

A few years ago, I found myself in something of an existential crisis after reading an article on Peak Oil and Global Warming. Having always been peculiarly susceptible to terrifying prophecies, I was completely overwhelmed. Believing the 21st century held little in store but social and environmental collapse, I became convinced that my life was as good as over, and like a petulant child, I decided if that was the case then I no longer wanted anything to do with this world. I dropped out of school and settled into an aimless life of Internet gaming, hoping to numb myself to fear. Instead, with so much free time, my horror over the doom of our planet blossomed into an obsession, and I began turning into a *Mad Max* survivalist, the kind who hoards gasoline and firearms, and perversely longs for whichever cataclysm he believes is imminent. One day in the midst of this internal strife, while researching ways to booby-trap a grain silo, I stumbled upon an e-book of Masanobu Fukuoka's out-of-print Natural Farming classic, The One Straw Revolution. It changed my life.

The title of Fukuoka's book refers to a low-input system of rice production in which the straw is returned to the field after harvest, and the revolutionary effect he believed its adoption would have on Japanese agriculture. Yet to call The One Straw Revolution a book on rice farming would be to misrepresent it entirely. Fukuoka's book is as much philosophy as it is farming: Using a quaint conversational style featuring anecdotes from life on his farm, he espouses a return to nature for all mankind, claiming not only that it is possible, but that it is necessary in light of the wholesale environmental destruction that seems to be an unavoidable consequence of modern life. One Straw is at once a treatise on the author's practice of "Do Nothing" farming—in which nearly all inputs and labor are eliminated by growing within natural systems—as well as a scathing

critique of scientific agriculture and more broadly, the value of human intellect. Nature, not science, is the farmer's best teacher, Fukuoka says, because it is the unmoving center and source of all agricultural knowledge. For humans to think they know better is arrogance and suggests a fundamentally flawed understanding of the natural world.

One Straw had a profound influence on my view of Man's place in Nature. It opened my eyes to the possibility of a truly sustainable agriculture, and confirmed the reality of a need for one in any responsible society. Furthermore, Fukuoka's observations forced me to abandon my preconceptions of Nature as a chaotic thing to be subdued, seeing it instead as the harmonious guide and provider it is. But more than that, his words compelled me to reevaluate my life. To understand why, it must first be understood Fukuoka's "Do Nothing" agricultural philosophy is simply the practical extension of his larger personal philosophy, a worldview grounded in Daoist and Buddhist ideals, recognizing the impermanence of reality and the oneness of the universe. It embraces simplicity and humility, and rejects the ego and its creations: the pursuit of material wealth, unnecessary labor simply to feel "productive", and the attempt to impose purpose on an apparently purposeless existence. Most importantly, it questions the value of human achievement in the understanding that most progress is destructive—taking Man further from Nature, and thus Himself—and only seems like an improvement because we have created the unnatural conditions where it appears that way.

As weeds in cracking pavement gradually etch it into rubble, so too did Fukuoka's words wear away my obstinate nihilism. He wrote that the further Man gets from Nature—the very source of existence—the more confused and heartsick he becomes: I was certainly both those things, so I planted a garden to test the truth of his words, just

AF29716

scattered a handful of seeds over a patch of naked earth. As I watched those flowers grow, I began to feel something like peace. Humbled by the power and the mystery of Nature, I grasped how futile it was to struggle against the world, and for the first time since childhood I experienced anew the joy of small things, of simply breathing deep and knowing I was alive. Freedom from anxiety was simple as tending to my garden. By living in the moment, actively engaged with the world instead of cowering in a corner of my brain, the mistakes of the past and the uncertainty of the future no longer held such sway over me. From this new perspective, I began to reconsider what I had been so afraid of, and discovered that the source of my fear was little more than selfish attachment to a comfortable life. It suddenly seemed absurd: I had been the cause of my own misery—clinging so hard to life that I wasn't living—and to find respite, all that had to change was my own attitude.

This morning I find myself walking in the field behind my house: five acres of land so abused by modern agriculture even weeds struggle to grow. At the sight I nearly pause in despair, but suddenly a flock of sparrows burst from the thicket to wheel above me in their flight, and I listen to snow crunch beneath my feet, and I remember that sleeping in the earth are the seeds I've sown: clover, grain, wildflowers. Life will return to this field, and I will help it. To farm under Nature's guidance: that is the path I walk, and not because of insecurity, in the survivalist's frantic search for a lifeboat on a sinking ship, or out of some misplaced sense of obligation. No, thirty years ago a hermit from Japan wrote that there was peace to be had living near the source of things, and I've found that to be true—that is why I am on the road back to Nature.