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Reflections: The Different Drum
M. Scott Peck

Prologue: Fascinating story of the 5 old monks and the rabbi. Increasing our sense of value for one another and the unique gifts we bring to community will make us more attractive to others and enhance our mission effectiveness.

Introduction: Hope for our world is having it become a “salad bowl” of diversity blended by mutual appreciation rather than a “melting pot” of bland sameness where differences are removed — a nice thought but not likely. The description of the United Nations Mediation Room aptly illustrates the sterile approach of trying to solve our differences by taking the path of least offense — striking.

Chapter 1: Stumbling Into Community
Love is the basis for true community. Caring enough to confront is a damaging concept if the confrontation is used as a tool outside the context of a loving relationship. Peck’s journey included moments of community interrupted by long periods of bleakness where he searched for community in a system that did not encourage its existence. Western (American) individualism as per Tocqueville, if not “strongly balanced by other habits, it would inevitably lead to fragmentation of American society and social isolation of its citizens.” Today’s culture suggests that he was right.

Chapter 2: The Fallacy of Rugged Individualism
We are created to be unique. Individuation as per Jung is a normal process of development and marks the human race in particular. Individualism is the abuse of individuation that mitigates against community. We are unique individuals but must depend upon others for sustenance, company, and meaning in our lives. Much of our loneliness derives from the cultural expectation that we be ruggedly individual.

Chapter 3: The True Meaning of Community
Community is symptomized by the removal of barriers that inhibit free and intimate communication. As such it has to work at being exclusive since it tends to draw in rather than push out. I can inhibit community by excluding myself or others not wanting the conditions necessary for its development can thwart it. Community can enhance the process and quality of decision-making. The arrogance of rugged individualism can be replaced by the humility of soft individualism that takes the form of genuine community. Though community must be maintained in order to remain healthy, community is able to sense its sickness and take action to correct it. It is also characterized by a sense of safety. The full range of expression can be handled by a community that values and respects the individual and thus a place of healing is created. “Fights” become constructive. Each member possesses a leadership role as the traditional strong leader fades to include the contributions made via the giftedness of all. Healthy community possesses a “spirit” that testifies to its value.
Chapter 4: The Genesis of Community
Community is oft times generated around crisis. Unfortunately, as goes the crisis so goes the community. Recognizing the ever presence of various forms of crisis can encourage the development of permanent forms of community. Sometimes community happens unexpectedly in any of a number of settings. Normally short-lived but nonetheless meaningful, these community experiences are important to the overall experience of community. This can happen in small group or simply attending a church where you “click.” Community can be achieved by design. There are rules that govern the building of community. The role of leadership should include as a primary function that of intentionally and skillfully building community among those being led.

Chapter 5: Stages of Community-Making
The process of building community often follow the chronological order of 1) pseudo-community; 2) chaos; 3) emptiness; and finally 4) community. These stages are marked by pretense of community in stage 1 wherein differences are simply ignored and politeness masks the latent conflict made possible by those differences. Stage 2 presents the conflicts in an active context with little hope of resolution. Stage 3 is the way out of chaos and is the counterpart to an organizational solution that disallows community—emptiness. This stage requires the laying aside (as opposed to the obliteration) of differences. These differences are primarily housed in our preconceptions and expectations that are informed by our prejudices, theology, ideology, solutions, our need to heal or fix, and our need to control. These preconceptions must die a death in order for the group to experience rebirth and genuine community. The community (Stage 4) that results allows for a sense of tranquility that does not ignore individual differences but rather deals with those differences in a vital and responsible manner. Love and respect for the members of the community allows the transcendence of individual differences.

Chapter 6: Further Dynamics of Community
Peck discusses the Tavistock Model of group dynamics and draws from it the assertion that groups will tend toward task avoidance behavior. This model lists four means of task avoidance: flight; fight; pairing; and dependence. Though the T model does not incorporate a high value for love and respect each of the tactics may be utilized in avoiding the hard work of building community. A significant aspect under “dependency” is the role of the leader. The leader must be willing to deal with the consequent hostility when he refuses to allow dependence upon himself. Intervention into group behavior by the leader should focus on the group as opposed to individuals. The exception is when individual behavior puts the group at risk. When an individual must be dealt with it should be done by the group and not by the leader alone. Occasional a private confrontation by the leader with the offending member is appropriate. The optimum size of the group is unknown but members that do not speak are not necessarily non-participants. Including these nonverbal ones allows for much larger groups. Exercises in a community-building group can include silence, stories, dreams, prayers, song, and liturgy. Confronting the reality of reentry is an important leadership element for all those that have experienced group community and must go back to the “real” world.
Chapter 7: Community Maintenance

Community, once attained, must be maintained in order to guard against the tendency to revert to traditional methods that sacrifice community quality. Adjustments must be made on a continual basis to compensate for increased size and social changes. The temptation to fall back on organization, as a substitute for community, must continually be resisted. A constant necessary factor is commitment. It is necessary for the formation of community and a committed nucleus is necessary for the maintenance of community. Too little or too much structure can deter community and must be monitored for balance. Authoritarian leadership will always disallow community. A community once formed must determine its appropriate lifespan. Discerning between task avoidance and no longer having a task is an important maintenance function. The first must be corrected the latter requires an appropriate funeral.

Chapter 8: Human Nature

“Community is a true alchemical process that transforms the dross of our differences into golden harmony.” P. 171

We tend to assume that all people are essentially alike. The reality is that we are very different from one another. Not all people think the same nor do they possess the same expectations. Though there are some basic similarities, especially in spiritual formation, we are profoundly different. We must accept this basic assumption if we are ever to move community from the personal or group level to the larger venue of state, national, or global levels. Human nature has the capacity for transformation but our family and culture mold the default condition. Our capacity for transformation is what creates our profound diversity but in it lays the hope of solving our conflicts. Though molded by our childhood, culture, life experiences, and choices we can likewise be changed to allow community on a personal and even global scale.

Chapter 9: Patterns of Transformation

Peck defines the stages of spiritual growth as 1) chaotic, antisocial 2) formal, institutional 3) skeptic, individual 4) mystic, communal. Most churches exist at the stage 2 levels and effectively reach stage 1 people. Most churches discourage and even disallow the stage 3 experiences. Stage 4 is a transcendent and more inclusive spirituality that does not seek exclusivity but rather unity. (I need to personally think this one through though I think that I agree with him.)

Chapter 10: Emptiness

“The ultimate purpose of emptiness is to make room.” P.212

Experiencing emptiness is a necessary element in the formation of community. It requires the intentional hard work of laying self aside and enduring the self-silence necessary to hear/experience another culture or ideal. “Silence is the most important ingredient of emptiness.” Ibid. The psychological death required for salvation is equally important in the process of building community. What I struggle with is the concept of abandoning the either/or for the both/and model? Is it necessary for me to abandon my foundational beliefs in order to allow the building of true community? I believe not. Emptying self to allow for a genuine time of listening and contemplation coupled with the willingness to honor another’s informed choice seems to be the focus of emptiness.
Chapter 11: Vulnerability
Vulnerability is an essential quality of emptiness. Emptiness allows us to be open. Being open requires vulnerability because there is risk involved when we open ourselves to others and to other ideas. I am reminded in reading this chapter of a book I read a couple of years ago entitled “The Three Kings” that said that brokenness is an essential experience for a leader. It used the relationships of Saul, David, and Absolom to emphasize Saul’s unwillingness to be broken and David’s brokenness over Absolom. Peck postulates that there can be no vulnerability without risk — no community without vulnerability — and no peace without community.

Chapter 12: Integration and Integrity
“Community is integrative.” P. 234
Community is not achieved by obliterating diversity. Seeking out and welcoming diversity achieve community. Compartmentalization marks our culture and is a default mode for most of our diversity management practices. We tend to assume that community can be achieved only in the context of sameness. The “melting pot” is a false metaphor for community as it suggests a bland sameness produced by the mixing of people. Differences produce conflict. Community does not avoid conflict. Community reconciles conflicts brought on by its inclusive nature. Integrity is achieved by inviting all elements to come together to seek reconciliation and peace. Peck holds that all truth is paradoxical. Finding peace requires the acceptance of paradox in most all of what we hold dear. Stewardship is the responsibility of each member to care for the parts of the whole and though he does not use the term he seems to be describing systems thinking. “Any form of behavior that stems from a lack of integration, that represents compartmentalization, is blasphemy.” P. 249.

Chapter 13: Community and Communication
Communication is the most essential element in the formation of community. The test that Peck applies to determine whether or not communication is happening is summed up in the question, “Does communication lead to greater or lesser understanding of among human beings?” The product of communication is reconciliation. If it doesn’t happen then genuine communication has failed to take place. Attempts at communication that aren’t contributing to reconciliation are task avoidance practices that lead nowhere in the direction of mutual understanding. Communication seems a daunting task in the church that expects perfection of its members. O, the lies we tell and failures we mask in the name of pseudo-community!

Chapter 14: Dimensions of the Arms Race
Peck’s aspirations and frustrations with implementing the principles of community development on a global scale in the context of 1989’s political environment provide a case study of the frustrations encountered in most attempts at affecting the change necessary to establish genuine community.

Chapter 15: The Christian Church in the United States
The Christian church was founded amidst crisis. The community that marked the early church was necessary in no small part because of the crisis of persecution. A perpetual
sense of crisis based upon the perpetual need for mortals to know a life-giving Savior should assist the church in maintaining community. That, unfortunately, has not consistently been the case. Peck sees the church as an organization gripped by fear — afraid to live dangerously. The radical practice of Christianity espoused by Jesus is oft times dangerous. The church needs to step out of its secure environs and practice radical Christianity. The church has adopted a Communion ceremony without a sense of community. Jesus was inclusive on an international scale but not unconditionally so. So also must the church be. As the “Body of Christ” the church must be willing to be stretched out and crucified even as was Jesus. The cross must be borne amidst the agony of conflict for conflict will be the consequence of practicing radical Christianity in a world that resists change. The battle between good and evil is fought out in every person and the church, as a genuine community, needs to enter the fray.

Chapter 16: The United States Government
Peck sees the federal government as in need of basic overhaul. The governing practices, if not the system itself, are essentially hostile to building community. Reforms aimed at facilitating community within the system and beyond must be made if we are to have any hope of affecting peace and security at home and abroad. I wish that Peck had separated the theory of building community from his obvious passion for changing US foreign policy, etc. In the last few chapters it seemed that the teacher became a preacher.

Chapter 17: Empowerment
This chapter was not so much about empowerment as it was a brief promotional to start social action groups based upon community principles.

I was greatly blessed by this book but became a bit bored and disappointed by the last few chapters that I felt strayed from the core purpose of the work.