

Gardening as if our lives depended on it

“... they shall not plant and another eat; ...”
Isaiah 65:22 (New Revised Standard Version Bible)

How many times have we taken for granted that we can drop by the grocery store to pick up bread, milk, and eggs? Have we considered:

1. Where the food originated—locally or thousands of miles away;
2. How it was produced—organically or with petroleum-based machines and chemicals; and
3. Who harvested it—fairly paid farmers or low-paid, non-citizen migrant workers?

As I considered the grocery store and the verse from Isaiah. “... they shall not plant and another eat ...,” I wondered about my relationship with the food I eat, those who harvest the food, and the Earth.

Most of the food I eat is planted and harvested by people I’ll never meet. Some people I know couldn’t grow a tomato or raise a chicken if their lives depended on it (I’m not far behind!). Perhaps that’s what troubled me: what if our lives suddenly depended on our ability to cultivate our own food? Many of us wouldn’t survive long!

Which brings me back to the grocery store, a symbol of our profound disconnection with the Earth. We note the passing of seasons, not by changes in weather patterns, plant cycles, or animal behaviors, but instead by sales of chocolate rabbits, scary costumes and artificial trees. Consequently, unprecedented ecological problems, such as water contamination, air pollution, and climate change, seem too big to grasp because we have lost our physical and spiritual connection with the Earth.

What would happen if we learned to grow a tomato or raise a chicken? Is it possible we could learn to reconnect with the Earth and with each other by planting a garden? And what if we planted community gardens on the property of churches, temples, mosques, synagogues, or zendos? We could create places where all who speak different languages of faith, but understand the universal language of life, could gather.

In understanding the natural processes on which our lives depend, the community garden would be an entry point into an environmental consciousness ... a way of thinking globally by acting locally. Planting, harvesting, and eating together would lead to friendships and greater understanding of each other’s faith traditions. Then together we could begin to deal with the ecological mess our forebears and we have unwittingly created, which will require an unprecedented interfaith effort. Then perhaps the legacy we leave our children and grandchildren is the unconditional abundance of the Earth rather than the prospect of empty grocery store shelves. They deserve nothing less.

Oh spirit who moves through all things, whose names are many ... I am humbled ... humbled by the myriads of life forms, humbled by the diversity of religious expression ...

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humbled by each sunrise ... humbled by the wren and the worm ... humbled by humanity's capacity to do good and evil ... humbled by tears and laughter ... humbled by the interconnectedness of all. Though I fail over and over, I seek only to be present in this moment so I can appreciate and be humbled by all who surround me. That is my practice ... that is my prayer.