

## Lesson 5 Together, We Thrive

### 7000 Oaks Make a Forest

Kassel is a small city located in central Germany. If you walk around Kassel, you will encounter rows of oak trees with stone columns beside them. This all began with a prominent German artist named Joseph Beuys, who came up with the idea to plant 7,000 oak trees throughout the city. "Seven trees do not make a forest, and neither do seventy, but seven thousand are a bit closer," said Beuys. Despite numerous challenges, he remained firm in his determination to have 7,000 trees planted. Thanks to him, these days, the people of Kassel enjoy magnificent oak trees throughout their city.

During the dreadful World War II, Kassel was the heart of German military production. This resulted in the entire city being bombed to the ground and destroyed. After the war ended, Kassel started to recover from the adversities of the war. It went through rapid industrialization and urbanization. This provided convenience for the citizens but caused significant environmental damage, too. In 1982, Beuys was invited to show his work in an exhibition in Kassel. Beuys saw the environmental damage and thought about what he could do to advocate for nature through his work. He wanted to speak about the need to turn destructive energy for waging wars into a constructive one to build a better society. In addition, Beuys, who was deeply aware of the importance of preserving and restoring nature, wished to reshape the relationship between humans and nature. To make this happen, he proposed the project, "7000 Oaks." In this ambitious project, he intended to plant 7,000 oak trees throughout Kassel, each paired with a basalt column.

Beuys started the 7000 Oaks project by planting a small oak tree with a basalt column in front of an art museum. The oak tree illustrated nature's constant growth, while the basalt column signified a man-made structure that remains constant. He sought to demonstrate that man-made buildings and nature could coexist in harmony by contrasting the oak tree with the basalt column. Beuys did not intend to plant all the trees by himself. He wanted to invite the citizens of Kassel to participate in the planting of the trees. After he planted the first tree and placed the first basalt column beside it, he brought 6,999 more basalt columns and piled them up in a public square in front of the museum. The stones would be moved one by one, directly next to a newly planted oak tree at its new site. He urged everyone to plant their own oak tree and to place one of the basalt columns next to it. Beuys believed that community participation was essential to the project's success.

At first, the 7000 Oaks project was met with controversy and opposition. It was financially supported by the city of Kassel and its mayor, but some people protested against spending taxpayers' money on such a "useless" project. They complained that it was pointless to plant trees in a city. Above all, people questioned whether 7,000 trees could successfully be planted in the city. However, Beuys held on to his faith and continued to make efforts to reach out to as many individuals as possible to include them in the project. He held workshops to educate people about the project's importance and how they could contribute. He even talked to people one on one about the project and encouraged them to take part. His message to the people of Kassel was that everyone had the ability to make a difference.

Through his tireless efforts to spread his message, an increasing number of Kassel residents changed their minds about the project and joined him in planting trees. The community's involvement did not end with the planting of the trees. Residents, community councils, schools, local associations, and others provided planting sites. People took care of the trees after they were planted. They watered, trimmed, and protected the trees from harm. The project brought the community together during the process. People who had never met before were inclined to work together to plant trees. They shared a common goal and worked towards it. The project gave the residents of Kassel a sense of community and belonging.

By 1986, approximately 5,500 trees had been planted. Unfortunately, Joseph Beuys died at the age of sixty-four, before his final project was completed. As a legacy of his will, his family and the citizens continued to plant the remaining trees. Finally, his son, Wenzel Beuys, planted the final tree in 1987. The massive project took five years to complete. The project would not have been realized without the active participation of the Kassel residents. Rows of large oak trees now provide spectacular views in and around Kassel.

The 7000 Oaks project has flourished and continues to inspire Kassel residents and visitors from all over the world. The trees are now a vital part of the city's landscape, providing a green and peaceful shelter in the heart of the city. The 7000 Oaks project began with one person, but it became a collaborative work by the whole community, planting not only trees, but also community spirit. Thanks to this project, people were able to make a significant difference to their society.

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## The Work of a Miracle

Taeon, known for its beautiful sandy beaches and rocky landscapes, went through a tragic disaster. In 2007, an oil tanker had an accident in the ocean near Taeon, resulting in a massive oil spill of about 12,000 kl into nearby waters. The government declared Taeon a special disaster area. The scale of the spill was enormous, covering over 1,200 km of coastline. The oil spill had terrible effects on the environment. Birds and underwater organisms died, and the local population was in danger. In the face of this crisis, something tremendous happened.

Volunteers from all over the country rallied together in a unified effort to undertake the seemingly impossible task. In order to transport sand polluted by oil away from the shoreline, these ordinary individuals formed a human chain. Shoulder to shoulder, they passed buckets of sand and oil from one person to another. They worked tirelessly, day and night.

As the days turned into weeks, the persistent efforts of these dedicated volunteers began to bear fruit. The shoreline that had once been soaked in oil ultimately began to change, as the collective might of their labor steadily washed away the toxic contamination. According to the Korean government, this was one of the largest volunteer efforts to have ever taken place in Asia. Their actions demonstrated that miraculous things could indeed be achieved, and triumph against disaster is possible when people unite for a greater purpose.