

The Economy of Love

By Christian Elwell

With autumn upon us, it is time again to harvest the bounty of the seeds that we planted this spring. For many years I have been growing small plots of upland rice, sometimes no more than a 100 plants, saving seed from year to year from the most balanced individual specimens. For the past two years, I have been planting larger plots, and we have been eating home grown rice here at South River Farm. With each meal it seems to taste better and better. Nourished in this way, I have been weighing and measuring, inwardly and outwardly, both the rice and our human plight. The rice has something to say:

If you were to plant one single grain of rice seed in the spring, and care for this plant so that it could complete its life cycle to fruition, in October you could harvest at least 250 grains of new rice seed from this one plant.

A year from now, if you planted each of those 250 seeds 6 inches apart in rows one foot apart, you would need a garden space about 128 feet square (8' x 16'). From this small plot of rice, you would harvest about 5 pounds of unhulled rice [62,500 0250 x 250) grains of rice].

Two years from now, if you were to plant out the 5 pounds of seed, you would need about three-quarters of an acre of land. Each plant would yield 150 grains, and you would harvest about 1,250 pounds of hulled, brown rice, enough to feed a small community.

That's already more than enough rice for one person to handle, but just to follow the progression one more round, let's say your community got together, three years from now, to plant out all your seed (1,250 pounds). Your planting would require about 184 acres of land; your total harvest would be about 116 tons of hulled brown rice.

To summarize: we start with one single grain of rice, 3 1/2 years later we have 116 tons!

The above figures are not based on commercial yields of rice; such figures would be even more staggering. The figures are based on observations and measurements I have made while growing upland rice as a novice here in Coway, Mass, for 20 years, where rice has never, ever been grown before, in a climate unthinkable for its cultivation.

Over the years, I have been able to work with the rice as a close friend. I have come to know her from seed to seed, through 11 generations, each one adapting to the ever-present Now. As with other beings of the plant kingdom, her beauty, her simple seeds, her obedience to the lawfulness of cosmic life, her generosity, her tolerance, and total forgiveness are altogether like a still small voice calling to us, reminding us to attend to our own potential within. She tells us that we, too, are like seeds in the process of becoming. Have we the faith of a single grain of rice, we can, in the fullness of time, bring about enormous and real positive change, inside and out.

Christian Elwell and his wife, Gaella, have farmed and made miso in western Massachusetts since 1979. This article is adapted from their newsletter, South River Currents.

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