

Masanobu Fukuoka

On Listening to Nature, By Mitsuko Mikami

"The ultimate goal of farming is not the growing of crops, but the cultivation and perfection of human beings."

- Masanobu Fukuoka

"Time is running out" to save the planet, Masanobu Fukuoka, the natural philosopher, warned. Speaking in Tokyo, the man who popularized natural agriculture and wrote *The One-Straw Revolution*, said that natural alternatives must be developed to prevent environmental destruction and solve the problem of world hunger. If not, the earth may perish within twenty-five years.

Mr. Fukuoka, who will be 90 this year, was the featured speaker for the Second Country Ocean Festival this autumn which met in Mitaka Public Hall. Nearly 800 people listened to his remarks and applauded as he held up a sheaf of freshly cultivated rice. Though frail, he is still active, and his compassion and deep love for the planet shined through everything he said.

Mr. Fukuoka's talk was followed by a Genmai (Brown Rice) Forum at which a panel of farmers, environmentalists, and cooks discussed ways to change society peacefully and safeguard personal and planetary health.

In a special interview after his talk with Amberwaves, Mr. Fukuoka observed, "I am against genetically modified (GM) crops because time is necessary for the natural evolution of species. Artificial manipulation of genes in a laboratory is contrary to natural order and change."

"It is a mistake to think I grow rice," he explained. "It is not I who grow rice, but it is nature that grows rice. Human beings don't know nature at all. Perhaps birds or raccoons are smarter than human beings because they know true nature. Natural farming is fundamentally different from all other types of farming. We must throw away our knowledge and learn directly from nature. Working for the earth is our original mission as human beings."

To preserve real nature, he suggested, the first step is to throw away our watch and clocks and come into balance with the natural rhythms and cycles around us.

On his farm in Kyushu, as described in his books, he has developed a method to produce whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and other crops in abundance without plowing, fertilizing, weeding, or applying pesticides. In addition to listening to nature and following our intuition, he teaches sowing many varieties of seeds together and letting nature do the rest.

Although rooted in the Buddhist philosophy of Mu, or nothingness, Mr. Fukuoka's approach to farming transcends religion. As he once observed: "Although natural farming - since it can teach people to cultivate a deep understanding of nature - may lead to spiritual insight, it's not strictly a spiritual practice. Natural farming is just farming, nothing more. You don't have to be a spiritually oriented person to practice my methods. Anyone who can approach these concepts with a clear, open mind will be starting off well. In fact, the person who can most easily take up natural agriculture is the one who doesn't have any of the common adult obstructing blocks of desire, philosophy, or religion.

. . . the person who has the mind and heart of a child. One must simply know nature - real nature, not the one we think we know!"

As the gulf between rich and poor nations continues to increase, Mr. Fukuoka turned more of his attention to global problems. In the mid-1980s he visited Africa and developed techniques to coat seeds with clay and get them to grow in desert and arid regions where nothing could be cultivated. His mission to "drop seeds, not bombs" has inspired many traditional and indigenous people to experiment with his methods. In principle, entire regions can be renewed and abundant crops produced in areas that today yield only poverty, hunger, and death.

(Photo)

Strikingly similar in appearance and manner to Lao Tzu, the great Chinese sage, Mr. Fukuoka conveys both a sense of timelessness and urgency.

This article was contributed by Mitsuko Mikami, who teaches macrobiotic cooking in Tokyo and recently published a set of beautiful Brown Rice Recipe Cards. She represents Amberwaves in Japan.

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