

## **The permaculturalist, the natural farmer and the hunter-gatherer: The transition to reconnection with the land.**

Larry Korn, the translator and student/friend of the Natural farmer Fukuoka Masanobu was once asked about the difference between permaculture and Natural farming, he gave this insightful answer:

*“OK, let's tackle the question of the relationship between natural farming and permaculture and my relationship to both. The two methods look similar in many respects. Fukuoka's orchard is a perfect example of what an edible food forest is like. Both emphasize no-tillage and the interconnectedness of things. Both look to nature as a guide. But they are quite different in their approach.*

*With permaculture, the practitioner spends a good deal of time considering and observing the site. He or she checks out the plants and animals that are living there, the soil and water conditions, the climate, solar aspect, and so forth. All of this information is gathered together and the permaculturist sits down at a desk and draws up a comprehensive design. The design is human created...a product of the intellect. It is the designer's best shot at deciding what will work best and serve the objective of the overall project.*

*Natural farming, on the other hand, begins with the understanding that people can never understand nature. When people make the decisions in an attempt to mimic or improve upon nature unexpected and unwelcome side-effects are certain to occur because the human intellect is limited. In natural farming people never take the lead...it is always following nature's direction. When Fukuoka-san set out to develop a natural farming system he had no idea where it would lead or what the creation would look like in the end. He experimented, but only to get practical feedback on which way to go...never for its own sake. Sometimes his experiments lead to a disappointingly low yield, but if he gained a clearer idea of the direction he needed to follow, he considered that year's activity a success.*

*Another difference is that permaculture has a certain "what can I get from this land?" undercurrent. If we build better compost or apply aerated compost tea, for example, we will get more yield faster than if we did not use these techniques. Instead of "How about trying this and how about trying that," Fukuoka-san asked, "How about if I didn't do this, or didn't do that." He was aiming for a simplicity in which human decision-making eventually was completely out of the picture. Fukuoka approached the land by first asking, "What does nature need here...how can I be of service." In One-Straw he says, "Simply serve nature and all is well." In the end, of course, the natural farmer reaps far greater rewards by following this approach both in yields and in personal growth.*

*I am definitely a student of Fukuoka first and a permaculture teacher secondarily, but when I teach permaculture at least I know that 25 energetic people will be out in the world planting trees. That's a good thing, of course. I understand that the world view of Fukuoka's natural farming is foreign to most people at first, mainly because people are used to living in the world created by the human intellect and are comfortable there. Permaculture exists within that world. It is very teachable. You can create a two-week curriculum and teach the fundamentals of permaculture in a way that*

*makes sense to most students. It is largely a how-to-do-it sort of thing which is appealing, especially to Westerners. It is also the reason permaculture has caught on so easily around the world. Natural farming cannot be taught in that way. There is no institute, no curriculum, and no certificates indicating understanding. Practitioners of natural farming are generally happy to peacefully go about their work far below the radar. Again, natural farming has caught on in India more quickly than in any other part of the world. I believe there is a reason for that.*

*As for the question about whether or not I feel I have been successful in explaining natural farming and what I would have done differently... Many of the concepts expressed by Fukuoka-san are quite simple, but sometimes his way of explaining them actually obscures their simplicity. It doesn't help that he uses Asian expressions like "do nothing" and "no mind" to explain them which mean nothing to most Westerners. There's not much I can do about that except perhaps to write my own book someday with that in mind. One thing I would have definitely changed is the emphasis on the technique over the world view. The world view is the heart of natural farming and the farming is only an example of how this understanding would be expressed in Japan, where he lived with his conditions and so forth. Each person must work out the techniques for themselves. It will be unique to where they are living."*  
(Quote from: <http://www.permies.com/t/17886/fukuoka/Questions-Fukuoka-Natural-Farming>)

In Larry's introduction to Fukuoka's "[The One Straw Revolution](#)" he also points out:

*"If the newcomer expected "natural farming" to mean that nature would farm while he sat and watched, Mr. Fukuoka soon taught him that there was a great deal he had to know and do. Strictly speaking, the only "natural" farming is hunting and gathering. Raising agricultural crops is a cultural innovation which requires knowledge and persistent effort. The fundamental distinction is that Mr. Fukuoka farms by cooperating with nature rather than trying to "improve" upon nature by conquest."*

In his book "The Natural Way of Farming" Fukuoka also explains 3 different approaches to farming, metaphorically using Buddhist concepts of the various outlooks of the world. He explains the most narrow methodology being the dualism and materialism of modern farming methods which seemingly are separated from nature aggressively, seeing nature as something separate and to be feared or forced. Then next is the "Hinayana" farming which is about a kind of seeking for nature. Nature is still seen as separate from the farmer so he tries to rectify this separation and using all different forms or ways of being able to connect with this. In a way the most obvious of these methods is organic agriculture, a further refinement to this is permaculture and a further refinement still might be Natural farming.

The last of Fukuoka's 3 expressions of farming is what he calls "Mahayana" which is the broadest plain of all. In this expression it is unclear as to whether the person is farming or if simply they are living off the land in the way of a hunter-gatherer, this tends to concur with Larry's point that the only "real farming" is that of the hunter-gatherer.

So considering the above it is clear to say that in a way we can have a range of letting go of “doing” and striving in farming and in our connection to nature...it goes:-

5. Scientific agriculture
4. Organic agriculture
3. Permaculture
2. Natural farming
- .....
1. At one with nature (hunter-gatherer)

Of course this is all concentric circles, the foundational “1” energy of nature is constantly at the background. However interestingly there is actually very little difference between 2,3,4 and 5 ...all of these have the mind-set of being separate from nature and so even though one may be a little less obvious than the other it is all a form of separation until it isn’t any longer. Even modern day foraging or learning “how to be a hunter-gather” which is offered in numerous courses is really a mental process as it isn’t coming instinctually but through learned behaviours and ideas. True connection to nature comes only via the senses like children...this kind of connection cannot be taught and there is no course. There is no better or worse in nature. Everything is contrived until it isn’t any longer, and then we are wild men and women.

There is no way to be a hunter-gather, there is no set of skills to learn to be this, it just come instinctively and is in us already, dormant. If we engage with the mental to bring us to nature there will always be a divide between it and us, therefore it doesn’t matter if you are a scientist or on a course to be a permaculturalist or on a course to be hunter-gather, it’s all the same until the “self” drops out. However hunter-gathering is not a hobby or something that is merely done at the weekends, it’s actually a situation of *eating to live*...it's the natural human way of eating. It is impossible for this to come to pass now, with natural environments existing only in small conservation zones. There is simply not enough food available for the modern society to turn to hunter-gathering sustainably, or perhaps very few people can actually do this, for the vast majority this is simply idealistic. However Natural-farming, is a process of returning to nature, something that at this point in human civilization which is still full of “mind” is an actual, albeit a long shot, possibility. It is perhaps the clearest foundation that is as vague as possible not to be too discriminating and analytical in order to allow nature to come through without too much human augmentation.

Permaculture starts to clamp down more on natural processes and organize them around human ideals and organic farming simply follows the demands of the consumer in an industrial process, as of course do scientific farming practices. Organic agriculture is the easiest to transition to but in fact changes very little. Bio-dynamic agriculture as based on the ideas of Rudolph Steiner is a form of organic agriculture and so has the same problems as organics. Also it is only one man’s philosophy, which is narrowed and obscured by its own “religion”. Again Natural farming has no such process and is purely a connection to the unknown of nature.

Natural farming is of course about producing food, but allowing food to be produced the way it needs to be and also making use of wild-foods, so it innately incorporates learning about and using wild-foraged foods and herbs in the area where food

production will also take place. However it also recognizes that wild foraged foods are simply not possible to live from day to day. While nature itself is in such scarcity and land has been overtaken by modern agriculture and cities, so natural farming is deeply practical in its realization that for humans to live in the environment that is no longer the Eden of the hunter-gatherers' world, there has to be a transitional process that allows for farmed food that is as natural as possible food supplemented by foraged wild foods...it is a transition to conserve the land and make it like the original Eden we were from. This will take thousands of years...so in the meantime natural farming is a transitional process that draws the human back to nature...it works where we are at the moment and is less demanding of the earth than permaculture.

Community has also been destroyed and so farming-based communities bring back this tribal process that would be innate within the original hunter-gatherer societies but again would be contrived if we tried to simply "create tribes". There is no point trying to be a hunter-gatherer in a world and situation where it is only possible to go to wild lands that are protected by governments and in which one cannot live. We have to first reclaim the land, the people have to draw the land back to them and away from the power focus of governments and then gradually towards a situation of connection with nature again.

The point is that everyone needs to conserve the environment and bring back life to the soil, "to serve the land" as Fukuoka puts it. When this process occurs then there is going to be an abundance rather than a shortage of wild plants and vegetation. At the moment use of foraged foods is akin to stripping away the last remaining food supplies in the wild. But when the land is reclaimed by nature and this food is growing naturally, then it is in good supply and can be used more easily without fear of shortage. When monoculture is king the land quickly forms deserts and this then causes massive food shortage.

The abundance of nature is truly potential, but only if we allow it to bloom again. Natural farming is the one method that allows for a return to nature the way nature wants it to be. One can see permaculture as also following this in a more contrived way and so is more transitional; organic agriculture is even less transitional as it still focuses on a process that is commercial whereas permaculture is about self-sustainability.

As a general population we have to focus on what actually works practically for food supply as well as what allows for a radical end to systems that no longer have benefit to the human. Permaculture and particularly the more yin approach of Natural farming are the key solutions to this. Permaculture might be thought of as the more yang version of natural farming and natural farming as the more yin. The more yang the approach the more "mind" is in it.

For us to move into a true hunter-gatherer society again first there has to be a total letting go of the "self" state, which is out of human hands. When nature is ripe this too will occur and for some of us there will be a possible return back to Nature the way it intended, then even the idea of "farming" will be farcical.

*“Unless people become natural-people, there can neither be natural farming, nor natural food.”*

- Masanobu Fukuoka

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