

Spirituality & Community

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www.spiritualityandcommunity.com



**Vaclav Havel
New Year's Address, 1990**

Spiritual Traveler: Form to Essence

Dr. Stewart Bitkoff

**Organic Gardening
Jay North**

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Who We Are

www.spiritualityandcommunity.com

Welcome! Seeking spiritual fulfillment? True happiness and mental wellness? Well, that's what we're all about. Spirituality & Community is a magazine, web site, and online community for those seeking answers to life's deepest questions. ***We are dedicated to promoting spirituality, true happiness, mental wellness, and appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.***

A New Age of Light

Our focus is spirituality, which we view as an inner search for happiness and fulfillment. We are concerned with what lies within the heart. ***We believe that within everyone lies a pure love that we call the Light or the Lord within. We believe that one must open one's heart to the Light to attain spiritual fulfillment and that only this brings true happiness and mental wellness.*** The Light is the essence of humanity. ***Ultimately, we find our way by casting our gaze inward.*** We will search this inner world over until we find our home:

***We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
T.S. Eliot, Little Gidding***

We believe that mankind is entering a new age, an Age of Light. We see a growing spiritual crisis in the world today. Our culture has brought us unprecedented material well being, but we seem further away than ever from true spiritual wholeness. We also perceive an increase in mental health issues in our society and believe this to be linked to spiritual detachment. Many wander endlessly in search of the material gratification that will bring them happiness. Many have lost faith in religions and traditions. Others sincerely believe in traditional religions but remain unfulfilled spiritually and unhappy. Unfortunately, too many are so close-minded they refuse to ask what is missing from their lives. Yet, many hunger for spiritual wholeness and are searching for answers. ***We believe that we are entering a new age of enlightenment in which genuine spiritual progress will be made and that spiritual development depends upon a genuine appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.*** An appreciation for diversity of belief provides us with a fresh view of the beliefs of others, allows us to take from each set of beliefs that which rings true, and enables us to synthesize a personal spirituality that makes sense for each of us. When we view the beliefs of others with our hearts, we see truth shine through. We look with the highest regard to traditional beliefs and religions for guidance, and we also look forward. ***We believe that the past is not the end but the beginning.***



What We Do

Spirituality & Community produces a magazine and encompasses an online community. Both aspects serve as the basis for bringing together those who share our aspirations and beliefs, to meet each other and exchange ideas. We provide many opportunities for exploring spirituality and communicating with others:

- Spirituality & Community magazine*
- Features on the site*
- Online chats* (as interest arises)

The magazine is based on a Reader's Digest® type model. It is comprised primarily of reader submitted material. It is the primary mechanism for a member to both explore spirituality and communicate his or her ideas to others. Features are also posted on the site. When interest is sufficiently high, we will hold chats online. *We sincerely hope that you will find truth within, and we wish you only the best on your own personal journey!*

Vaclav Havel

New Year's Address, 1990



Vaclav Havel became the president of Czechoslovakia in December of 1989 after the fall of communism during the Velvet Revolution. He also became the first president of the Czech Republic in 1993. He was a playwright during the communist era, whose work centered on political themes and human rights. His dissident status resulted in imprisonment by the authoritarian regime. The following speech was an address to the nation on New Year's Day, 1990. For more, see: http://old.hrad.cz/president/Havel/speeches/index_uk.html.

My dear fellow citizens,

For forty years you heard from my predecessors on this day different variations on the same theme: how our country was flourishing, how many million tons of steel we produced, how happy we all were, how we trusted our government, and what bright perspectives were unfolding in front of us.

I assume you did not propose me for this office so that I, too, would lie to you.

Our country is not flourishing. The enormous creative and spiritual potential of our nations is not being used sensibly. Entire branches of industry are producing goods that are of no interest to anyone, while we are lacking the things we need. A state which calls itself a workers' state humiliates and exploits workers. Our obsolete economy is wasting the little energy we have available. A country that once could be proud of the educational level of its citizens spends so little on education that it ranks today as seventy-second in the world. We have polluted the soil, rivers and forests bequeathed to us by our ancestors, and we have today the most contaminated environment in Europe. Adults in our country die earlier than in most other European countries.

Allow me a small personal observation. When I flew recently to Bratislava, I found some time during discussions to look out of the plane window. I saw the industrial complex of Slovnaft chemical factory and the giant Petr'alka housing estate right behind it. The view was enough for me to understand that for decades our statesmen and political leaders did not look or did not want to look out of the windows of their planes. No study of statistics available to me would enable me to understand faster and better the situation in which we find ourselves.

But all this is still not the main problem. The worst thing is that we live in a contaminated moral environment. We fell morally ill because we became used to saying something different from what we thought. We learned not to believe in anything, to ignore one another, to care only about ourselves. Concepts such as love, friendship, compassion, humility or forgiveness lost their depth and dimension, and for many of us they represented only psychological peculiarities, or they resembled gone-astray greetings from ancient times, a little ridiculous in the era of computers and spaceships. Only a few of us were able to cry out loudly that the powers that be should not be all-powerful and that the special farms, which produced ecologically pure and top-quality

food just for them, should send their produce to schools, children's homes and hospitals if our agriculture was unable to offer them to all.

The previous regime - armed with its arrogant and intolerant ideology - reduced man to a force of production, and nature to a tool of production. In this it attacked both their very substance and their mutual relationship. It reduced gifted and autonomous people, skillfully working in their own country, to the nuts and bolts of some monstrously huge, noisy and stinking machine, whose real meaning was not clear to anyone. It could not do more than slowly but inexorably wear out itself and all its nuts and bolts.

When I talk about the contaminated moral atmosphere, I am not talking just about the gentlemen who eat organic vegetables and do not look out of the plane windows. I am talking about all of us. We had all become used to the totalitarian system and accepted it as an unchangeable fact and thus helped to perpetuate it. In other words, we are all - though naturally to differing extents - responsible for the operation of the totalitarian machinery. None of us is just its victim. We are all also its co-creators.

Why do I say this? It would be very unreasonable to understand the sad legacy of the last forty years as something alien, which some distant relative bequeathed to us. On the contrary, we have to accept this legacy as a sin we committed against ourselves. If we accept it as such, we will understand that it is up to us all, and up to us alone to do something about it. We cannot blame the previous rulers for everything, not only because it would be untrue, but also because it would blunt the duty that each of us faces today: namely, the obligation to act independently, freely, reasonably and quickly. Let us not be mistaken: the best government in the world, the best parliament and the best president, cannot achieve much on their own. And it would be wrong to expect a general remedy from them alone. Freedom and democracy include participation and therefore responsibility from us all.

If we realize this, then all the horrors that the new Czechoslovak democracy inherited will cease to appear so terrible. If we realize this, hope will return to our hearts.

In the effort to rectify matters of common concern, we have something to lean on. The recent period - and in particular the last six weeks of our peaceful revolution - has shown the enormous human, moral and spiritual potential, and the civic culture that slumbered in our society under the enforced mask of apathy. Whenever someone categorically claimed that we were this or that, I always objected that society is a very mysterious creature and that it is unwise to trust only the face it presents to you. I am happy that I was not mistaken. Everywhere in the world people wonder where those meek, humiliated, skeptical and seemingly cynical citizens of Czechoslovakia found the marvelous strength to shake the totalitarian yoke from their shoulders in several weeks, and in a decent and peaceful way. And let us ask: Where did the young people who never knew another system get their desire for truth, their love of free thought, their political ideas, their civic courage and civic prudence? How did it happen that their parents -- the very generation that had been considered lost -- joined them? How is it that so many people immediately knew what to do and none needed any advice or instruction?

I think there are two main reasons for the hopeful face of our present situation. First of all, people are never just a product of the external world; they are also able to relate themselves to something superior, however systematically the external world tries to kill that ability in them. Secondly, the humanistic and democratic traditions, about which there had been so much idle talk, did after all slumber in the unconsciousness of our nations and ethnic minorities, and were inconspicuously passed from one generation to another, so that each of us could discover them at the right time and transform them into deeds.

We had to pay, however, for our present freedom. Many citizens perished in jails in the 1950s, many were executed, thousands of human lives were destroyed, hundreds of thousands of talented people were forced to leave the country. Those who defended the honor of our nations during the Second World War, those who rebelled against totalitarian rule and those who simply managed to remain themselves and think freely, were all persecuted. We should not forget any of those who paid for our present freedom in one way or another. Independent courts should impartially consider the possible guilt of those who were responsible for the persecutions, so that the truth about our recent past might be fully revealed.

We must also bear in mind that other nations have paid even more dearly for their present freedom, and that indirectly they have also paid for ours. The rivers of blood that have flowed in Hungary, Poland, Germany and recently in such a horrific manner in Romania, as well as the sea of blood shed by the nations of the Soviet Union, must not be forgotten. First of all because all human suffering concerns every other human being. But more than this, they must also not be forgotten because it is these great sacrifices that form the tragic background of today's freedom or the gradual emancipation of the nations of the Soviet Bloc, and thus the background of our own newfound freedom. Without the changes in the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, and the German Democratic Republic, what has happened in our country would have scarcely happened. And if it did, it certainly would not have followed such a peaceful course.

The fact that we enjoyed optimal international conditions does not mean that anyone else has directly helped us during the recent weeks. In fact, after hundreds of years, both our nations have raised their heads high of their own initiative without relying on the help of stronger nations or powers. It seems to me that this constitutes the great moral asset of the present moment. This moment holds within itself the hope that in the future we will no longer suffer from the complex of those who must always express their gratitude to somebody. It now depends only on us whether this hope will be realized and whether our civic, national, and political self-confidence will be awakened in a historically new way.

Self-confidence is not pride. Just the contrary: only a person or a nation that is self-confident, in the best sense of the word, is capable of listening to others, accepting them as equals, forgiving its enemies and regretting its own guilt. Let us try to introduce this kind of self-confidence into the life of our community and, as nations, into our behavior on the international stage. Only thus can we restore our self-respect and our respect for one another as well as the respect of other nations.

Our state should never again be an appendage or a poor relative of anyone else. It is true that we must accept and learn many things from others, but we must do this in the future as their equal partners, who also have something to offer.

Our first president wrote: "Jesus, not Caesar." In this he followed our philosophers Chelick and Komensk. I dare to say that we may even have an opportunity to spread this idea further and introduce a new element into European and global politics. Our country, if that is what we want, can now permanently radiate love, understanding, the power of the spirit and of ideas. It is precisely this glow that we can offer as our specific contribution to international politics.

Masaryk* based his politics on morality. Let us try, in a new time and in a new way, to restore this concept of politics. Let us teach ourselves and others that politics should be an expression of a desire to contribute to the happiness of the community rather than of a need to cheat or rape the community. Let us teach ourselves and others that politics can be not simply the art of the possible, especially if this means the art of speculation, calculation, intrigue, secret deals and pragmatic maneuvering, but that it can also be the art of the impossible, that is, the art of improving ourselves and the world.

We are a small country, yet at one time we were the spiritual crossroads of Europe. Is there a reason why we could not again become one? Would it not be another asset with which to repay the help of others that we are going to need?

Our homegrown Mafia, those who do not look out of the plane windows and who eat specially fed pigs, may still be around and at times may muddy the waters, but they are no longer our main enemy. Even less so is our main enemy any kind of international Mafia. Our main enemy today is our own bad traits: indifference to the common good, vanity, personal ambition, selfishness, and rivalry. The main struggle will have to be fought on this field.

There are free elections and an election campaign ahead of us. Let us not allow this struggle to dirty the so-far clean face of our gentle revolution. Let us not allow the sympathies of the world, which we have won so fast, to be equally rapidly lost through our becoming entangled in the jungle of skirmishes for power. Let us not allow the desire to serve oneself to bloom once again under the stately garb of the desire to serve the common good. It is not really important now which party, club or group prevails in the elections. The important thing is that the winners will be the best of us, in the moral, civic, political and professional sense, regardless of their political affiliations. The future policies and prestige of our state will depend on the personalities we select, and later, elect to our representative bodies.

My dear fellow citizens!

Three days ago I became the president of the republic as a consequence of your will, expressed through the deputies of the Federal Assembly. You have a right to expect me to mention the tasks I see before me as president.

The first of these is to use all my power and influence to ensure that we soon step up to the ballot boxes in a free election, and that our path toward this historic milestone will be dignified and peaceful.

My second task is to guarantee that we approach these elections as two self-governing nations who respect each other's interests, national identity, religious traditions, and symbols. As a Czech who has given his presidential oath to an important Slovak who is personally close to him, I feel a special obligation -- after the bitter experiences that Slovaks had in the past -- to see that all the interests of the Slovak nation are respected and that no state office, including the highest one, will ever be barred to it in the future.

My third task is to support everything that will lead to better circumstances for our children, the elderly, women, the sick, the hardworking laborers, the national minorities and all citizens who are for any reason worse off than others. High-quality food or hospitals must no longer be a prerogative of the powerful; they must be available to those who need them the most.

As supreme commander of the armed forces I want to guarantee that the defensive capability of our country will no longer be used as a pretext for anyone to stand in the way of courageous peace initiatives, the reduction of military service, the establishment of alternative military service and the overall humanization of military life.

In our country there are many prisoners who, though they may have committed serious crimes and have been punished for them, have had to submit -- despite the goodwill of some investigators, judges and above all defense lawyers -- to a debased judiciary process that curtailed their rights. They now have to live in prisons that do not strive to awaken the better qualities contained in every person, but rather humiliate them and destroy them physically and mentally. In a view of this fact, I have decided to declare a relatively extensive amnesty. At the same time I call on the prisoners to understand that forty years of unjust investigations, trials and imprisonments cannot be put right overnight, and to understand that the changes that are being speedily prepared still require time to implement. By rebelling, the prisoners would help neither society nor themselves. I also call on the public not to fear the prisoners once they are released, not to make their lives difficult, to help them, in the Christian spirit, after their return among us to find within themselves that which jails could not find in them: the capacity to repent and the desire to live a respectable life.

My honorable task is to strengthen the authority of our country in the world. I would be glad if other states respected us for showing understanding, tolerance and love for peace. I would be happy if Pope John Paul II and the Dalai Lama of Tibet could visit our country before the elections, if only for a day. I would be happy if our friendly relations with all nations were strengthened. I would be happy if we succeeded before the elections in establishing diplomatic relations with the Vatican and Israel. I would also like to contribute to peace by briefly visiting our close neighbors, the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. Neither shall I forget our other neighbors -- fraternal Poland and the ever-closer countries of Hungary and Austria.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I want to be a president who will speak less and work more. To be a president who will not only look out of the windows of his airplane but who, first and foremost, will always be present among his fellow citizens and listen to them well.

You may ask what kind of republic I dream of. Let me reply: I dream of a republic independent, free, and democratic, of a republic economically prosperous and yet socially just; in short, of a humane republic that serves the individual and that therefore holds the hope that the individual will serve it in turn. Of a republic of well-rounded people, because without such people it is impossible to solve any of our problems -- human, economic, ecological, social, or political.

The most distinguished of my predecessors opened his first speech with a quotation from the great Czech educator Komensk. Allow me to conclude my first speech with my own paraphrase of the same statement:

People, your government has returned to you!

* Tomas Garrigue Masaryk (1850-1937), Czech statesman and philosopher, the first president of Czechoslovakia.

Spiritual Traveler: Form to Essence

Dr. Stewart Bitkoff

*At the beginning I was mistaken in four ways. I sought to remember God, to know Him, and to seek Him. When I had come to the end, I saw that He had remembered me before I remembered Him, that His knowledge of me had preceded my knowledge of Him, His love toward me had existed before my love to Him, and He had sought me before I sought Him.**

Bayazid Bistami

Introduction

This striking quote by the Sufi Bayazid indicates that the spiritual search is comprised of 2 actions or journeys; the first journey being the traveler's action toward the goal and the second that action of the goal or teaching upon the traveler: this second action being the saving Grace.

Today, many western spiritual travelers are unaware that their journey is comprised of this multi-dimensional aspect. Mistakenly, some equate success only with personal effort, believing the harder he/she tries the greater their chance of enlightenment. Randomly sampling paths and exercises, going from the outer world inward, seeking to connect with their own inner, spiritual center; often this first part of the journey takes a physical form: exercises, prayers, reading books, personal discipline and doing good works.

As Bayazid indicates, after a period of preparation, this second action - the movement of the goal toward the traveler- is bestowed, coming forward naturally, enriching daily life. For this to happen, it is most productive when there is contact with a teacher and school, who through the Grace of the Path, facilitate energy release and connection to the higher element.

In our western culture, many are still unfamiliar with the subtleties of eastern spiritual training. The traveler wishing to make the journey from *form to essence*, in addition to overcoming personal and societal obstacles must also come to terms with this dimensional factor: eventually realizing success is based upon a combination of organized effort and Divine Love, and Love is bestowed not earned.

In this writing, we will continue to discuss some key elements of the spiritual journey and further prepare the ground work for personal realization of the Beloved's timeless caress.

Proliferation of Guides

Nowadays, when the traveler goes into any large bookstore one of the things which becomes apparent is that there is a surplus of people writing about their own spiritual experience and how to travel inward. It seems just about everyone has a book, personal method, and set of exercises to complete the journey; for the most part, in good faith, these authors wish to share a blueprint that has worked for them.

This abundance of paths and methods, for the average traveler is confusing. I can remember my first experience entering the largest spiritual bookstore in New York City and being completely overwhelmed by the number of paths and books which were available. I didn't know where to begin.

So much written material occurs as a result of the following reasons. Often, these books fall into the category of preparatory material or action of traveler toward the goal.

- ❖ *A Special Age.* This is one of those times in history, when travelers can freely explore what it means to be spiritual without fear of physical harm or death. We live in an open age and through the use of the computer and the internet, information about religions and spirituality is available in unprecedented amount. Also as a writer, the computer has made the physical task of writing accessible to many; the publishing industry with self-publishing has completely revolutionized how easily books can be published, and venues like e-magazines, blogs and e-mail have turned just about everyone into a 'published' author.
- ❖ *Everyone is a Teacher.* One of the characteristics of the spiritual journey, after the traveler has had some initial success connecting with their own inner current, is that the traveler wants to share this wonderful experience. Because it has enriched their life, they wish to share and teach others. Every traveler is different, and there are hundreds of paths, with countless techniques; consequently in our open society we have a proliferation of material with many descriptions of what has inspired and worked. Most often, this material serves as way to get started, takes you part of the way and is not connected to a larger, comprehensive system to complete the full journey.

Hence, we hear an often repeated remark, 'I'm tired of all these self-help books that really don't help anyone. I want experience that works.'

The Great Hunger

Within every one, there is an empty space which often manifests as a hunger or unease. On some level, each of us feels there is a missing piece and we all go about our lives trying to fill it.

- ❖ *The Great Hunger.* This inner emptiness and Great Hunger temporarily can be eased with just about anything. The world is a giant bazaar and the traveler can stock their basket with fine food, colorful garments, different types of work, sexual positions, drink, drugs and a variety of other pursuits and hobbies. Yet this inner spiritual restlessness can only be quieted on a lasting basis through connecting with your own inner spark, or the sacred within. This is the first journey from *form to essence*. As a preparation, many of the books, videos and new age systems take you part of the way. From the outer to the inner.
- ❖ *Loss of the Sacred & Mythical.* To further heighten the need for the spiritual journey, many of our more traditional connections with the sacred are no longer available. Today we are a scientific culture and daily, science challenges many of our old myths and

traditional spiritual teachings. For example, the Bible offers that humanity has existed on earth for something like 10,000 years; whereas, science suggests that we have been on this planet, in human form, for millions. Similarly science suggests there were multiple locations where humanity began, not just one location or Garden of Eden.

Each civilization requires practical wisdom, a mythos or set of rules to help the traveler grow and guide their life; rites of passage, which traditionally helped connect the traveler with the Universal Divine through their own sacred center, in our culture have been replaced with consumerism. For western travelers, science, money, need for power, credit cards and individual personal expression have become the center of life. While these aspects to life are important, they do not fill the empty place and the inner hunger continues. Some travelers quickly recognize the malaise as a spiritual hunger. These travelers read the books, follow the exercises and prepare for the inner experience which connects with the Divine. Books, lectures, videos, articles, are part of the answer; however, the inner fire must be tended by something else as well.

Remembering

All of us are spiritual beings who have taken on a physical body, with a spiritual center that knows the way home. This spiritual center, or heart, is always connected to the sacred. The traveler must learn to still that part which is tied to the world and listen to that which is tuned to the Higher. This is termed 'remembering.' This connection is enhanced as the traveler learns in the presence of a teaching Master. Often, this learning facilitates the second dimension to the journey.

- ❖ *Preparation for Study.* Connecting with your own inner current is part of being human. It is as natural as breathing or drinking a glass of water, yet, most often we are blocked from this experience by daily cares. Also, it is natural to fill the empty space with concerns, ideas and worry, yet we must also set aside time to allow what is inside to naturally come forward. To reach our sacred place and allow this energy to manifest on a conscious level, we must prepare, develop the skills necessary and be in contact with a teacher.

The second journey, connecting with your own inner current and allowing it to come forward, daily, is a matter of right time, right place, and right people working together.

- ❖ *Finding the Teacher.* In order for the traveler to be taught how to efficiently go inward, as well as allow what is inward to come forward and manifest, they must be part of a mystical school or path that specializes in this preparation. The traveler must be in an environment where this type of experience is offered and when ready, bestowed by the Divine upon the traveler.

By connecting with their own inner current and the higher energy of the universe, the traveler is changed; the traveler is alchemized through this set of experiences and recognizes the object of the search. This type of learning can be termed more advanced

spiritual learning. It goes beyond introductory material and preparation found in books, videos, or learning systems taught via the internet, DVD or television.

Typically, in this age of communication, all modern teachers have developed preparatory material that the spiritual traveler can read and study. And if a teacher appeals to you, study their material and when ready, present yourself for further instruction.

*It is necessary to have a guide for the spiritual journey. Choose a master, for without one this journey is full of trials, fears, and dangers. With no escort, you will be lost on a road you have already taken. Do not travel alone on the path.**

Rumi

- ❖ *Traveling the Path.* Each of the great religions has an inner current or mystical tradition; yet this type of experience is not for everyone all the time. As indicated above, it requires preparation and a teacher or environment which specializes in this learning. To stimulate spiritual experience before the traveler is ready, can cause more harm than good; many have become casualties of the spiritual path by opening their spiritual centers prematurely.

*All wisdom can be stated in two lines:
What is done for you- allow it to be done.
What you must do yourself- make sure you do it.**

Khawwas

Conclusion

In our western culture, we are at the frontier of spiritual learning, just becoming aware of eastern paths and traditions that have long connected travelers with the Divine. Similarly, we are witnessing an explosion of new age teaching and interest in the spiritual. As well, science has joined in this search for the underlying unity or life energy in the universe.

For the mystic, this quest has long been a journey from *form to essence*; where everything is connected in the primordial energy of Oneness and with proper training experienced through daily life. And in this journey, the operative or saving Grace has always been – the movement of the Beloved toward the traveler.

*Bistami, Rumi and Khawwas quote taken from: James Fadiman & Robert Frager, Essential Sufism, HarperCollins Publisher, 1997.

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Listen to Dr. Bitkoff's weekly show on internet radio: *Practical Wisdom*, Tuesday 1-2 pm, go to www.pibcol.com.

Also by Dr. Bitkoff, A Commuter's Guide to Enlightenment, Llewellyn, 2008 and Journey of Light: Trilogy, Authorhouse, 2004; these books are available from publisher or on Amazon.com. To contact author go to www.stewartbitkoff.com.

Grow 6000 Pounds of Organic Vegetables in Your Own Backyard

Jay North

Organic gardening popularity in America is at an all time high, and well it should be considering the high cost of fresh produce at the supermarket.

But wait, Eat Organic, it's the best bet for you and your family and oh so fresh right from your own backyard, best of all it will cut your grocery bill in half. What most want to be green thumbs may not know is they can grow over 6000lbs of fresh veggies right in their own backyard and tomatoes have never tasted so good.

While there are hundreds of gardening methods, the very best for small backyard gardens is the stack method, utilizing air space and raised multi-level beds. Equipment and supply cost can be kept to a minimum by using recycled materials often found at your local land fill, ask the operators if you can sift through to find what you need. To start your search, look for recycled lumber to build beds, wire, and rope and soft mesh materials for baskets.

How to grow 6000 pounds of fresh organic fruits and vegetables in your own backyard.

Start with a plan and plan according to what you like to eat. Design a lay out that calls for utilizing air space to the max. Use fruit trees for shade for plants that require shade on hot months (I.e.; Chervil, Basil and soft lettuces), use the fence line to tie up beans, berries, traveling squash and grape vines. Find simple building plans or a friendly carpenter to help design stacked raise beds, fill them with soil and organic compost, and build them to the highest level that is comfortable for you to reach. Use air space to tie up your cantaloupes and cucumbers.

Close planting is required to use the most root space without crowding the plants. Never mind the package that reads plant four inches apart, plant two inches apart. Plant carrots so you can pull an entire bunch for dinner, plant lettuce like grass and cut just the tops when ready for dinner. Train your tomatoes to clime the wall or fence, same for the cucs and melons. Support the fruit of melon plants with soft mesh baskets.

Two popular close planting methods

First the deep bed method—which is to say high wall, victory garden style or raised beds, which essentially mean all the same thing. Deep loose soil, wide enough bed to be worked from both sides of the bed and the bed is never walked on; this assist roots with air accessibility for the roots and ease of mineral assimilation. A typical high wall bed could be 10 feet long four feet wide and two feet high, supported with wood, rock or brick. Filled with high quality top soil, mulch and some organic fertilizers. Stop, wait, don't plant the whole bed in one day—no stagger your plantings by two weeks between each seeding. Why? Because you want to harvest and eat the veggies all season long, if you plant too much too quick, it will all mature at one time and be ready for consumption at the same time.

Now, combine your plantings: Example 1

Plant a short row of sweet corn. Plant seeds 1.5 deep but close together, the plant uses the nutrients best that way and corn can support one another in the wind. Okay corn is seeded, now what? Seed your onions, garlic and short edible flowers just a few inches from the corn seed path. They do not utilize the same nutrients and the onions and garlic make great pest control for the corn. Got it? Now you're thinking!

Example 2: Ready to plant some lettuce?

Wait—first run a wide gauge wire fence right down the center of your bed. Plant the seeds of pole beans and "cucs"¹ on both sides of the wire mesh fence, and then seed your lettuces, why? Shade! Lettuce love shade especially on hot summer days—sooner here than you expect it to be. Then around the whole planting, seed your carrots, radishes and potatoes.

Important note: notice the combinations?

Some vegetable plants require more water than others, so always hand water-never use overhead sprinklers and never over water. Water only when soil is dry and plants need additional water.

Popular planting method two:

Plant the Hopi method and save the world and water too.

The Hopi Indians are the oldest agriculturist group in America; they believe planting a seed and speaking kind loving words to it will save the world from destruction. While this may be true or false, their planting methods speak

loudly about what a genius way to plant and harvest edible crops and it's all done in circles.

Start by digging round holes in the ground about one foot deep. Lay soil to the side for refilling the hole. Add compost if you choose; many Hopi might disagree with the necessity for added materials other than a single whole fresh fish—dead of course at the bottom of the hole. Don't gut or clean out the fish, otherwise you are robbing your plants of all the fertilizer they will need for the growing cycle. Cover the hole with the soil removed-but do not pack it in. Seed the entire hole in a circular form. Use corn, squash, melons, onion, garlic and anything else you enjoy eating. Sow seeds deep in the loose soil, water and allow spouting. As plants grow tall and strong use little a less water with each watering—better to allow the root to go in search of water, there-by building the strength of the plant to add strength to your body. Aho Ho², and it is done, plant many seeds to the hole and plant close!

Lastly, don't plant just strawberries.

Plant Blackberries, Raspberries, Blueberries and Strawberries all at the same time and in the same area.

Start with a well composted soil Ph 7 or 8.³ Dig deep beds down, not up, dig deep, and add compost and mulch. Plant Blackberries where they can travel freely, plant Raspberries so that can grow straight up and out, plant Blueberries close and strawberries even closer. Plant varieties for spring, summer and fall producing, be sure to mark where they are and feast all year long.

Smart stacking and seeding will easily supply a whole family with 6000 pounds of fresh produce—even—year—round in mild climates. To extend your growing season use plastic tents early in the spring and late in the fall to protect against frost damage.

Water saving tip

Dig a very large hole in your backyard or side hill; place 2500 gallon plastic container in hole, add small water pump and collect waterrun off during the rainy season—watch your water bill be cut by 25%.

¹ cucs- slang for cucumbers.

² Aho Ho- native acknowledgement and blessings.

³ Ph- degree of acidity vs alkalinity, Ph 7 is neutral and best for most edible crops.

Jay North, Organic gardener, author and social activist is an internationally recognized expert in organic gardening and farming. Author of *Getting Started in Organic Gardening for Fun and Profit*. His books can be found at his website www.GoingOrganic.com and www.OneGlobePress.com for download immediately in PDF EBooks. A portion of the proceeds are donated to Oprah's Angel Network at www.Oprah.com.