefinite economic growth. On the global scale, scientific research shows that humanity is living beyond the capacity of the Earth and that this cannot continue.

When speaking of sustainability we have to think in complex terms of a system that is comprised of (at least) three pillars, namely environmental, economic and social. Furthermore, whenever we speak of environmental sustainability, we have to think of a closed system, as there is only one Earth, which provides the necessary constituents for life. Thus the environmental pillar limits the other two pillars of sustainability, so that economy and society are constrained by it. However, it is a fact that the three pillars are also interdependent, and none of them can exist without the others. Thus, whenever one speaks of sustainability, all three pillars need to be addressed respectively. All these pillars have served as common ground for umpteen sustainability standards and certification worldwide systems in recent years.

Economic sustainability means an economic system with fair distribution and an efficient allocation of resources. This would ensure that the economy would maintain a healthy balance with our ecosystem.

Environmental sustainability is integrally connected with nature. The difficulty with this pillar is that we take natural resources for granted and easily forget that these resources are not unlimited and that the Earth needs to be protected from corporate exploitation and neglect. Initiatives such as renewable energy, reducing fossil fuel consumption and emissions, maintaining sustainable agriculture, slowing deforestation, tree planting, recycling and better waste management all come within this category.

Social sustainability primarily means the people's well-being. Humanity has an ethical responsibility to stop inequality, injustice, and poverty. Initiatives like social justice, reducing poverty, and other fundamental activities that promote social equity are parts of this pillar.

In order to find solutions to sustainability problems, we have to think in terms of interconnected systems and address sustainability issues accordingly. A couple of ways to reduce negative human impact are environment friendly engineering and careful resource management and environment protection.

There have been numerous initiatives where people have tried to lead a more sustainable lifestyle over the last few decades, including:

- ❖ Establishing ecovillages.
- ❖ Reorganizing, restructuring and managing municipalities and cities.
- ❖ Revaluating economic sectors like permaculture, green building methods, and also sustainable agriculture.
- ❖ Creating sustainable architecture.
- ❖ Developing new technologies, e.g. green technology, renewable energy use.

There are initiatives on local, national and international levels aiming to enhance the world's ecosystem and reduce human impact on the Earth and make it sustainable. Such set of goals for achieving various aspects of sustainability are called Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (these replaced Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in 2015. The Sustainable Development Goals were created by the United Nations and were established to help achieve sustainability targets. In this system there are 17 main goals and 169 associated targets.¹

The seventeen SDG goals

- 1) **Poverty** – End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
- 2) **Food** – End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
- 3) **Health** – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
- 4) **Education** – Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- 5) **Women** – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- 6) **Water** – Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- 7) **Energy** – Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.
- 8) **Economy** – Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
- 9) **Infrastructure** – Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
- 10) **Inequality** – Reduce inequality within and among countries.
- 11) **Habitation** – Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
- 12) **Consumption** – Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- 13) **Climate** – Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
- 14) **Marine-ecosystems** – Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
- 15) **Ecosystems** – Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and

¹ <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

16) **Institutions** – Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

17) **Sustainability** – Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.



Worldwide, leaders, decision makers, scientists and the general public recognize that only healthy ecosystems can continue to provide vital goods and services. Therefore, there is an urgent need to reduce negative human impact and enhance ecosystem services. There are two major ways of reducing this impact. The first approach is environment management, which is a direct approach based largely on information gained from earth science, environmental science and conservation biology. The second approach is through demand management of human resource use, i.e. reducing human consumption, because the major human impact on Earth's systems is the destruction of biophysical resources, or in other words the Earth's ecosystems. These issues, and all others connected to and affecting environmental sustainability must be addressed immediately in order to achieve sustainability, where the precautionary principle is a key factor. The message and ideology of the ecosocialist approach resonates most with this need, as the only adequate solution to present-day ecological crises. An egalitarian economic, political and social structure has to be established to harmonize society with ecology and to fulfil human needs. Thus sustainability is viewed as a holistic domain that must involve all humanity redefining its very place in, and co-existence within, nature.

Self-sufficiency in Focus

Self-sufficiency means not needing any aid, support, or interaction with others for survival; it is therefore a type of personal or collective autonomy. The term self-sufficiency is generally applied to sustainable living communities in which nothing is consumed outside of what is produced within the community. Some examples of self-sufficiency include initiatives like simple living, homesteading, survivalism, DIY ethic and the back-to-the-land movement. There are activities that help self-sufficiency, for example autonomous building, permaculture, sustainable and organic agriculture, and using renewable energy. As total self-sufficiency is not easy to achieve nowadays due to global economic practices, therefore, the term is also used to refer to limited forms of self-sufficiency, for example growing one's own food, going off-grid and being independent of public utility supplies (e.g. electricity, gas and water). One such approach to self-sufficiency and sustainable living, exemplified by small-scale transition towns and rural ecovillages, seeks to create self-reliant communities based on principles of simple living. These communities try to maximize their self-sufficiency particularly by engaging in food production.

Self-sufficiency and sustainability also means that basic human needs have to be addressed in order that people and communities, whether small or large, can function properly. These needs are essential and are the following – eating, and drinking, sleeping, safety and social interaction.

When establishing communities (e.g. a small-scale family homestead, a medium-sized ecovillage, or even large urban cities), from an administrative perspective one must take into account that certain material needs and facilities must be provided to create any form of operable human society. There are five basic material needs, namely food and water, housing, clothing, health care, and education. Besides these basic needs there are complementary needs in society, which are not essential to maintain a functioning, self-sufficient community. There are five such complementary material needs. These are heating and lighting, transport, articles for personal use (e.g. tools, handicrafts), art and culture, and protection. However, in harsh environmental conditions, for example, in places with cold winters, heat and light become basic necessities.

The basic material needs of a person:²

- ❖ FOOD/WATER
- ❖ CLOTH
- ❖ HOUSING
- ❖ HEATH/MEDICAL CARE
- ❖ EDUCATION (Transferring the value system to the next generation.)

² Based on Ted Jaffe's manuscript entitled *Niceties and Necessities for Living a Good Life*. The basic material needs are the real needs of life. One can live without the complementary needs, but in the long term most people need them to lead a quality life. Ted Jaffe put the list together after 20 years of research. These are the key areas one has to take into account, if self-sufficiency is the goal.

The complementary material needs:

- ❖ TRANSPORT
- ❖ HEATING/LIGHT
- ❖ ARTICLES FOR PERSONAL USE
- ❖ ART/CULTURE
- ❖ PROTECTION

Renewable Energy Sources

Renewable energy is generally defined as a source of energy that is not depleted by use, such as water, wind, solar power or geothermal heat, and is collected from resources which are naturally replenished on a human timescale. From the point of view of self-sufficiency, renewable energy is preferable to fossil fuels. Firstly, these fossil fuel resources will be depleted in the near future due to their extensive use, and secondly they pollute the environment and living conditions.

One of the greatest questions regarding the environmental crisis is the need for energy and within it clean, renewable energy sources. Although nature's ability to renew itself is remarkable, the destruction caused by humanity is so great that it is jeopardizing the survival of humanity itself.

Therefore, it is essential to discover and implement energy-saving both at home and in industry, to use renewable energy sources, and to reduce the ecological footprint – this can be done by stepping out of the treadmill of consumer society and transitioning to a rural lifestyle requiring a much simpler maintenance system.

SAVING ENERGY IN AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT

- ❖ Use energy efficient light bulbs and install individually adjustable radiators.
- ❖ Install good insulation to reduce heat loss.
- ❖ Avoid gadgets operated with batteries. Even battery driven toys produce hazardous waste. Children are happy to play with simple toys made of natural materials.
- ❖ Be mindful of the energy efficiency of appliances like refrigerators.
- ❖ Unplug chargers after use. When leaving the house for a long period, unplug appliances.
- ❖ Consider borrowing appliances and tools we don't need all the time, rather than buy them.
- ❖ Make preserves of summer produce like fruits and vegetables and store them in reusable bottles and jars, instead of having freezers. Homemade jams and pickles are tasty, healthy and can often be prepared without preservatives.

- ❖ Join the 'Earth's Hour' movement and turn off the lights for one hour a year. A huge amount of the Earth's energy can be saved this way.
- ❖ Heating with firewood is an environmentally friendly technology as the amount of carbon dioxide released by burning is the same as the carbon dioxide absorbed by the tree during its life.
- ❖ When possible switch to renewable energy sources (e.g. solar collectors, solar panels, wind power, etc.) even if it seems to be expensive.

Clean Water

Fresh water reserves are a great asset and a great responsibility. To preserve Earth's scarce freshwater reserves we must use them much more carefully.

SAVE EVERY DROP

- ❖ Producing 1kg of meat requires about 10,000 litres of freshwater – from growing fodder, to processing meat. Treating slaughterhouse sewage also requires lots of sterilising chemicals and energy. Reduce meat consumption or join the 'Meatless Monday' movement, or become a vegetarian.
- ❖ Water usage of all kinds should be monitored at industrial and domestic levels: we can use a tap aerator to waste less water when washing hands or taking a shower.
- ❖ When buying a washing machine, consider the water usage of the various models.
- ❖ Collect rainwater outside. It can be used to water the garden and even be pumped into the house to flush the toilet. Think about how you can collect rainwater in your garden or balcony.
- ❖ Take a shower rather than a bath to wash away the fatigue after a long day.

Waste Management

The best method of waste management is to prevent waste production. This is not simple. However, if packaging materials get into the soil and water, they re-enter the food chain, which creates a detrimental effect on our bodies.

MANAGING WASTE – START ON A SMALL SCALE!

- ❖ Recyclable waste (paper, plastic bottles, glass, tins, etc.) should be deposited at recycling points.

- ❖ The most dangerous waste (batteries, fluorescent tubes, electronic waste, medicines, paint, used oil, etc.) should be deposited at specialised centres because if this get into landfills, it causes great damage.
- ❖ Never burn plastic. It directly damages the health.
- ❖ Single use containers should be compressed before putting them into the bin.
- ❖ Avoid buying food in punnets, packets or bags, choose loose produce instead.
- ❖ Whenever possible, use recycled or recyclable materials.
- ❖ Kitchen waste can be composted to produce garden fertiliser.
- ❖ Unnecessary clothes and household items should be given away or exchanged.
- ❖ Join the annual 'Let's Clean Up Europe' events organised to clean up the waste from neighbourhood communal areas.

Organic Agriculture and Horticulture

The proper ethical production of organic food creates intrinsic value – it enhances the environment and biodiversity, and improves people’s long-term health (physically, socially, environmentally and economically). Any development, production and procedure should take into account the impact it will have on the environment and preserve the integrity of organic production.

Organic agriculture is an integrated farming system that strives for sustainability, the enhancement of soil fertility and biological diversity whilst, with rare exceptions, prohibiting the use of synthetic pesticides, antibiotics, synthetic fertilizers, genetically modified organisms, and growth hormones. Organic farming is an alternative agricultural system, which began early in the 20th century in reaction to rapidly changing farming practices. Organic agriculture continues to be developed by various organizations. The basic characteristics of such farming are fertilizers of organic origin such as compost, manure and green manure. Such farming places emphasis on techniques such as crop rotation, companion planting, biological pest control, mixed cropping and the fostering of insect predators. Although there are minor exceptions, organic standards are designed to allow the use of naturally occurring substances while prohibiting or strictly limiting synthetic substances. The agricultural methods of this system are internationally regulated and legally enforced in many countries, and in large part are based on the standards set by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), which is an international umbrella organization for organic farming established in 1972.

Organic horticulture means growing fruits, vegetables, flowers, or ornamental plants by following the essential principles of organic agriculture and can be considered a part of organic farming. Organic horticulture’s soil building, conservation methods, pest management, and heirloom variety preservation are all based on organic agriculture.

The term ‘*horticulture*’ originates from two Latin words – *hortus* (garden plant) and *cultura* (culture). These words together form the definition: the culture of growing garden plants. Sometimes horticulture is also defined as “agriculture without the plough.” Instead, horticulture makes use of human labour and hand tools, although some small machines, like rotary tillers, are often used nowadays. Organic horticulture, or organic gardening, is based on knowledge and techniques gathered over thousands of years. In general terms, organic horticulture involves natural processes, often taking place over extended periods of time using a sustainable, holistic approach.

Organic agriculture is a system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions that combine tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment.

Among the many processes of organic farming and horticulture, combining scientific knowledge of ecology and modern technology with traditional farming

practices, are the principal methods of crop rotation, green manures, cover crops and composting (and also vermicomposting, mostly in horticulture), biological pest control, and mechanical cultivation, as well as the use of natural pesticides and fertilizers. Organic farming also uses animal manure, certain processed fertilizers such as seed meal and various mineral powders. Organic weed management promotes weed suppression rather than weed elimination by integrating cultural, biological, mechanical, physical and chemical tactics to manage weeds without synthetic herbicides.

In the chart below is a comparison of conventional and organic agriculture for many different elements of agriculture to have a clearer picture of the two approaches.³

| Conventional Agriculture | Elements | Organic Agriculture |
|---|---|--|
| Maximise, determined by availability and affordability of inputs; Large-scale, often owned by or economically tied to major food corporations | Scale | Optimise, determined by natural limits of the system; relatively small-scale, independent operations e.g. the family farm |
| Efficient part of the system, means of operating | Labour/communities | Integral part of the system, one of the reasons for operating |
| Optimise | Quality of Products | Maximise |
| Efficient part of the system; to be protected as an important resource, means of operating | Health of Environment | Integral part of the system; to be protected and enhanced as one of the reasons of operating |
| Marginal role | Traditional/indigenous knowledge | Integral part of system design and development |
| Considered as part of marketing | Health of consumers & producers | Integral part of the system, one of the reasons for operating |
| Facilitate marketing and trading | Standards | Guarantee integrity of the productions systems and products |
| Lessen dependency for economic reasons | External Resources (fossil fuels) | Lessen dependency for philosophical, environmental and economic reasons/ |
| Optimise | Production per ecological footprint | Maximise |
| Free trade with equal opportunities for those on an equal footing | Equity | Fair trade aiming at providing/creating/working on equity |
| Marginal role | Quality of Life of producers, processors, traders and consumers | Integral part of system design and development, one of the reasons for operating |
| Branding/trademark identity for marketing and trade | Identity of Products | Intrinsic values as part of product identity e.g. environmental and biodiversity benefits, consumer and community health, nutritional value (absence of contaminants and presence of nutrients, antioxidants etc.) |
| Maximising for profit | End Goal | Optimising for all system benefits and reasons for operating |

³ <https://organicnz.org.nz/index.php?q=organic/what>

Growing Organic Vegetables

An organic garden is more than just a means of providing food, it is a model of what is possible in a community. A lot of people could produce nutritious organic food using a container, a growing box, or a raised bed. Such small scale ventures can supplement a family with home-grown food, and when supported and encouraged it can even help supply a community with organic produce, promoting a more sustainable way of living. Organic gardening is a structure that can help us work in harmony with ecological systems and reduce the disturbance of the Earth's natural biosphere.

Organic gardeners use fertilizers such as compost, manure, mulches, planting cover crops, and other organic fertilizers to maintain a soil cover throughout most of the year. Such use of organic fertilizers yields a higher organic content in soils than on non-organic farms and helps limit soil degradation and erosion. Other methods are used to supplement existing gardens; methods such as composting, or vermicomposting, which recycle organic matter into very effective organic fertilizers and soil conditioners.

WHY CHEMICAL-FREE FOOD?

- ❖ If we have an unhealthy lifestyle - if we don't care what, when, or how much we eat and if we don't exercise, we become weak and ill. This is also true for plants.
- ❖ We should not copy the standards of large farms. At home our goal should be to grow different kinds of plants, as growing different varieties next to each other is beneficial if done properly, naturally preventing plants from diseases and bugs. Plant association is a science: if one does not apply this science, then a commonly used option is chemicals. However, using chemicals makes plants weak and unhealthy. It is worth the effort to carefully cultivate our garden instead of choosing the simpler but often more expensive solution.
- ❖ Around the world more and more people are trying to return to traditional agricultural practices. It is easier in the beginning join a small local gardening group or become partners on a working farm. Such first steps are valuable to gain experience, and if we stick to our principles and goals, then that will later bear fruit.
- ❖ Those who choose the organic way will get their payment not in money, but in healthy food and the satisfaction that comes from living in harmony with nature and shared environment.

CREATING YOUR GARDEN, BIG OR SMALL

- ❖ Find a small area where you can grow a few varieties of vegetables. If you don't want to have problems with weeds, you can use plants that cover the soil, like mustard. This keeps away weeds and keeps the soil moist. It also serves as a natural fertilizer.
- ❖ If you don't want to kneel on the ground, build raised beds.
- ❖ You can create a balcony garden with tomato, chilli, basil or hanging strawberries; it all depends on one's creativity.
- ❖ No balcony? You can grow herbs in a window box, especially perennials like rosemary, mint, sage, and marjoram. Simply plant them once and they will live for years.

GENTLE METHODS OF PEST CONTROL

- ❖ Plant association prevents diseases and keeps pests away. There are many methods in this category, such as planting red onion and carrot next to each other. The smell of both plants keeps away pests that would be drawn to the other.
- ❖ Planting marigold flowers keeps away eelworms. This is important for root crops, but also helps other plants as well. It is also good to plant marigolds next to tomatoes. Marigold is an easily grown flower which attracts bees for pollination, yet keeps away many pests with its scent. Basil is also a good growing partner for tomatoes.
- ❖ There are several types of homemade sprays that are helpful in keeping insects away from plants, including chilli and hot paprika. Nettles are also useful and are a great source of nitrogen, too. Freshly cut nettle at the roots of plants is also a natural pest deterrent. Castile soap mixed with water eliminates bugs and pests if used weekly. It is important to also spray the underside of leaves.
- ❖ One way to get rid of slugs is to collect and remove them. If boards are placed between the rows in garden beds, slugs will gather underneath because they like damp places. From there we can easily collect them and move them far away to a field where nothing is grown for consumption.
- ❖ Colorado beetles are more difficult. If you have grown potatoes, you know how much damage they can cause. If we can't fill the garden with their natural enemies like ducks, then collecting them is another solution. But timing is important: they are rarely seen in the morning or evening, but are easily during the day.
- ❖ If we don't have much gardening time due to other responsibilities, we can use natural sprays used organic cultivation. Nowadays we can buy these in many shops including traditional agriculture supply shops.

Plant Association and Crop Rotation

Use of plant association and crop rotation is an inevitable topic that helps us maintain productive food plants and their health. When speaking of diversified gardening, maintaining the soil's health and the welfare of plants enhances productivity and prevents the escalation of diseases. When planning crop rotation we need to take into account the succession of plants, and when designing conscious plant association we take into consideration their adjacency.

There is a complex system of symbiotic relationships and antipathy among plants. These relations function on the biochemical level, have physiological reasons and manifest through the metabolism of species. One plant prepares the soil while another one frightens off pests, or the third one grows hardly at all next to the fourth one.

If we take into consideration these relations, we will save ourselves a lot of trouble and our gardening will be much more fruitful.

Plant association

The most common associations:

- carrot with onion (they protect each other from carrot rust fly and onion maggot);
- celery with plants of the cabbage family (they protect each other from celery blight and cabbage-butterfly);
- lettuce with radish (lettuce protects radish from vine-beetle);
- cabbage with tomato (tomato discourages cabbage-butterflies);
- potato with green bean (green bean discourages Colorado beetle);
- cucumber with onion (onion hinders the spread of mildew).

Other favourable associations:

- bean with plants of the cabbage family;
- beetroot with plants of the cabbage family;
- tomato with parsley;
- tomato with onion;
- tomato with celery;
- tomato with dwarf bean;
- parsnip with onion;
- lettuce with bean;
- lettuce with cucumber;
- lettuce with dwarf bean;
- lettuce with beetroot;
- lettuce with Swiss chard;
- pea with plants of the cabbage family;

- cucumber with plants of cabbage;
- potato with pea;
- potato with broad-bean.



Nasturtium (Tropaeolum), originating from South America, is a useful plant for organic gardeners: it discourages pests, is beautiful, and its leaves and flowers are edible. (Photo: kolibrikert.hu)

Nasturtium, tomato, celery, basil (and other plants containing essential oils, like wild marjoram (oregano), sage, and pepper-grass) are known as repellents, since they keep pests away from plants. With the exception of unwanted adjacency these may be used effectively everywhere in association.

Here is a list of antipathetic associations:

- bean with onion;
- potato with onion;
- red cabbage with tomato;
- carrot with tomato;
- parsley with lettuce;
- paprika with aubergine;
- squash with potato.

If we always take into account these so-called antipathetic relations, then we cannot make mistakes.



Vegetable beds at a Hungarian organic farm in May

Crop rotation

In connection to the timing of planting and seeding, it is best to group vegetables in 3 main groups in the following way (abbreviations of family names⁴ are in brackets. This is important in the planning of a rotation system.

Group A – Main vegetables in the garden from May until the end of the growing period. Only vegetables with a short growing period can be planted in the same row before May. Includes: tomato (p), runner bean (l), cucumber (cu), late-cabbage (br), potato (p), pumpkin (cu), zucchini (cu).

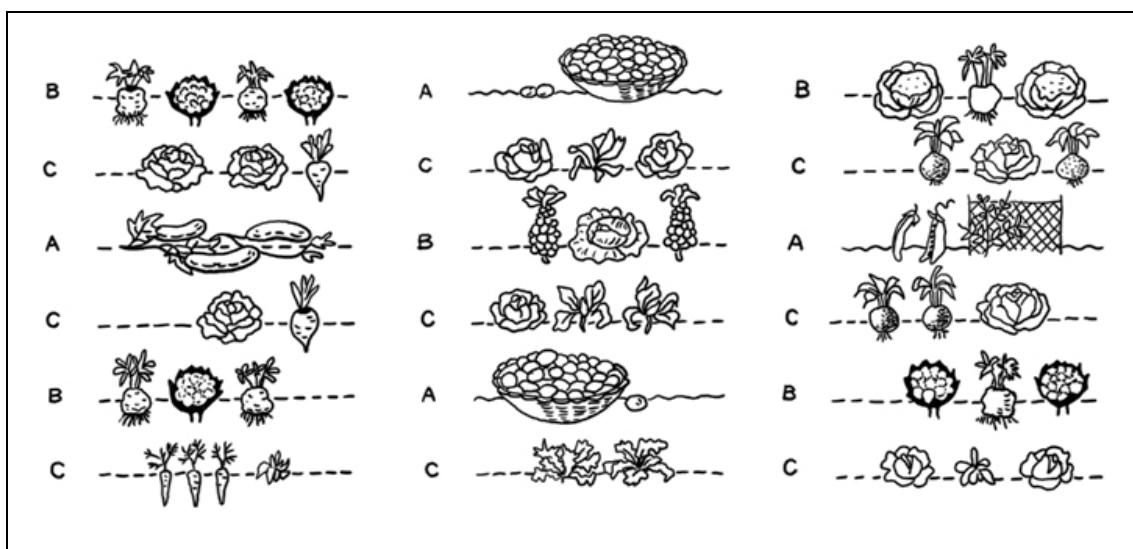
Group B – Vegetables in the first or second growing period. Includes: cauliflower (br), celery (ap), dwarf bean (l), early-cabbage (br), beetroot (ch), pea (l), parsnip (ap), onion (li), black salsify (as).

Group C – Vegetables with a short growing period. These may be replanted repeatedly and can include different varieties (early, summer, late) of the same plant families. Includes: early potato (p), lettuces (as), early, mid-early and late carrot (ap), kohlrabi (br), radish (br), sweet fennel (ap).

When planning the arrangement of a vegetable garden it is best to plant vegetables from A, B, and C group consecutively, so they reach maturity at different times.

The distance between rows varies from 40-50 cm. A classic pattern is A, C, B, C, A. This means there are about 2 metres between two A rows occupied by one B, and two C rows. We can plant green crops for the same row from group C with a short enough growing period. In B rows are vegetables from groups B or C that are planted before the main vegetables of B rows.

⁴ Abbreviation of family names: (p) – solanaceae or potato types, (ap) – apiales, (as) – asterales, (l) – legumes, (br) – brassicaceae or cabbage types, (ch) – chenopodium, (li) – liliaceae, (cu) – cucurbitaceae.



Three examples for the above mentioned arrangements of groups (based on Franck, G. 1987).

This system may at first appear to be overly complicated. However, once we create a plan in accordance with our needs, we may use the same basic plan every year with only some slight alterations.

Within rows we may interchange vegetables according to the above-mentioned favourable/unfavourable associations. Crop rotation is realized by moving each row down (according to the example plan given above) each year. The general principle is that a vegetable in the same family (see above for family abbreviations) should not be planted in the same place within 3 years.

If we use crop rotation and mulch and compost in between the rows, then in a few years we will have a very productive organic garden.

Composting

Compost is organic matter that has been decomposed and recycled as a fertilizer and soil amendment. Compost is usually a key ingredient in organic farming. At a basic level, the process of composting simply requires making a pile of wetted organic matter known as green waste (leaves, food waste) and waiting for the materials to break down into humus after a period of several weeks or months.

However, modern methods of producing composting are multi-step, monitored processes with measured inputs of water and air, as well as carbon- and nitrogen-rich materials. The process of decomposition is facilitated by shredding the plant matter, adding water and ensuring proper aeration by regularly turning the mixture. Worms and fungi further break down the material. Bacteria, requiring oxygen to function, and fungi manage the chemical process by converting the inputs into heat, carbon dioxide and ammonium.

Compost is rich in nutrients and is used in gardening, landscaping, horticulture, and agriculture. Compost is beneficial for the land, it act as a soil conditioner, a fertilizer, adds vital humus, and can act as a natural pesticide. Compost can help in erosion control, land and stream reclamation, wetland construction, and as landfill cover.

Preparing compost

Most common ingredients

- ❖ Grass clippings (worth mixing with broken twigs and leaves, and a little earth as otherwise it may rot).
- ❖ Plant cuttings (must be cut to a maximum of 15 cm).
- ❖ Kitchen refuse (except from tropical fruit skin and food remnants).
- ❖ Weeds
- ❖ Remains of commercial crops

Composting tips

- ❖ Do not put too many leaves at the same time. With larger amounts, dampen with water, and keep aside. In a few weeks decomposition will begin – at that time put the leaves in the main compost.
- ❖ Weeds can be used in composting, but should be treated with caution. Weeds should be collected in a separate pile. When the middle of the compost heats up to 70–80F, then the weeds can be mixed into the middle (check the temperature with a compost thermometer first). Temperatures of 70–80F destroys a weed's ability to reproduce. There are highly invasive weeds like couch-grass and bindweed which should not be added to compost. Burn or discard weeds like this in a place where they won't cause a problem, for example where trees are planted.

What not to add to compost

- ❖ Any part of sick or infested plants – compost made from this may re-infect other plants in the garden.
- ❖ Food – this will attract animals like dogs, rats and foxes.
- ❖ Skins of tropical fruits – these can contain traces of pesticides and fertilizers, and decompose slowly.
- ❖ Commercially grown flowers - these are often treated with chemicals.
- ❖ Plastic or colour printed paper – these do not decompose completely and contain toxic materials.
- ❖ Any non-decomposable materials such as glass, metal, or stones.

Ideally, compost should be 2/3 green matter to 1/3 dry matter. From time to time it is worth putting a few shovels of soil on compost. Alternatively, place it between layers of plant matter so the micro-organisms in the soil can break down the plant matter, and thus decomposition will take place more quickly. In warm periods, compost can be ready in 1–2 months. However, the usual time for the maturation of compost is 6 months or more.

It is important that compost does not dry out, so it is a good idea to site it in the shade, and during warm summers it is advisable to water it at least once a week. It is also helpful to turn or mix compost on a weekly basis. The right time to mix compost is when, after having heated up for the first time, it begins to cool down. Mixing compost adds air, which increases the rate of decomposition immediately thereafter. When compost is mixed a little wood ash can be added (wood ash is a good source of potassium).

Mature compost looks and smells like earth, but is darker and has a looser texture. When using compost on the garden, any organic material that has not yet decomposed should be added back into the compost. There is no need to work the compost into the ground; it is easier to just sprinkle it on the top and leave the rest to the worms. This also helps to stimulate soil-life. After 2–3 months before sowing the first seeds we should spread compost on the ground. Then, by the time we come to sow, we will have perfect, loose garden soil. It is not worth spreading compost on frozen earth because the majority of the nitrogen will be lost by the time the worms begin to work it into the ground.

The Value of Oxen

While the role of cows in simple living is appreciated because of their milk production, the importance of working oxen for many is still not understood. Working with oxen has a long history and can be traced back thousands of years. However, the role of working animals was undermined by the industrial revolution and has become considerably reduced. Just a few decades ago, farmers who worked with animals instead of machines were considered backward.

Fortunately, a revival in traditional agriculture started several years ago when farmers in industrialized countries turned back to the farming methods of their ancestors. Now more people are beginning to appreciate the value of working animals, giving these animals the credit they deserve. In the United States several hundred small farming projects have started using oxen instead of tractors. The continuous rise in petrol prices has been an important factor in this trend.

Because industrialisation and consumer society has led the world to the brink of ecological disaster, traditional agricultural methods are now considered progressive. Partly due to this, using oxen instead of machines gives inspiration, strength and self-esteem to farmers.

This positive effect will increase worldwide if we, the consumers, buy food grown on such farms. It is clearly an individual decision whether we support these kinds of farming projects instead of industrialised farms. The success of the organic farming movement requires the support of consumers and the economic sector.



Working oxen at rest at a Hungarian organic farm

In all pre-industrial civilizations, using the power of animals as a motive force was the norm – the only alternative was to replace working animals with humans. When animals are both valued and well-treated, engaging them in agricultural work becomes beneficial for both animals and humans. Pre-industrial societies knew that agricultural work is suitable for the temperament of oxen and engaged them, as well as other animals, accordingly. In modern agriculture, male animals are generally viewed as unproductive (apart from the few kept for reproduction). But when bulls can be trained to become working oxen, they become a valuable participant in the creation of wealth for individuals and society at large.

There are many ways oxen can be engaged in agricultural work, including land cultivation, haymaking, milling, and transport. Using ox for this kind of work reduces the need to use heavy machinery and thus reduces the strain on the environment caused by fossil fuels powered machinery.

There are various elements needed to successfully working with oxen. These include: dedicated trained people, well-trained oxen, optimum timing, and effective equipment.

In the chart below we can see various types of work oxen perform at a Hungarian organic farm. Not all these activities are fully developed, for example, the drawing of water from a well or the production of electricity using a capstan are still under development.⁵

| Land cultivation | Haymaking | Ox mill | Transport | Training |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ploughing - land preparation - sowing - cultivation - harvesting - maintenance - manure spreading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cutting - turning - raking - collecting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - threshing - sawing - milling - pulling water - producing electricity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - festivals - processions - guest and general transport - firewood | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - training for each year from an ox's birth until its 4th year |

⁵ Antal Kósa, *Presentation on Variety of Ox-work*. Conference on Cow Protection, Simhacalam, Jandelsbrunn, Germany, 2014.

Another valuable agricultural contribution of bulls, oxen and cows is fertiliser, or manure. Organic manure is a treasure for farmers, since all food production requires a reliable source of nutrients. Using cow dung is a natural way to provide such nutrients. The basis of organic gardening is a well-prepared and nutritive rich soil and the best currently existing soil-condition supplying material is cow manure. This manure contains nutrients in optimal proportions and improves the structure of the soil. It also loosens dense soil, makes clay rich ground friable and helps vegetables absorb nutrients. Of course, cow dung sourced from organic farms is better than that from non-organic sources. If someone does not have a farm close by, then buying organic pulverized manure is a good alternative.

According to Vedic teachings, without protecting cows and oxen it is impossible to maintain spiritual culture, and without such culture it is impossible to attain the goal of life. Therefore, these animals were protected in Vedic culture and there was no livestock which exploited cattle. Quite the contrary, these powerful productive animals were respected and treated as valuable members of the household and were not killed even in old age. Cows were kept for their milk, whereas oxen as well as bulls acted as the motive force for agricultural work and transportation, thus sustaining families in accordance with the principles of simple living, high thinking.

Vegetarianism – The Importance of Reducing Meat Production and Consumption

A vegetarian diet requires one third of the land of a meat-based diet. If instead of feeding grains to animals those grains were fed to humans it would help resolve a significant part of the international food crisis. The grains fed to animals kept for their meat or the crops grown on the land producing such fodder would, combined with proper distribution, feed the 7 billion people on planet Earth.

Current research indicates that the current trend of increasing meat consumption worldwide, with about 50 billion animals slaughtered annually, cannot continue. The keeping of billions of animals for the purpose of meat production is responsible for many issues connected to global warming. These issues include: the methane gas animals produce, and the finite resources used in the production, processing and safe distribution of meat.

Reducing meat consumption would be more influential in minimizing climate change than, for instance the replacement of fossil fuels by renewables. A study by the World Watch Institute states: “At least 51% of global warming-potential gases of human activities come from animal husbandry and the connected industries.” The world’s livestock industry produces almost 32 billion tons of carbon dioxide and other harmful gases annually, far exceeding the emissions in industrial production. It is estimated that 37% of the methane released into the air is the consequence of meat and milk production (methane is several hundred percent more harmful to the atmosphere than carbon dioxide). Extraordinary problems are caused to create grazing and crops for livestock (including forage), meaning that forests and natural areas are being damaged and in some cases destroyed. Meat production also has many hidden costs. For example, European pigs are fed with cheap soya from Brazil.

Meat production requires a lot of electricity because carcasses must be kept refrigerated, and to make meat safe to eat cooking times are longer therefore more fuel is used than when cooking vegetarian based food. Thus, changing practices in livestock farming and implementing a drastic reduction in meat consumption are essential for environmental protection and should have as high a priority on government agendas as replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, an institution in charge of climate change, has stated that reducing meat consumption provides the greatest chance for stopping global climate change. If we want to help the environment and live a quality life, then we should either give up eating meat, or at least minimize meat in our diet.

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF INDUSTRIAL MEAT PRODUCTION⁶

- ❖ According to a European Committee, all the grains produced in Europe would alone feed the entire human population, yet this grain currently only supplies 20% of the needs of Europe's livestock farms. In other words, an area 5 times bigger than Europe is now being used to feed all the livestock in Europe.
- ❖ In the USA 80% of corn and 95% of oats produced there are fed to livestock.
- ❖ According to the calculations of FAO and WHO, crops from one hectare of land can:
 - 1) Feed 22 people, if potatoes are grown
 - 2) Feed 19 people, if rice is grown
 - 3) Feed 1-2, if used for meat production
- ❖ According to a 2004 report by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development: 13,000 litres of water are needed to produce 1kg of beef, whereas 550 litres of water is needed to produce the flour for 1kg of bread.
- ❖ Pork requires 17 times more energy than it takes to produce the same quantity of vegetables.
- ❖ Globally livestock-raising uses 2/3 of the earth's agricultural land. A recent study showed that almost 4.3 billion animals and 18 billion poultry are raised for meat; these animals are fed with a significant percentage of vegetables from agriculture – 80% of soya bean production and 75% of marine fish are fed to animals.
- ❖ From 1950 to 1970 humanity's meat consumption multiplied 5-fold; since 1970 it has doubled.

⁶ Data source: http://naturportal.hu/eletmod/25_erv_vegetarianizmus_mellett; <http://tudatosvasarlo.hu/cikkek/529>; Cremo, M. A.- Mukunda G.1995; Végh L.-Szám D.- Hetesi Zs. 2008.

Preserving without Preservatives

Making Homemade Preserves and Syrups

Storing, processing and preserving vegetables and fruits is an essential procedure in organic farming, especially if we live in a place where the growing seasons are short (e.g. six months) and winters are cold. During this time we have to use stored and preserved vegetables and fruits. Thus learning how to preserve food is essential for self-sufficiency.

Firstly, there is an optimum time for harvesting vegetables and fruits. If we do it at the right time they can be stored and preserved easier and for longer. Gradation of the quality of produce is an important aspect when processing and preserving of vegetables and fruits. Here are some examples of simple and healthy ways to preserve food without preservatives.

Elderflower Syrup

Ingredients:

2 litres water

15–20 of elderflower flower heads

2 lemons

2kg sugar

Storage bottle

Method: Add the elderflowers to the water (if the flowers are clean and without insects it is not necessary to wash them). Cut the lemons into slices and add those to the water as well. Let this soak for 2 days in a cool place covered with a thin cloth, so it is exposed to the air. Stir each day. On the third day pour the mixture through a fine sieve into a bowl. Place liquid in a sturdy pot and add 2kg of sugar and 50 grams of citric acid. Stir liquid to melt the sugar while bringing it to the boil. Simmer for a short time, and then put the syrup in the storage bottle. Put a lid on the bottle and leave to cool.

Preserving Green Beans

The amount of preserving liquid added to green beans depends on the size of the jar. Therefore, the size of the jar determines how much liquid one uses. One should use tender, crispy pods for preserving.

Ingredients for the preserving liquid:

3 litres water

1 spoon of salt

1 spoon citric acid

Preserving jars

Method:

Wash the beans, snip off and discard the ends, and, if needed, wash again. Put water on to boil. Add beans to boiling water, parboiling them for 2–3 minutes (the beans should be removed from the water when springy, neither hard, nor soft). Drain the beans. Cut the pods in half only if necessary, as the cut surface increases the loss of nutrients, especially vitamins. Add the salt and citric acid to the cooking liquid. Meanwhile, fill the jars with beans up to 3/4 of the jars capacity. Pour the lukewarm liquid onto the beans. Wipe the sealing surface of the jars with a clean, damp cloth. Put the lids on. Take a large pot. On the bottom of the pot place a clean kitchen-cloth or thick paper. After putting the jars in the pot, fill the bottom of the pot with warm water up to a depth of 2 inches. Cover the pot and slowly bring to the boil. Simmer gently for 20 minutes. Leave the jars in the water and take them out once the water is cool.

Preserving Sour Cherry without Sugar

Method:

Use only flawless fruit. Wash cherries thoroughly. Remove the stems. Remove the pits from the cherries with a knife. Wash the cherries again with cold water and put them in scalded jars. Wipe the sealing surface of the jars with a clean, damp cloth. Put the lids on. Then take a large pot. On the bottom of the pot place a clean kitchen-cloth or thick paper. After putting the jars in the pot, fill the bottom of the pot with warm water up to a depth of 2 inches. Cover the pot and slowly bring to the boil. Simmer gently for 15 minutes. Leave the jars in the water and take them out once the water is cool.

The same preserving procedure can be used for apricots, plums and tomatoes. If we leave tomatoes in boiling hot water for a few minutes, the skin peels off easily.

Homemade Strawberry Preserve

If we plant strawberry seedlings at the beginning of autumn, then we may be able to harvest strawberries the following spring. The following is a description of how to preserve strawberries in three different ways used at a Hungarian ecovillage, Krishna Valley.

First, we clean the strawberries, and soak them in sugar for a day. By doing this the strawberries give off juice. There is no need to add water. You need 1/3 of a unit of sugar for 1 unit of strawberries – for instance, for 12kgs of strawberries we add 4kgs of sugar. Then we separate the fruit and its juice by carefully pouring the juice through a filter. After that we boil the juice for 10 minutes, skimming off the foam. When the juice cools down, we pour it back onto the fruit. We repeat the procedure in the next two days. On the third day we add the fruit to the liquid and boil them together for a few minutes. We then put the hot

preserve in clean jars, seal the jars tightly and wrap them in dry cloth so they cool down slowly. When the jars are cool, we unwrap them, and put them in a cool, dry place.



Strawberry preserve and strawberry syrup from a Hungarian organic farm.

Strawberry preserve*

Remove the stalks and wash the strawberries properly. Put the strawberries in a dish and add the sugar and leave it for 24 hours. Filter the juice and boil the juice for 10 minutes, skimming off the foam. When the juice cools down, pour it back onto the strawberries. Repeat this same procedure on the next day and the day after, boiling the juice, adding the strawberries to the juice and boiling them together for a couple of minutes. On the third day, once the mixture is cool, put the strawberries in jars after removing the juice, seal the jars tightly and wrap them in dry clothes so the jars cool slowly.

*You need 1/3 of sugar to 1 unit of strawberry; i.e. 1/3kg of sugar to 1kg of strawberry.

Strawberry syrup

Add 0.2kgs of sugar to each litre of strawberry juice left over after making the strawberry jam. Boil this syrup, then pour it into bottles and wrap the bottles in dry cloths.

Strawberry jam

Wash and clean the strawberries, then pound them. Put the strawberries in a pot and bring to the boil. Add sugar (0.4kgs of sugar to 1kg of strawberries). Once boiling cook the mixture for 20–25 minutes. Place the preserve in jars and seal them (sterilize the jars before using them). Wrap the bottles in dry clothes so the jars cool slowly.

Making Homemade Detergents: Washing Soda and Household Soap

It is ecologically advisable to replace synthetic chemical detergents for eco-friendly ones, however shop bought eco-detergents can be quite expensive or difficult to source. So, besides preserving the environment and protecting our health, it is the depth of our purse that persuades many of us to abandon shop-bought cleaning products.

An additional benefit is that natural soaps can be utilized for many different purposes. Also, making our own homemade products creates an opportunity to be creative.

Washing soda (sodium carbonate)

Washing soda is a general household detergent, dissolving grease and softening water; it is alkaline, which means it is effective in removing built up calcium in places like the insides of a kettle. Washing soda dissolves easily in hot water. In the process of its production there are no by-products which have a negative effect on the environment. It is also inexpensive. It can be found in both health shops or supermarkets.



Washing soda (photo source: mixonline.hu)

Washing soda and other natural cleaners, when used properly, are more gentle than chemical detergents and therefore using them might require a bit more elbow grease and time.

When washing clothes 1/2–1/3 of your normal washing powder can be replaced with washing soda. By doing this, your clothes will be softer and their colour will last longer – to achieve this wash your clothes at 40–60 Celsius.

Washing gel

It is possible to make washing gel from household soap. First, grate the soap, then boil it in distilled water. For white clothes add sodium carbonate to the gel. When rinsing the clothes add a mild acid such as cider vinegar – this neutralizes any alkali left in the cloth. It is also nice to add essential oils when washing clothes, e.g. tea tree oil (which has fungicidal and bactericidal effects), or lavender oil (which is soothing). Citrus oils can also be used. This gives the clothes a pleasant odour.

Another use for washing gel is to wash cooking and eating utensils. Put 1 spoon of sodium carbonate in 5 litres of hot water (after washing glass with this detergent, rinse the glass with vinegary water, to remove streaks). Do not clean aluminium with this type of washing gel. If you have sensitive skin, use rubber gloves when doing the washing up to avoid skin becoming dry.

Green Household

The destruction of the environment includes the exploitation of the soil, the pollution of water, air and nature. Even now chemicals contaminate much of the world's food and water.

GETTING RID OF CHEMICALS

- ❖ A clean home and body can be achieved using organic cleaning agents like vinegar, wood ash lye, soda, citric acid, essential oils, horse chestnut or soap nut. Recipes for homemade preparations are widely available. These naturally sourced preparations can be used in communal buildings to provide hygiene.
- ❖ Cosmetics without synthetic ingredients are increasingly available and if you are feeling adventurous, with a little investment of time and using a few good ingredients, you can prepare aluminium-free deodorant and lipstick without animal fat or artificial ingredients.
- ❖ Try natural remedies for minor ailments. For example, try the Vedic culture's ancient science of life, Ayurveda. Pollution from medicines is a significant burden on the environment and human health. This burden can be avoided by using medicinal herbs and disease preventing methods by using natural products and living a healthy lifestyle. However, when necessary, you must take the medicine prescribed by your doctor.

MAKE YOUR OWN HOMEMADE BEAUTY TREATMENTS

Good recipes for homemade beauty treatments can be found on the Internet, in books and magazines, and there are even courses on the subject. It is possible to switch from synthetic based treatments to more natural homemade versions. Nature provides us plenty of alternatives in cleaning and skin care, adapting the recipes according to our own taste, skin type, or issues. But there are some disadvantages with homemade cosmetics.

- ❖ Natural products go bad quickly, as they do not contain artificial preservatives. Avoid this problem by making small quantities and using it in a short space of time.
- ❖ The use of inferior ingredients can be as harmful as synthetic ones.
- ❖ If necessary, keep creams in the fridge.
- ❖ Allergic reactions can also be caused by natural products, so make a skin test before every new product is used.

KITCHEN & HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

VINEGAR: It has a softening effect, is a great conditioner for the hair, and cleans clothes and dishes.

❖ *VINEGAR HAIR RINSE*

Wash your hair, then add 1 tablespoon vinegar-acid (or apple-vinegar or lemon juice) to 1 litre of warm water and work through hair. The result will be shiny hair which is easy to comb. If you want a nice scent too, add 1-2 drops of your favourite essential oil.

ESSENTIAL OILS: Besides their therapeutic qualities in aromatherapy and healing, essential oils also have preservative qualities. Some of them are fungicides so they protect product from mould (e.g. lavender and oregano), and some are bactericide (e.g. lemon and tea-tree).

ASH: With some water and wood ash we can produce lye, a liquid washing detergent, very simply. Wet wood ash is an effective cleaner for the bath, sink, and other hard surfaces (use with caution when cleaning delicate surfaces).

❖ *ASH-LYE WASHING DETERGENT*

Ingredients: 5 litres water, 2 litres ash-lye, 100g soap.

Making ash-lye: Into 1 litre of wood ash slowly add 3 litres of boiling water. Cover this mixture and leave it for a few days. After the ash sinks to the bottom, carefully pour off the water, straining it through a cloth. This liquid is ash-lye which is relatively strong. When handling it carefully follow good recipes and wear rubber gloves.

How to make soap with ash-lye: Melt the soap in a little water, then pour into a pot, adding 2 litres of lye. Stir together, and then add 5 litres of warm water. Mix well, cover, and put aside overnight. The resultant washing detergent will be thick.

BUTTERS: Ghee (clarified butter), coconut butter, cocoa butter etc. can also be used as ingredients for creams and skin care, as they add consistency to the mix.

VEGETABLE OILS (preferably coldly pressed):

Vegetable oils nourish the skin, can be used for massage, and as an ingredient in creams, masks, soaps etc. Most often we use olive oil, coconut oil, sunflower oil in the household, all of which nourish the skin.

❖ *LIP CREAM*

Ingredients: 1 tsp vegetable oil, 1 tbsp butter, 1-2 drops of essential oil (e.g. orange, lavender, or vanilla).

How to prepare: Melt the butter over steam and mix the essential oil into it. Keep stirring until it is cold. Store in small jars.

POWDERED SPICES (e.g. mint, cinnamon, fennel, clove):

For teeth cleaning, and for adding natural scent to soaps, teeth cleaners, and powders.

DRIED HERBS (e.g. nettle, chamomile, lavender):

Dried herbs beautify and cure, and are good for skin washing, baths, homemade soaps, and creams.

SALT: Can be used as an exfoliating skin scrub, it also emulsifies and cleanses.

❖ *SHAMPOO TEA:*

Ingredients: ½ litre of nettle tea (for dark hair) or chamomile (for blond hair), 2 tbsp of baking soda, 1 tbsp of salt, 1 tsp of honey.

How to prepare: Strain the tea after soaking, then mix in baking soda and salt. When cool, add honey.

Note: Shampoo tea will not create a foam, but it cleans the hair and scalp nicely. Rinse shampoo-tea from the hair with water, then wash hair with a slightly sour rinse made with 1 tbsp of lemon juice or apple vinegar mixed in 1 litre of water. Rinse again. Nettle keeps the hair and scalp in good condition, and baking soda gently cleans the hair. Salt emulsifies the skin and honey is nourishing.

DAIRY PRODUCE: Ingredients in face-wash, masks, baths, and soaps.

HONEY: Nourishes, hydrates, reduces inflammation, helps cure wounds, sterilises, and preserves.

FLOURS: (oat, rice, corn starch): Help skin problems, and solidify liquid products.

❖ *FACE MASK FOR TIREDNESS:*

Ingredients: 1 tbsp honey, 1 tbsp cream, 1 tbsp mineral water.

How to prepare: Make a large amount of this to use it for your whole body. Add 1 tbsp of vegetable oil to 1 tbsp of oat flour to make a body scrub. This mixture freshens and nourishes the skin.

We wish you good luck and fun in making and experimenting with your green household products at home.

Find more recipes on the following webpage:

<http://www.natureanddevotion.com>

Bee Keeping and Producing Honey

The Importance of Beekeeping

Bees are important – not just because they give us tasty and healthy products like honey, pollen, propolis and royal jelly, but also because they play a key role in pollination of flowers. When flowers are pollinated plants are then able to produce seeds, grains, beans, nuts, fruits, berries, and vegetables. Bees are thus essential to the food-production chain and for keeping nature in balance. Beekeeping helps develop a sense of responsibility for living creatures and for nature. It can also help someone become more self-sufficient in their food sources.

How to Start

It is important to understand how bees do their work, their rhythm, and their needs. This understanding is also important to reduce the number of times bees sting. Therefore, the first thing we would recommend is to attend a course on beekeeping. Courses often start in March since that is the time when bees become active.

We would recommend getting a “bee-mentor” who can guide you in beekeeping. And of course, there are many written sources on beekeeping like books, magazines or Internet publications, which can be of great help and inspiration.

Anyone starting beekeeping needs to consider the following:

- ❖ How many hours will you have free for beekeeping?
- ❖ What equipment do you need? E.g. beehives, beehive-boxes, protective clothing, smoker. Smoke and water spray are helpful to calm bees down. Protective clothing such as a veil is recommended, especially in the beginning.
- ❖ Where do you put the bees? In your garden, in the forest? Windy conditions have to be avoided when working with bees. Sometimes you also need permission from local authorities.
- ❖ What kind of bees would you like to have? The climate is one factor to consider when deciding which kind of bee is best for you.

A beehive

A beehive consists of a queen, and about 40,000 summer workers, 10,000 winter workers, and 200 drones. During 1 year there can be 5 generations.

A bee lives for 9 weeks. 3 weeks brood, 3 weeks inside the hive, and 3 weeks outside.

Each bee has its tasks. The queen produces eggs – up to 2,000 a day from March to June.

The working bees clean and warm the hive, feed the grubs, accept and transport nectar, build combs, guard the hive, and collect honey and pollen, etc. They visit about 200 flowers during each “outing”.

The drones inseminate the queen and keep the temperature stable in the hive.

Tasks of the beekeeper

After starting a hive the beekeeper creates the right environment for the bees, and supports them where possible. He supplies water, food, warmth, sun protection etc. He checks the hive once or twice a month. He harvests honey, wax and propolis.

Products

Honey

There are different kinds of honey e.g: mixed, flower, and tree. Ancient cultures like the Greeks and the Romans used honey to heal sore throats, colds, flu, and diarrhea. Raw honey contains enzymes, minerals, and vitamins such as B-complex, C, D and E. Honey is generally sweeter than sugar and easier to digest.

Pollen

Bee pollen is nutritious. It is rich in enzymes, contains vitamins (especially B₂, B₃ and B₅), minerals like calcium, iron and magnesium, amino acids, and proteins. It has detoxifying and healing effects and is very good for the ill, the elderly, and children.

Propolis

Bees collect propolis from tree bark and leaf buds. The health effects of propolis can be compared to antibiotics because propolis restricts the reproduction of viruses, bacteria and fungus. Ancient cultures used propolis against colds and to heal wounds, bed sores, and skin ulcers. Propolis stimulates the healing process and can prevent infections as well as strengthening the immune system. Liquid propolis is used in products like cream, toothpaste and lip balm.

Royal Jelly

Royal jelly is a liquid produced by bees that is fed to the queen throughout her life. It contains protein, amino acids, vitamins and enzymes. Royal jelly is said to be an immune-boosting anti-aging food, promoting long life and restoring vitality. It also helps in cases of chronic fatigue, weakness and memory.

Wax

Wax can be used for candles or in cosmetics. Candles can be produced from wax sheets or liquid wax.

Youth Voluntary Services

Youth Voluntary Services are organized all over the world by different agencies like WWOOF, Helpx, or Workaway.

- ❖ WWOOF (www.woof.net)
- ❖ Helpx (helpx.net)
- ❖ Workaway (www.workaway.info)
- ❖ Freevolunteering (www.freevolunteering.net)

European Voluntary Service (EVS) is an international volunteer programme funded by the European Commission. At the website of EVS (www.europeanvoluntaryservice.org) one finds the following information:

It enables all young people legally resident in Europe, aged between 18 and 30 years, to carry out an international volunteer service in an organisation or in a public body in Europe, Africa, Asia or South America for a period ranging from 2 to 12 months. It is very similar to the International Civil Service: provides the reimbursement of travel expenses (90%) and complete coverage of the costs of food and accommodation for the international volunteer.

Thanks to the intercultural dimension and its non-formal approach, European Voluntary Service is a unique opportunity to come into contact with cultures different from your own and to acquire new skills and abilities useful for your personal and professional growth.

EVS is based on the following principles:

- ❖ increasing your own skills through the practical experience of volunteering abroad;
- ❖ encouraging the learning of another language;
- ❖ developing the ability to interact with persons of different language and culture;
- ❖ spreading tolerance among young people of the European Union;
- ❖ promoting active citizenship;
- ❖ supporting the development of local communities.

EVS is NOT:

- ❖ an occasional, part-time volunteering;
- ❖ an internship in an enterprise, in a humanitarian organization or an NGO;
- ❖ a recreational or a touristic activity;
- ❖ a language course abroad;
- ❖ a paid job.

EVS proposes projects in different areas:

- ❖ culture,
- ❖ youth,
- ❖ sports,
- ❖ social care for the elderly, the disabled and the immigrants,
- ❖ cultural heritage,
- ❖ art,
- ❖ leisure,
- ❖ media and communications,
- ❖ environmental protection and education,
- ❖ rural development
- ❖ and development cooperation.

It is possible to do EVS in:

- ❖ all 27 European Union Member States;
- ❖ EFTA countries (Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein);
- ❖ candidate countries (Turkey);
- ❖ countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus;
- ❖ other countries of the world (with different timing and procedures).

European Voluntary Service is practically FREE OF CHARGE. Travel expenses, accommodation, food, local transportation, health insurance, language lessons and monthly allowance are covered and financed by the European Commission (the volunteer contributes only 10% of the travel expenses).

Youth Exchanges

International or European youth exchanges are educational opportunities offered by the European Commission for young people to travel and enjoy intercultural experiences with people from all over Europe.

Youth exchanges are meetings of short duration (six to fifteen days) in which different groups of young people from different countries come together to meet, discuss different subjects, have fun together and share an extremely overwhelming experience. In an international youth exchange, participants live in the same building for the duration of the exchange performing educational and training activities during the day and organizing moments of leisure and free time in the evening.

Each youth exchange has a theme around which all the activities of the exchange are organized, and it is established well in advance.

The themes of exchanges can be:

- ❖ sport,
- ❖ sustainability,
- ❖ art,
- ❖ environment,
- ❖ music,
- ❖ cinema,
- ❖ cultural or culinary traditions,
- ❖ economy
- ❖ and even religion.

Youth exchanges are funded by the Youth in Action Programme of the European Commission, a programme designed to promote and support projects of non-formal education.

The contribution of the European Commission covers on average 70% of travel costs and a good proportion (often 90%) of the costs of food and accommodation of a youth exchange, making it a great way to spend an educational holiday at extremely low cost. Intercultural exchanges are European projects that give you the opportunity to meet others from different countries, discover cultures other than your own, enrich your cultural baggage and make new experiences abroad. Each youth exchange is a big opportunity for cultural, social and linguistic learning.

Find out more on the following webpage:

www.europeanvoluntaryservice.org/youth-exchanges

Yoga as a Way of Life

It has become commonplace to equate yoga with a specific set of exercises one performs in a specific time and place. We do yoga when we go to a yoga-class, or when we sit in meditation, whereas at other times, we do something else. But is there a gap between life and yoga?

If we read the classic texts on yoga, we can see that yoga is a systematic way of living a life, meant to bring about a higher state of consciousness.

Yoga and Simplicity

The situation we are presently in is beyond our control, but with our present choices we can affect our future. Yoga gives us a set of principles and tools that we can apply in our lives to diminish our future suffering and to increase our happiness. Our consciousness plays a central role in this project. Since all our experiences take place through and in our consciousness, yoga analyses how our consciousness works, and how we can utilize this knowledge.

In the yogic view, our desires are the seeds of our dissatisfaction. We desire experiences and things which are difficult or impossible to achieve, or in the best case they only bring about temporary satisfaction. We need a new approach for dealing with our desires. Whereas advertisements show that by fulfilling our desires we become happy, yoga claims that it is like pouring fuel on fire: the flames will only increase. Running after the dictations of our mind and senses, we will program ourselves to continue running. The satisfaction we receive this way is superficial, and it does not give fulfilment to the self.

Yoga offers a radical alternative: what would happen if we would manage to gain control over our consciousness? Yoga claims that we are inherently happy, and we fail to realize our inner happiness only when we project our consciousness outside ourselves. This is where simplicity steps in. If our desires for satisfaction are in fact traps that lead us towards dissatisfaction, we need to minimize our engagement with the external world. Seeking satisfaction from a minimalistic way of life, we open a door to discovering the inner wealth of our soul. Simplicity enables us to have the time and energy for the yogic journey inward.

Yoga as a way of discovery

We can only give up something, if we find something more valuable. A simple yogic lifestyle does not mean inner poverty. Regulating our desires allows us to re-direct our attention. We start seeking happiness by understanding ourselves as we truly are, instead of fulfilling vain expectations. Happiness lies within. To reach it we need a suitable practice.

There are many yoga-practices meant to turn our attention inward. The well-

known ones are physical postures (asanas) and regulated breathing (prayanama). These represent only a small sample of all that is available. Other practices include systematic cultivation of a spirit of kindness and generosity, practices of concentration and meditation and ethical practices. All such practices are meant to help us control our mind, and slowly develop a higher consciousness. We will present here three sample practices you can try to get an idea.

Focusing your mind on the divine

Yoga philosophy states that God is particularly easily available through a sacred sound. There are many sacred sounds, or mantras, that can be used to elevate the consciousness. We will introduce here a simple practice that you can use throughout the day whenever you have time. It works best, however, if you can sit down and spend some time where you only concentrate on the mantra.

Inhale slowly through your nostrils. Exhale and mentally produce the sound 'Ham'. Let the sound vibrate in your mind as long as you exhale. Let the sound merge with the mental sound of 'Ham'. Then inhale, and mentally produce the sound 'Sa'. Let the sound of 'Sa' vibrate in your mind as long as you inhale. Let the sound of your inhalation merge with the sound of 'Sa'. Now you have a deceptively simple yet effective practice in place. Keep on exhaling and inhaling, in a rhythm that is suitable for you and keep on repeating the mantra 'Ham-Sa'. Hamsa means swan, a symbol of purity, and hence a suitable name for the divine.

Inverted posture

Inversions are bodily postures that are meant to calm down the mind. We will introduce here a simple yet effective one. Lie down on the floor and bring your feet close to your buttocks. Then slowly lift up your spine until your legs and trunk form a straight line from your shoulders to your knees. If you feel comfortable, you can elevate your sternum to form a position that resembles a bridge. Do it to the extent that you are comfortable with. You can start by staying in the position just a couple of breaths, and with practice you can stay in that position for a longer time. If you manage to stay in the position for some minutes, you may notice something interesting: while the exercise is strenuous to your legs, lifting most of your trunk above your head, and bringing your chest closer to your chin will have a relaxing effect on your mind. You are sweating and relaxing at the same time. This exercise works wonders if you do it regularly, with an empty stomach. It should not be done during pregnancy, or if you have high blood pressure.

Social interaction

There is a simple four-point program for cultivating a loving spirit towards each other:

1. Cultivate friendliness with people who are happy. Sounds simple, the trick is not to feel envy when someone is happy.
2. Cultivate compassion when you see someone suffering. Rather than seeing others' lot as an opportunity for feeling superior, try to feel for others and extend your help when you can.
3. Find joy in other's virtue. We all do acts which are sometimes more and sometimes less virtuous. Imperfection is human. However, when we see glimpses of perfection in others, let us make these our sources of joy.
4. Disregard vice. This does not mean that we should not try to stop vice if that is in our hands, but we should not dwell on it. Whatever we focus on will affect our mind, so it is best not to spend time pondering over others' shortcomings.

Applying these principles allows you to practice yoga in different circumstances. When you are with others, apply the four-point program of social interaction. When you have some time for exercise, try the bridge-position. In every situation you can fix your mind on the Divine by mentally repeating the mantra 'Ham-Sa' with your breath. It is also a nice way of calming down the mind and falling asleep, if you feel restless in the evening.

Time Management

In order to live simply, one has to manage one's time well. Distractions and allurements harass us constantly from the moment we wake up until the moment we go to sleep, and often there are also sleep disorders that affect our rest. Distractions come in the form of TV, advertising, unnecessary shopping, excessive Internet usage, gossiping, and procrastination.

Every time-manager emphasizes the importance of having goals. Without goals life can feel meaningless. But to achieve a goal we must make an effort, invest energy and time, and sacrifice other things which are less important.

Let us say that we want to change our lifestyle in order to live simply. That is our goal. What must we do to achieve this goal? Probably we would have to give up things that consume a lot of time and energy and which make our life unnecessarily complicated. If we work hard to be able to buy a lot of things – that is not simple life. Therefore, we should try to be satisfied with less things in order to be able to work less and have more time for establishing relationships, spending time with family, reading and so on. A simple life means a life of balance. Everything must be present in the right quantities: sleeping, eating, working, resting, association, and time for oneself. To achieve balance needs to be flexible and always keep in mind one's goals and priorities despite all obstacles that come on the way.

How to achieve balance

Living simply means giving up unnecessary things, and patiently striving to develop qualities that enable us to achieve that which gives us satisfaction and which is in harmony with nature and our surroundings.

Being tidy, clean, on time, respectful, appreciative, grateful and patient are qualities in our everyday efforts that empower us to be determined, steady and fixed in achieving good qualities that help us leading a simple lifestyle.

How to find out what motivates us

Better, prosperous life, happiness, good health – these are some of the general goals which might motivate us to live simply. But how badly do we want these things in order to change? The popular saying, "The best things in life are not things", sums this up nicely.

Some people who drink to excess, are promiscuous, take drugs and act irresponsibly say they are enjoying life. But if we are not actually happy very soon such flickering pleasures are finished. One way to change one's conditioned behaviour is to be attracted to superior values and strive to reach them. Simplicity is a quality that most people strive for. The company of like-minded people is very important for achieving goals. Just as a drug addict needs to avoid other drug addicts to control his addiction, and associates with people who do not need drugs. Similarly someone who wants to live simply must associate with

others who also want to live simply. The result depends on determination and motivation.

A lot of people try to find satisfaction through possessing material goods. People who are the most content are those satisfied with what they already have. One needs time and space to see problems coming and prepare to face them. This is only possible when one's life goals are clearly defined. Sensual pleasure cannot be the ultimate goal of life because life ends eventually. Therefore, the purpose of living a simple and happy life is to be able to have time for a spiritual quest, and searching and asking questions like, "Who am I?", "Why am I here?", and "What is going to happen to me when my life ends?" Without finding answers to these questions there is no possibility of being truly successful.

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