

The Free Farm by Pancho Ramos

We are not growing fruits and veggies. We are facilitating the growth of soil and community. The food is a byproduct. We're mostly giving back to Mother Earth, and in the process, enjoying the co-creation of the Belovedhood.

This is the revelation I got when I met hermano Tree. From my perspective, this is Gandhi's constructive program at its best, revamped for the 21st century. Gandhi used the spinning wheel as both physical embodiment and symbol for radical change. Today, the foundation for social justice is local and healthy food — our "spinning wheel" for the 21st century. For the last few years, I've been close to an amazing man named "Tree," to learn how to facilitate this construction. If you know him, you know that he is full of wisdom. When you are in his presence, meaningful work flows naturally. In his non-hierarchical, nonviolent, gentle way to suggest activities, one feels compelled to be of service. It could be in a park or an urban farm or a soup kitchen or a school yard, this love to serve and be kind permeates one's soul. And it becomes contagious.

Being close to Tree has given us the privilege to witness first hand his incredible energizing schedule. I wanted to know how it is possible for a human being to have such intense work days and still be generous with all beings.

A hint of the answer to the question: "How is it possible that a human being could have such intense work days and still be generous with all beings?" comes from Peace Pilgrim. She said:

Now there is living to give instead of to get. As you concentrate on the giving, you discover that just as you cannot receive without giving, so neither can you give without receiving - even the most wonderful things like health and happiness and inner peace. There is a feeling of endless energy, it just never runs out, it seems to be as endless as air. You seem to be plugged in to the source of universal energy.

Tree does all this, so that you and I, and all those families from different backgrounds can have fresh local organic food. We were thrilled to see that now there are entire families from the Mission who are coming to the stand. Families from the part of the Planet we call China, Mexico, Guatemala, Yemen, India; people who speak Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Farsi, Arabic, Hindi, English; and lots of children, plenty of children. It is a wonderful experience to foster this intercultural interaction and get nourished by their smiles and laughter. Some of our fliers are now in Spanish and Mandarin.

The Free Farm Stand is definitively a great experiment in the joy of serving our diverse families in the Earth Community, as is the Free Farm.

Under Tree's servant leadership, all of a sudden, 40 volunteers at the farm can work harmoniously. As sister Britney and I write this piece from the Free Farm, there are people: harvesting for the free farm stand; building a terrace; beautifying the labyrinth; watering the beds and isolated pots; preparing the table for the vegan lunch at noon; planting seeds in the greenhouse; washing the produce for the 1pm farm stand; guiding visitors to show some of the magic of the farm; carrying wheelbarrows -or taking a nap in

one of them- full of mulch to nourish the paths; turning the compost; taking pictures for the blog and writing a post to celebrate all of this work and the work that can't be described with metrics.

The diversity of the people volunteering honors and matches the rich diversity of life in the farm. On the one hand, the farm is filled with people of brown, black, white skin; a 1 yearold whose mom joined the yoga and meditation sessions in the morning; young people from both Standford and the UC Berkeley; teens from all backgrounds sharing their wisdom; enthusiastic elders from the neighborhood; people without houses and without money giving away all they have: their time, love and energy; Christians, a Buddhist monk, secular people, anarchists, Jews, Muslims, Native Americans all united in this church without walls. With this diversity, we come together, work together, learn together, and share. On the other hand, the farm is inhabited by a red tail hawk -who has made the farm her source of mice and rats- by ravens, hummingbirds, pigeons, worms, snails, ants; bumble bees, bees that live in hives and bees that live buried in the soil, who knows what fascinating interactions are happening beneath the surface of the beds. We learn from this animal world too, just as we learn from the diverse human worldviews that the farm draws together.

Many of us enjoy our volunteer work at the Free Farm because we believe that healthy local food is the foundation of social justice. While 93 percent of the varieties of crops have gone extinct in the part of the Planet we call the U.S. -and all over the World- city kids, like many of us, are learning how to facilitate the growth of food and how to let some crops go to seed. The concepts of both regeneration (not sustainability) and community are being shared and practiced. We are planting seeds of generosity and harvesting kindness to and from the community.

With this growth of soil and community, local neighbors are getting more and more involved. As these neighbors volunteer at the farm and receive its produce, a circle of giving and receiving is emerging. In this gift economy, we are able to provide for one another and cultivate compassion and care. As we shared before, the effects of the farm do not end within the Western Addition neighborhood here in San Francisco. They carry over to the Mission, where the surplus food produced by the farm is given away as an act of unconditional love. We don't believe that in a pollution-violence based economy only people with financial resources can consume healthy local organic food. We believe and practice that everybody can and must be nourished with healthy local food and healthy entertainment. We are doing our best to treat each other as family. And our family is widening, indeed. There is a palpable love and acknowledgement to take care of our elders, including Page and Margaret's initiative to make the farm more accessible to them:

Why is it that some of us forget, when we are adults, how wonderfully interdependent and vulnerable we are when we are just mere babies or respectable elders? This is what the young generations are learning in shared servanthood with the guidance of people like hermano Tree. He is one of those people that you want to live in community with in order to change our thing-oriented society to a people-oriented society, one meal at a time. As our friends from Growing Cities captured in this video: "Food is a such unifier. Food is a (r)evolution right now."

Through the act of freely giving away healthy and local produce, unjust food systems-like the one in this part of the Planet, where kale is often not affordable for many, yet unhealthy hot dogs and sodas cost less than a dollar-are challenged and a community is built. It is the love and dedication of volunteers that makes this possible. And it is this same love and dedication which has an infectious tendency on others, keeping the farm and the stand energized and thriving.

In other words: feed all, serve all, love all.

These were our two seeds as Free Farmers,

May all become compassionate, courageous and wise.

Britney, Pancho and Adelaja