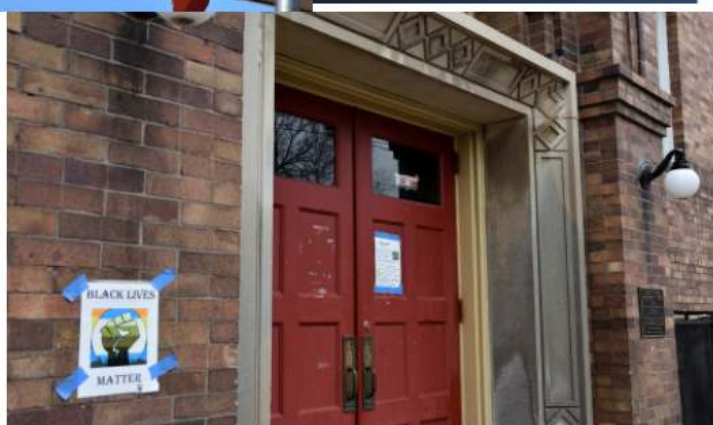




SPIRIT  
JUSTICE  
MUTUAL AID  
HEALING  
SURVIVAL



Jeff Kisling

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# Spirit, Justice, Mutual Aid, Healing and Survival

## Introduction

This discussion about Spirit, Justice, Mutual Aid, Healing and Survival is not an academic exercise. The capitalist economic system continues to transfer great wealth to the elites, which means those who aren't rich are increasingly impoverished. White supremacy and dominance continue oppression via outrageous legislation and increasingly militaristic policing. Including dramatically criminalizing those who engage in peaceful protest as domestic terrorists. Banning books! And rapidly evolving environmental chaos will increasingly impact millions of people. Which will destroy shelter, and systems that supply our basic necessities.

## Spirit, Justice, Mutual Aid, Healing and Survival

- **Spirit**

Spirituality, whatever that means to you, is important to show us the way into our unknown future. You might not belong to an organized religion. But I believe we need guidance from something beyond ourselves.

- **Justice**

There are so many injustices (see below). We cannot move forward until we acknowledge and work to correct them.

- **Mutual Aid**

My experiences with Mutual Aid convince me this is the framework to address injustice, bring us hope, and show the way into a chaotic future.

- **Healing**

We are all suffering so much. Damage from injustices of the past and present. Dread about what the future holds. It is becoming increasingly clear that we need support for the mental health of us all as we struggle with the unfolding chaos.

- **Survival**

As the systems we rely upon for basic necessities continue to fail, we will be forced to find alternatives for our survival.

## Context

I've been praying, thinking, learning, writing about, and experiencing the Spirit as an integral part of justice work. Recently, the Spirit has led me to step back and write a consolidated paper about what I've been learning about Spirit, justice, Mutual Aid, healing, and survival.

I've been blessed to have become friends with many people who are doing amazing work for justice in their communities. Although their lives and their work demonstrate deep spirituality, faith is not something we usually talk about. I've attempted to do so a few times when I thought it might be appropriate, but not much happened. One thing that has worked is when I send messages to certain people, I sometimes briefly mention spirituality. That occasionally results in that friend replying briefly about the Spirit from their perspective. I might say something that happened was spirit-led, for example. Or use language that is more often used in Indigenous cultures, such as Creator.

Bringing the Spirit into justice work is awe inspiring. It has been amazing when I have witnessed or been a part of doing so. We need the presence of the Spirit to guide us through the ongoing collapse and chaos we are facing.

In what follows I'll describe what I have been learning about ways we can build just communities. And prepare for the ongoing chaos.

I was blessed to have been born into and continue to participate in Quaker communities. That is the spiritual part for me. I'll discuss how unprogrammed Quaker beliefs and practices are uniquely applicable as one possible way to do spirit-led justice work. Spiritual practices of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color would work, as well, of course.

And for the past three years I've been part of a Mutual Aid community, which has shown me that Mutual Aid is a framework for building just communities. And a means for climate survival.

As I'm writing this, I received this notice "From Climate Emergency to Climate Survival" that will discuss "how mutual aid climate survival programs can grow the movement".

## From Climate Emergency To Climate Survival


*A Climate Mobilization Network  
Movement Visioning Workshop*

Together we will build relationships  
and explore:

- How mutual aid climate survival programs can grow the movement
- New, creative approaches to taking action against fossil fuels
- Ways to integrate healing into our work
- And how to create space for reflection, intentionality, strategic clarity, and alignment around a shared vision for the next era of our movement

We know that our communities are overwhelmed with unmet needs, abandoned by the government and **that more disasters are coming.**

What does collective survival look like in this moment?



**February 28  
4pm PT**

## Prefigurative Politics

You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.

**Buckminster Fuller**

The term prefigurative politics was coined by American academic Carl Boggs in the 1970s. According to Boggs, the aim is to embody "within the ongoing political practice of a movement... those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal."

Our lives reflect our beliefs, or they should. Mutual Aid is an example of prefigurative politics. Our Mutual Aid communities work, now, in the way we want the future to work for everyone. That is a reason why I'm writing this. In these chaotic times, Mutual Aid is an opportunity for you to deal with the rising authoritarianism and dysfunctions of American society, and become involved in a community that is built on supporting each other. This doesn't stop authoritarianism, but allows you to join a community where you can live according to your values. It just came to me that perhaps this might diminish authoritarianism in the general society.

## Mutual Aid

I have been blessed to have been drawn into Mutual Aid as a framework for justice work. The focus of Mutual Aid is doing things instead of just talking about them. And that draws people into the movement, when they can see what they do in a Mutual Aid community has an immediate impact on people's lives.

## Three Key Elements of Mutual Aid

- Mutual aid projects work to meet survival needs and build shared understanding about why people do not have what they need.
- Mutual aid projects mobilize people, expand solidarity, and build movements.
- Mutual aid projects are participatory, solving problems through collective action rather than waiting for saviors.

You can see these principles reflected in the **Des Moines Mutual Aid Points of Unity** found at the end of this. This is discussed extensively in Dean Spade's book, **Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)**.

There are a lot of misconceptions about Mutual Aid. I capitalize Mutual Aid to indicate I'm writing about "real" Mutual Aid. Common misconceptions include thinking that helping someone out is Mutual Aid. This is a very common misconception. You don't understand Mutual Aid if you don't learn the difference between Mutual Aid and charity.

### **Characteristics of Mutual Aid vs. Charity**

Mutual aid projects depart from the charity model in crucial ways. Most mutual aid projects are volunteer based and avoid the careerism, business approach, and charity model of nonprofits. Mutual aid projects strive to include lots of people, rather than just a few people who have been declared "experts" or "professionals." If we want to provide survival support to as many people as possible and mobilize as many people as possible for root-causes change, we need to let a lot of people do the work and make decisions about the work together, rather than bottlenecking the process with hierarchies that let only a few people lead.

**Dean Spade. Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next) (Kindle Locations 640-645). Verso.**

Mutual aid is collective coordination to meet each other's needs, usually from an awareness that the systems we have in place are not going to meet them. Those systems, in fact, have often created the crisis, or are making things worse. We see examples of mutual aid in every single social movement, whether it's people raising money for workers on strike, setting up a ride-sharing system during the Montgomery Bus Boycott, putting drinking water in the desert for migrants crossing the border, training each other in emergency medicine because ambulance response time in poor neighborhoods is too slow, raising money to pay for abortions for those who can't afford them, or coordinating letter-writing to prisoners. These are mutual aid projects. They directly meet people's survival needs and are based on a shared understanding that the conditions in which we are made to live are unjust.



## Spirit, Justice, Mutual Aid, Healing and Survival

There is nothing new about mutual aid— people have worked together to survive for all of human history. But capitalism and colonialism created structures that have disrupted how people have historically connected with each other and shared everything they needed to survive. As people were forced into systems of wage labor and private property, and wealth became increasingly concentrated, our ways of caring for each other have become more and more tenuous.

Today, many of us live in the most atomized societies in human history, which makes our lives less secure and undermines our ability to organize together to change unjust conditions on a large scale. We are put in competition with each other for survival, and we are forced to rely on hostile systems— like health care systems designed around profit, not keeping people healthy, or food and transportation systems that pollute the earth and poison people— for the things we need. More and more people report that they have no one they can confide in when they are in trouble. This means many of us do not get help with mental health, drug use, family violence, or abuse until the police or courts are involved, which tends to escalate rather than resolve harm.

In this context of social isolation and forced dependency on hostile systems, mutual aid— where we choose to help each other out, share things, and put time and resources into caring for the most vulnerable— is a radical act.

**Dean Spade. Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next) (Kindle Locations 104-120). Verso.**

## Spirit-led

My first experience with Mutual Aid was Spirit-led. In early 2020 we held a vigil in support of the Wet'suwet'en peoples who were being attacked by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police as they tried to prevent the construction of a natural gas pipeline through their pristine territories in British Columbia. I posted the time for the vigil on Facebook but didn't expect anyone to come. But my now good friend, Ronnie James, did come. Ronnie is an Indigenous organizer and came to see what we were doing. Since that day he has helped me understand Mutual Aid.

Being involved with Mutual Aid has been the focus of my justice work ever since. I know that meeting was Spirit-led. Which reinforces, for me, the role of spirituality in Mutual Aid. Not everyone involved in Mutual Aid speaks in terms of spirituality. But their actions are from a spiritual basis, I believe.



## Hierarchy

What I have found most helpful in describing Mutual Aid is to talk about hierarchy.

Because hierarchy is so ingrained in our culture, people on top often fall into dominance behaviors without meaning to, assuming the superiority of their ideas, not taking other's opinions seriously, or unilaterally making decisions and telling others to implement them. If we are trying to build a world where people have collective self-determination, where we get to make justice-centered decisions together about land, work, housing, water, minerals, energy, food, and everything else that matters, we need to practice new skills beyond dominance and submission in decision-making.

**Dean Spade. Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next) (Kindle Locations 906-910). Verso, 2020**

From my Mutual Aid community, I've come to understand how crucial it is to avoid hierarchies. In what follows I'll explain why recognition of hierarchies is essential for the Spirit to work in our communities.

- Hierarchies always involve power relationships. Which can result in oppression.
- The hierarchical practices of organized religions cannot be a way to bring spirituality into justice work.
  - Organized religions have many hierarchies. The most fundamental being the pastor's role.
  - And so much harm has been done when White Christian missionary efforts, for example, were forced upon other peoples.
  - But organized religions can use charity to help Mutual Aid communities.
- The non-hierarchical practices of spirituality of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color and of **unprogrammed** Quaker worship are ways to continue to bring the Spirit into justice work.

Unprogrammed Quaker worship means gathering together for about an hour each Sunday to worship without a pastor. To worship in silence together, to listen for leadings from the Spirit.

# No hierarchy

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- We bring our learned practices of **hierarchy** with us
- Even when no paycheck or punishment enforces our participation
- Even in volunteer groups we often find ourselves in conflicts stemming from learned dominance behaviors.
- But collective spaces, like mutual aid organizing, can give us opportunities to unlearn conditioning and build new skills and capacities.

## Tacit Knowledge

When I talk about spiritual experiences, I usually use the term **ineffable**, meaning cannot be expressed in words. The thesis referenced here discusses spiritual experiences or understanding as **tacit knowledge**.

Tacit knowledge, also called practical knowledge, is knowledge that cannot be explained. It is how many people and groups seem to have practices that become second nature to members of a culture or group, such as the ability to navigate the seas in a small boat or speak a native language. Applying tacit knowledge to the study of religion and spirituality allows us to think about how we connect with the world and how we address the concern of what one feels to be true of their existence, or existential intuition.

### **Mutual Aid as Spiritual Tacit Knowledge Within Doukhobor Epistemology by Rachel L. Neubuhr Torres**

The idea of tacit knowledge was pioneered by Michael Polanyi who stated that “we can know more than we can tell” **1**. Tacit knowledge is not mutually exclusive to the fields we can empirically measure, though. In his article Tacit Knowledge and Spiritual Pedagogy, Ronald Lee Zigler states that “what is apparently overlooked is Polanyi's belief that tacit knowledge is an important component to all areas of human understanding—including those areas normally termed religious, moral or spiritual **2**.”

### **Mutual Aid as Spiritual Tacit Knowledge Within Doukhobor Epistemology by Rachel L. Neubuhr Torres**

## The Doukhobors. A Case Study

In the latter half of the 1800s, Petr Kropotkin wrote about his theory of cooperation, or **mutual aid**, as an important factor in evolution.

At this time (1800s) a group of spiritual Christians, known as the Doukhobors were living communally in Russia. They were severely persecuted and forced to relocate several times because of their pacifism and other beliefs. Including the emphasis on personal spiritual experiences rather than the Bible.

As Kropotkin began writing his series of essays, a group of spiritual folk-Christians known as the Doukhobors were living communally in the Transcaucasian region of the Russian Empire. Native to the region of modern-day Ukraine, they became a target of persecution by Russian Empire officials and Orthodox clergy members and were periodically forced to relocate to various regions of the state. Their relocation to the Caucasus was their final within the Russian Empire as discrimination and oppression forced their exodus to Canada in 1899. What kept them together was their faith: unwavering pacifism, the rejection of liturgical authority, and their strength in togetherness. **Mutual aid has been a core element of Doukhobor spiritual practice since their formation and is itself a form of tacit knowledge within their spiritual culture**, which in turn illuminates the persistence of their practices and beliefs against the backdrop of persecution and displacement they experienced.

### **Mutual Aid as Spiritual Tacit Knowledge Within Doukhobor Epistemology by Rachel L. Neubuhr Torres**

Their beliefs and practices, which still exist today, included pacifism, vegetarianism, commitment to hard work, and rejection of secular governments. Their name originally stemmed from an insult as it means “spirit wrestler,” and was meant to imply that they were wrestling against the spirit of God.

...

Even though there have been multiple schisms with the group splitting into different Doukhobor factions, they all hold the central constant element, as described by Woodcock and Avakumovic, that is the belief in the imminence of God, and the presence within each man of the Christ spirit, which not merely renders priesthood unnecessary, since each man is his own priest in direct contact with the divine, but also makes the Bible obsolete, since every man can be guided, if only he will listen to it, by the voice within.

### **Mutual Aid as Spiritual Tacit Knowledge Within Doukhobor Epistemology by Rachel L. Neubuhr Torres**

The Doukhobors, or “spirit wrestlers” trace their roots to southern Russia in the mid-1600s, when a group of believers split from the Russian Orthodox Church on moral and liturgical grounds. The Doukhobors believed that God did not dwell in the church, but in each human being. While the term “Doukhobors” was meant to be derogatory, the group embraced it, saying, “We are spirit wrestlers because we wrestle with and for the Spirit of God against those things that are evil.”

Doukhobors’ religious philosophy is based on two biblical commandments: “Recognize and love God with all thy heart, mind, and soul,” and “Love thy neighbour as thyself.” Their position has always been that war is not compatible with Christianity, and to kill another human being is to kill the Spirit of God within that person.

**Fact file: Russian Doukhobors, or the ‘Sons of Freedom’ by Global News and Postmedia News 16x9, December 7, 2012**

## Quakers and the Doukhobors

Throughout our Quaker history we have been persecuted, often because we, too, believe there is that of God in every person, so we could not kill anyone. Pacifism is an important part of our faith. We also share the belief that we can have spiritual experiences and guidance today.

A group of Quakers helped the Doukhobors' resettle in Canada.

During their time within the Russian Empire the Doukhobors were periodically resettled across various parts of the state before finally being allocated to the Caucasus region. They remained deeply spiritual and communal despite these challenges and were able to maintain their culture. Up until the nineteenth century they had been able to avoid military conscription based on their unwavering belief in pacifism, but in 1895, which was a time of rising Russian nationalism, the Doukhobors were conscripted into the military. This was a major challenge to their pacifism because this practice did not only stem from the belief of not causing harm but more so from the belief that God dwells within each person and, so, to kill another person would be to kill a part of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the Doukhobors protested against conscription. In the summer of 1895 Doukhobors across Transcaucasia amassed their rifles into piles and lit them ablaze.

The resulting persecution was severe. They were set upon by Cossacks on horses, armed with lead-tipped whips, as the horses trampled into the Doukhobors. Cossacks whipped into them indiscriminately, ripping one man's eye out. George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic narrate history in *The Doukhobors* and describe how "the Doukhobors resisted passively, drawing their injured comrades within the circle, huddling together and offering their own bodies to the whips, so that all should share in the torment" **10**. The severity of their persecution drew attention from Count Leo Tolstoy, who took it upon himself to help get the Doukhobors out of the Russian Empire. With the help of several others, including a group of Quakers, Tolstoy was able to negotiate for their resettlement in Canada. Although the Doukhobors no longer faced physically violent persecution, their arrival in Canada quickly became problematic as they faced external judgement and prejudice.



**Mutual Aid as Spiritual Tacit Knowledge Within Doukhobor Epistemology by Rachel L. Neubuhr Torres**

Koozma J. Tarasoff, a Doukhobor living in Ottawa, published a fascinating history of the Doukhobors, called *Plakun Trava*, in 1982. He writes of the Doukhobors, a Russian sect which emerged from the religious upheaval of the 17th century: "They were Christian anarchists in search of a practical utopia." The Doukhobor (or "spirit wrestlers") were persecuted in Russia for their revolutionary beliefs. "They opposed all church ceremony, all priests, all formal types of prayer. They resisted external government, refusing to do military service, and endeavoring to live a life of self-sufficiency."

Koozma Tarasoff visited Philadelphia Yearly Meeting at its invitation in March 1983. It was his first visit to our yearly meeting, and he and I attended almost all of the sessions. We treasure the memory of his 12-day visit in our home. Joseph S. Elkinton, my great-grandfather, made four trips to Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1899, on behalf of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Arch Street), to meet the ships bringing 7,500 Doukhobors from Russia to settle on land granted to them by the Canadian government. My grandfather, Joseph Elkinton, also visited them in Saskatchewan, where they settled first, and wrote a history about this group of Russian pacifists who had suffered much persecution in czarist Russia.

**Renewing the Quaker-Doukhobor Connection by David Elkinton, Friends Journal, January 1/5, 1984**

[Personal Experiences Among the Doukhobors in Canada, Doukhobor Heritage by Joseph Elkinton](#)

## Forced Assimilation

Forced assimilation is an injustice that must be addressed. That has been a systematic way to erase cultures and peoples. The trauma from forced assimilation passes from generation to generation. The victims and perpetrators of these atrocities cannot come together to build survival systems until this is acknowledged, and healing has begun.

Methods to **forcibly assimilate** the Doukhobors were carried out for years, and in the 1950s the government of British Columbia forcibly removed Freedomite (Doukhobor) children from their homes and placed them into a residential school in New Denver, B.C. The children were kept away from their families and forced to learn a secular curriculum that did not allow them to retain their unique dialect of Doukhobor Russian. This forced assimilation of the Doukhobors and their children did what it does to any other group: **they faced a loss of their culture, identity, and epistemology.**

### **Mutual Aid as Spiritual Tacit Knowledge Within Doukhobor Epistemology by Rachel L. Neubuhr Torres**

Forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples has been brought to attention recently, as the remains of thousands of native children are being discovered, buried on the grounds of the institutions of forced assimilation in this country and Canada.

Forced assimilation is occurring today in schools where it is forbidden to teach about Black, Indigenous and other people of color's history and lives today. And prohibited to learn about sexual orientation and gender identity.

## Doukhobors and spirituality

The lessons from the spiritually intuitive internal voice; the identity of acting with the spirit of God against any form of authoritative persecution; the oral history shared amongst themselves detailing their origins, triumphs, troubles, and prophecies; pacifism to the point of vegetarianism; these are just a handful of instances within Doukhobors existence that point to how mutual aid is a part of their spiritual tacit knowledge and becomes a unique part of their epistemology.

The practice of mutual aid within the Doukhobor community is amplified because it is part of their spiritual tacit knowledge and epistemology. This has driven their perseverance in maintaining the survival of their culture and spiritual beliefs.

**Mutual Aid as Spiritual Tacit Knowledge Within Doukhobor Epistemology by Rachel L. Neubuhr Torres**

## Quakers and Mutual Aid Today

Quakers, also, have a history of Mutual Aid that is part of our spiritual knowledge and epistemology.

Quaker history began in the mid-1600s in England. The Quaker practice was to gather in silence, to listen for spiritual messages or leadings. Without a pastor. That means these Quakers meetings didn't have a hierarchy. These **unprogrammed** practices show how mutual aid is part of our spiritual knowledge. This spiritual practice has driven the perseverance of many Quakers in maintaining the survival of our culture and spiritual beliefs.

As often happens with religious bodies, a divergence of beliefs and practices occurred among Quakers. Some Quakers decided to have a pastor to lead religious services. And to refer to themselves as churches.

Unprogrammed Quakers refer to our gatherings as meetings (meetings for worship).

The name of my Quaker Yearly Meeting is Iowa Yearly Meeting (**Conservative**). Conservative indicates **conserving** the original practices of Quakers. As mentioned at the beginning of this document, **unprogrammed, conservative** groups of Quakers have continued the original practice of gathering together in silence to listen for spiritual messages or leadings. Without a pastor.

Many times, when I've tried to explain Mutual Aid, people will say something like 'that's the way we all used to live in our grandparents' time.' And I say yes, but we have not been living that way since, that way now.

White supremacy and capitalism have worked well in widening the gap in the distribution of wealth. Transferring great wealth to a very few people. Success is now viewed in material, economic terms. People feel the need to build their own wealth, and not care about other's circumstances.

## Spirit, Justice, Mutual Aid, Healing and Survival

The Quaker community I grew up in was mainly rural, with members living near each other. These communities could be deemed Mutual Aid communities. But they began to break down as members moved away. And as many Quakers adopted more of the materialism of the communities they moved to.

Most of those early Quaker communities in this country were of White people. And though I can't remember it being mentioned as I was growing up, we were all settler-colonists. That still applies. Most Friends don't understand their white privilege and thus are often unaware of that hierarchy, of how those who aren't white continue to be oppressed because of it.

Police and prison abolition are another key aspect of Mutual Aid communities. Police protect property and wealth, enforcing capitalism. Are a definite hierarchy as they violently enforce that we obey their commands. Far too often to the point of death.

These points are well expressed in the Des Moines Mutual Aid Points of Unity (below).

I say these things because they are barriers to forming Mutual Aid communities. There can be no hierarchy. This is something white people in particular must learn.

These principles are consistent with the teachings of religions and spiritual practices. Mutual Aid communities are examples of Beloved community. My experience, as a white Quaker, is my Mutual Aid community has helped me live more consistently with and deepened my faith.

And as we return to the principles of our faith, we can then be a resource for the spirituality of our Mutual Aid community. I believe this is what Quakers are called to do in these troubled times. This work will need to be done in the community, beyond the meetinghouse.

Returning to the three principles of Mutual Aid discussed earlier, these are things we will see as our faith communities build Mutual Aid communities where they are.

- Mutual aid projects work to meet survival needs and build shared understanding about why people do not have what they need.
- Mutual aid projects mobilize people, expand solidarity, and build movements.
- Mutual aid projects are participatory, solving problems through collective action rather than waiting for saviors.

## Maintaining a flat or horizontal hierarchy is what makes Mutual Aid work.

- MUTUAL is the key. That inhibits the tendency to think of “us” versus “them”. Helps us truly build community with everyone.
- Removes the artificial hierarchies eliminates grouping people by race, class, gender, education, etc. There cannot be white supremacy, for example, if there is no hierarchy.
- Mutual Aid resists authoritarianism and colonization.

## Queries related to Mutual Aid

- Do we recognize that hierarchies are about power, supremacy and privilege? What are our existing hierarchies, and how do we break them down?
- Do we work to prevent hierarchies in our peace and justice work?
- What are we doing to meet the survival needs of our wider community?
- How are we preparing for disaster relief, both for our community, and for the influx of climate refugees?
- Are we examples of Beloved community? How can we use Mutual Aid to invite our friends and neighbors to join our community?

**Mutual aid focuses on the root of community problems, rather than their symptoms. Jason Laderas**

## Des Moines Mutual Aid Points of Unity

- **We believe in working shoulder to shoulder and standing in solidarity with all oppressed communities.**

We ourselves are oppressed, and our mutual aid work is a fight for our collective liberation. We do not believe in a top-down model of charity. Instead, we contrast our efforts at horizontal mutual aid, the fostering of mutually beneficial relationships and communities, to dehumanizing and colonizing charity.

- **We believe in community autonomy.**

We believe that the communities we live and organize in have been largely excluded from state social services, but intensely surveilled and policed by the state repressive apparatus. Capitalism is fundamentally unable to meet people's needs. We want to build self-sustaining communities that are independent of the capitalist state, both materially and ideologically, and can resist its repression.

- **We are police and prison abolitionists.**

Abolition and the mutual aid that we practice are inextricably linked. We don't rely on capitalist institutions or the police to do our work. We believe in building strong and resilient communities which make police obsolete, including community systems of accountability and crisis intervention.

- **We work to raise the political consciousness of our communities.**

Part of political education is connecting people's lived experiences to a broader political perspective. Another component is working to ensure that people can meet their basic needs. It is difficult to organize for future liberation when someone is entrenched in day-to-day struggle.

- **We have open disagreements with each other about ideas and practices.**

We believe there is no formula for resolving our ideological differences other than working towards our common aims, engaging with each other in a comradely manner, and respecting one another whether or not we can hash out disagreements in the process. New item



Des Moines Mutual Aid is an Abolitionist Mutual Aid Collective made up of varying radical and revolutionary tendencies in what is currently known as central iowa.

None of these articles represent the collective as a whole. Take what you can from these pieces and burn the prisons.

In Love and Rage,  
Des Moines Mutual Aid

**Des Moines Mutual Aid removing snow so free food can be given out.**

Your local Anarchists, Communists, and Black Liberations organized a mass evacuation of the houseless camps to hotel rooms paid for by the community. We have turned no one away in this polar vortex. We keep us safe, the government is incapable of doing so. --Des Moines Mutual Aid



## Healing Transformative Mutual Aid Practices (T-Maps)

We are all suffering so much damage. Damage from injustices of the past and present. Dread about what the future holds. I just recently learned of the damage that occurs from being on the frontlines of the struggles for justice. I became aware of that when I learned about another type of Mutual Aid, Transformative Mutual Aid Practices (T-MAPS).

Transformative Mutual Aid Practices (T-MAPS) are a set of tools that provide space for building a personal “map” of wellness strategies, resilience practices, unique stories, and community resources. Creating a T-MAP will inspire you to connect your struggle to collective struggles. When we make and share our T-MAPS with others they become potent tools for healing and liberation.

Your T-MAP is a guide for navigating challenging times, figuring out what you care about, and communicating with the important people in your life.

<https://tmapscommunity.net/>

## Spirit, Justice, Mutual Aid, Healing and Survival

- Many of us experienced childhood and adolescent traumas and continue to experience traumas based on our individual intersectionalities
- We understand the mechanics of the harms and traumas inflicted by the prevailing social order's oppressive and exploitative systems
- We must recondition ourselves towards caring for each other; communal care is ongoing radical action
- Alone we are vulnerable, but together we are strong; therefore, genuine community is paramount
- We acknowledge that the architecture of capitalist society is colonizing white supremacy culture; it is an architecture of domination, abuse and exclusion
- We focus intensely on the concept and practice of mutual aid
- We endeavor to decolonize our thinking, group interactions, and architecture of group processes
- We center acting in solidarity across groups in ways that build unity through diversity
- We emphasize prefiguration within our organizations as necessary to counteract the abuses of prevailing society and manifest community and liberatory ways of being and living
- When we do not prefigure communal care into our group structures and routines, we unconsciously recreate the alienation, racism, homophobia and transphobia, hierarchical ableisms, and neuro-homogeneities of capitalist society, along with their negative effects
- If we don't practice solidarity with our own comrades, we cannot expect to practice solidarity with others
- Knowing what we know about how prevailing society operates to oppress, exploit, and traumatize vulnerable people, a group or org that does not actively engage and support the mental and emotional wellbeing of its members is not revolutionary
- Many folx who show up to our groups do not stay because they sense the group is non-supportive or unsafe for their being

### A Call for Prefigurative Mental Health Support and Communal Care Within Radical Groups and Organizations

I've written a number of blog posts about T-MAPs.

<https://quakersandreligioussocialism.com/t-maps/>

# A Letter Regarding Community, Mutual Aid and LANDBACK

Dear Friends,

The measure of a community is how the needs of its people are met. No one should go hungry, or without shelter or healthcare. Yet in this country known as the United States millions struggle to survive. The capitalist economic system creates hunger, houselessness, illness that is preventable and despair. A system that requires money for goods and services denies basic needs to anyone who does not have money. Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) are disproportionately affected. A glaring example of systemic racism. The capitalist system that supports the white materialistic lifestyle is built on stolen land and genocide of Indigenous peoples, and the labor of those who were enslaved in the past or are forced to live on poverty wages today.

Capitalism is revealed as an unjust, untenable system, when there is plenty of food in the grocery stores, but men, women and children are going hungry, living on the streets outside. White supremacy violently enforces the will of wealthy white people on the rest of us.

It is clear to many people that the colonial capitalist economic system and white supremacy are contrary to the Spirit and we must find a better way. We conscientiously object to and resist capitalism and white supremacy.

*capitalism has violated the communities of marginalized folks. capitalism is about the value of people, property and the people who own property. those who have wealth and property control the decisions that are made. the government comes second to capitalism when it comes to power. In the name of liberation, capitalism must be reversed and dismantled, meaning that capitalistic practices must be reprogrammed with mutual aid practices.*

**Des Moines Black Liberation Movement**

## Mutual Aid

How do we resist? We rebuild our communities in ways not based upon money. Such communities thrive all over the world. Indigenous peoples have always lived this way. Generations of white people once did so in this country. Mutual Aid is a framework that can help us do this today.

The concept of Mutual Aid is simple to explain but can result in transformative change. Mutual Aid involves everyone coming together to find a solution for problems we all face. This is a radical departure from “us” helping “them”. Instead, we all work together to find and implement solutions. To work together means we must be physically present with each other. Mutual Aid cannot be done by committee or donations. We build Beloved communities as we get to know each other. Build solidarity. An important part of Mutual Aid is creating these networks of people who know and trust each other. When new challenges arise, these networks are in place, ready to meet them.

Another important part of Mutual Aid is the transformation of those involved. With Mutual Aid, people learn to live in a community where there is no hierarchy. A community where everyone has a voice. A model that results in enthusiastic participation. A model that makes the hierarchy required for white supremacy impossible.

Commonly there are several Mutual Aid projects in a community. The initial projects usually relate to survival needs. One might be a food giveaway. Another helping those who need shelter. Many Mutual Aid groups often have a bail fund, to support those arrested for agitating for change. And accompany those arrested when they go to court.

## LANDBACK

The other component necessary to move away from colonial capitalism and white supremacy is LANDBACK.

*But the idea of “landback” — returning land to the stewardship of Indigenous peoples — has existed in different forms since colonial governments seized it in the first place. “Any time an Indigenous person or nation has pushed back against the oppressive state, they are exercising some form of landback,” says Nickita Longman, a community organizer from George Gordon First Nation in Saskatchewan, Canada.*

*The movement goes beyond the transfer of deeds to include respecting Indigenous rights, preserving languages and traditions, and ensuring food sovereignty, housing, and clean air and water. Above all, it is a rallying cry for dismantling white supremacy and the harms of capitalism.*

**Returning the Land. Four Indigenous leaders share insights about the growing landback movement and what it means for the planet, by Claire Elise Thompson, Grist, February 25, 2020**

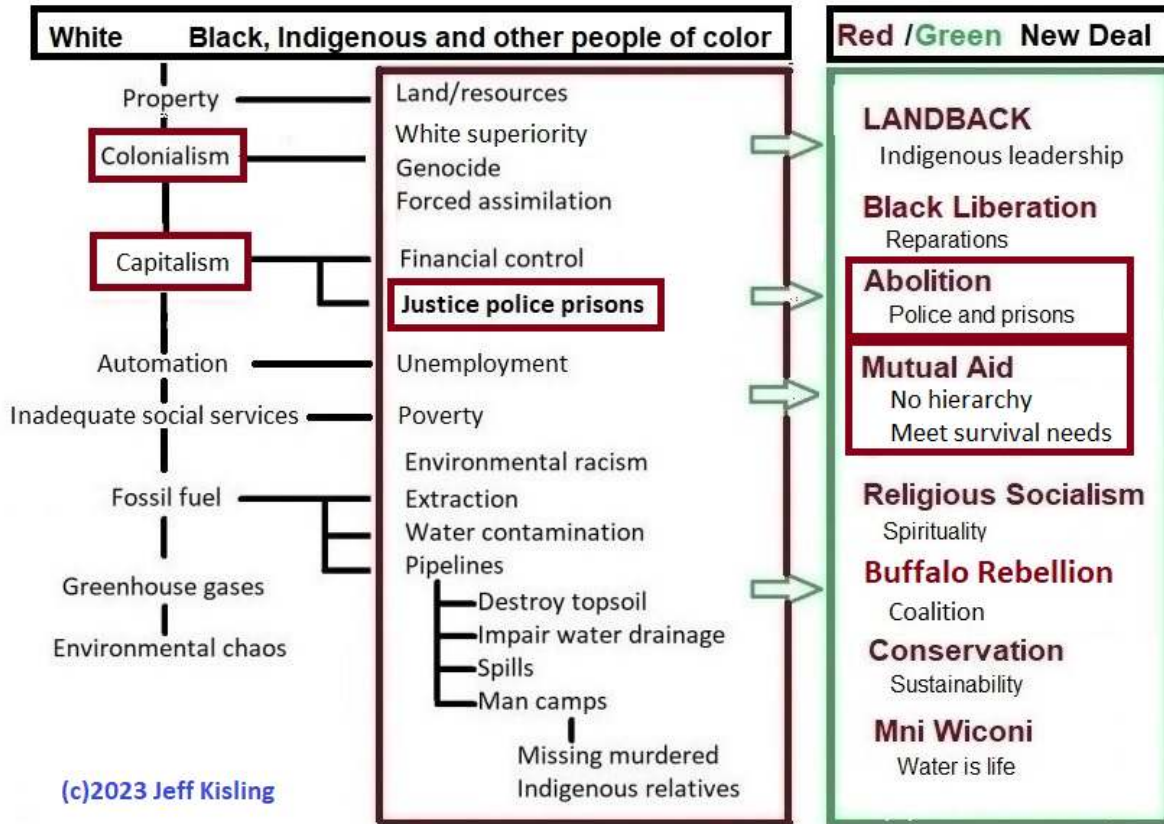
It matters little what people say they believe when their actions are inconsistent with their words. Thus, we may say there should not be hunger and poverty, but as long as we continue to collaborate in a system that leaves many without basic necessities and violently enforces white supremacy, our example will fail to speak to mankind.

Let our lives speak for our convictions. Let our lives show that we oppose the capitalist system and white supremacy, and the damages that result. We can engage in efforts, such as Mutual Aid and LANDBACK, to build Beloved community. To reach out to our neighbors to join us.

We must begin by changing our own lives if we hope to make a real testimony for peace and justice. We remain, in love of the Spirit, your sisters and brothers.

*Note: Modeled from ‘An Epistle to Friends Concerning Military Conscription’*

# Spirit, Justice, Mutual Aid, Healing and Survival



The **Doukhobours** or **Dukhobors** ([Russian](#): [духоборы](#) / [духоборцы](#), [romanized](#): *dukhobory* / *dukhobortsy*; lit. 'Spirit-Warriors / Wrestlers')<sup>[2][3][4][5]</sup> are a [Spiritual Christian ethnoreligious group](#) of [Russian](#) origin. They are known for their [pacifism](#) and tradition of [oral history](#), hymn-singing, and [verse](#). They reject the Russian Orthodox priesthood and associated rituals, believing that personal revelation is more important than the Bible. Facing persecution by the Russian government for their nonorthodox beliefs, many migrated to Canada between 1899 and 1938, where most currently reside.<sup>[6]</sup>

[Wikipedia Doukhobors](#)

**Tacit knowledge** or **implicit knowledge**—as opposed to formal, codified or [explicit knowledge](#)—is [knowledge](#) that is difficult to express or extract, and thus more difficult to transfer to others by means of writing it down or verbalizing it. This can include personal [wisdom](#), [experience](#), [insight](#), and [intuition](#).<sup>[1]</sup>

[Wikipedia Tacit knowledge](#)

**Epistemology** (/ˌɪˈpɪstəˈmɒlədʒi/ ([listen](#)); from [Ancient Greek](#) ἐπιστήμη (*epistēmē*) 'knowledge', and *-logy*), or the **theory of knowledge**, is the [branch of philosophy](#) concerned with [knowledge](#). Epistemology is considered a major subfield of philosophy, along with other major subfields such as [ethics](#), [logic](#), and [metaphysics](#).<sup>[1]</sup>

Epistemologists study the nature, origin, and scope of knowledge, [epistemic justification](#), the [rationality](#) of [belief](#), and various related issues. Debates in epistemology are generally clustered around four core areas:<sup>[2][3][4]</sup>

1. The [philosophical analysis](#) of the nature of knowledge and the conditions required for a belief to constitute knowledge, such as [truth](#) and [justification](#)
2. Potential sources of knowledge and justified belief, such as [perception](#), [reason](#), [memory](#), and [testimony](#)
3. The structure of a body of knowledge or justified belief, including whether all justified beliefs must be derived from justified [foundational beliefs](#) or whether justification requires only a [coherent set of beliefs](#)
4. [Philosophical skepticism](#), which questions the possibility of knowledge, and related problems, such as whether skepticism poses a threat to our ordinary knowledge claims and whether it is possible to refute skeptical arguments

In these debates and others, epistemology aims to answer questions such as "What do we know?", "What does it mean to say that we know something?", "What makes justified beliefs justified?", and "How do we know that we know?".<sup>[1][2][5][6][7]</sup>

Wikipedia Epistemology



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1 Polanyi, Michael, and Sen, Amartya. *The Tacit Dimension*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2009, 6

2 Zigler, Ronald Lee. "Tacit Knowledge and Spiritual Pedagogy." *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 20, no. 2 (1999), 162

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## Ways of war

*Mutual aid is not only a tool of survival, but also a tool of revolution.*

*The more we take care of each other, the less they can fracture a community with their ways of war*



SPIRIT  
JUSTICE  
MUTUAL AID  
HEALING  
SURVIVAL