

Chapter 8

Principles of Commoning an Earth Interbeing Food Commons

An Earth Interbeing food commons goes beyond a political claim for food to responsible food relationships, from rights to responsibilities. All beings have the claim to the right to food, but the responsibility to meet the needs of the hungry imposes a common duty to fulfill that right for all beings. Commoning Earth Interbeing food regulates and manages the taking and reciprocity of life for food within the framework of mutual need, mutual aid, and solidarity for and with all. Because the life we take to eat requires a place to be and grow, an Earth Interbeing food commons has the responsibility to meet the needs of all life to have both food and a place for life to grow.

This chapter considers the principles of an inclusive food system that would sustain the Earth Interbeing and meet mutual needs for food and place, a worldview drawn from indigenous knowledge. It will take persistent effort over a long time for those of us who lead privileged lives within Western Culture to transform our ways of living to wholeness with the Earth Interbeing, yet we can join others already on this journey. We can resolve today to unlearn what harms and learn how to become whole beings to ultimately heal our broken Earth Interbeing food relationships.

Consider this chapter's enumeration of proposed principles of an Earth-interbeing food system as a first draft. The transformation of our food relationships begins with consensus building around firm principles and practices. Westerners interested in an Earth-interbeing food commons will have to free ourselves from our colonial Western mindset before we can envision how to enact the ways of wholeness in commoning food.

We know our belonging within the Wholeness of Earth Interbeing: Beings live within an interrelated, interdependent, and interacting mesh with all other beings, the Earth, sun, water, and air. Out of this interrelated Earth Interbeing, wholeness emerges, a whole whose qualities transcend those of its parts.

The wholeness of Earth Interbeing's majesty and complexity at every scale makes it incomprehensible, yet it opens our understanding of its ways. We interact with this beautiful and meaningful Earth Interbeing wholeness with awe, respect, and care.

We know our equality with all beings: Interbeing equality comes from the reality that we all share and utterly depend upon the Earth and other beings to meet our survival needs. We have equality in the responsibilities to care for the Earth Interbeing and to live in the ways of wholeness.

Despite Western claims, people do not have dominion over each other, other beings, future beings, or the Earth. Think of a sphere rather than a pyramid. No form of life has greater value

than another, nor can beings subjugate other beings or the Earth for self-benefit. True unity occurs only in actions that further mutual aid.

The whole person relates with others impartially and does not judge others. The whole community supports the wholeness of its members and governs through egalitarian practices and participatory democracy, holding everyone equally accountable for their actions. The whole person benefits from the equality of other ways of knowing and experiencing life by understanding these other perspectives.

Westerners strongly resist their equality with the Earth Interbeing. We staunchly believe in our exceptionalism, superiority, and greater value relative to other people, beings, and even the Earth itself. Because we do not want to give up the privileges we unlawfully claim, we deny equality with more than humans, especially with those we eat. For us to create an Earth Interbeing food commons, we will have to resolutely focus on our interbeing power relationships.

We respect and care for all our relations. We live within the Earth Interbeing mesh of interrelationships, which define our experience of reality and life. Its bounteous gifts keep everything alive. All beings are responsible for respecting and caring for each other and the Earth through mutual aid relationships to sustain the Earth Interbeing. Respect means we do not impose our will upon other beings. Care means that we respond to the needs of others in ways that maintain, preserve, and renew our interbeing and shared Earth so that we can all live as well as possible. We experience our interbeing relations as kin for whom we have the duty of affectionate care.

Western culture does not respect other people, life, or the Earth as we subjugate all to fulfilling our needs and wants. The global corporate food system does not care how its omnicidal practices harm the Earth Interbeing.

An Earth Interbeing food commons honors food as a gift of the Earth Interbeing and recognizes our interbeing mutual need for healthy food. Such a commons cares for the hungry and undernourished, the marginalized and exploited. It resists people taking the places, and thus their sustenance, from the oppressed and our more than human kin.

The Earth Interbeing food commons cares for future generations of Earth Interbeings. We care for what sustains us today to ensure its ongoing well-being and ability to provide sustenance for generations to come.

We reciprocate for the imbalances we create. Within this complex of interbeing relationships, personal actions have consequences for more than ourselves and our group. All beings have the equal responsibility for their actions at all scales.

Taking another's life and extracting Earth resources cause an imbalance within the wholeness of Earth Interbeing. If our actions disturb the balance of Earth Interbeing, we have the responsibility of reciprocity to restore, preserve, and renew the wholeness of Earth Interbeing

at the scale appropriate for our actions. Repaying this debt of taking by giving back restores the balance of the wholeness of Earth Interbeing.

Animals have a fierce need to take another's life for food. Plant-eaters and carnivores depend entirely upon the lives of others to meet their needs. While animals cannot give back the life they took, we can find ways to nurture the conditions for life to renew, creating communities of interdependence. The bee takes nectar from a flower but, in so doing, pollinates the plant so that its seed can grow a new generation. Wolves prevent beavers from damming streams and creating ponds that turn forests into wetlands.

An Earth Interbeing commons has rules for taking another's life. When we take the life of others for food, we minimize the harm we inflict upon them in the taking. We take only what we need in times of abundance or our fair share in times of scarcity. We do not waste what we have taken; instead, we share our surplus. We act as faithful stewards of what we take from the Earth Interbeing.

Western people have over the centuries accumulated an enormous moral debt to the Earth Interbeing for centuries from taking from other people, other beings, and the Earth without ever giving back. We exempt ourselves from the need to reciprocate and rebalance the wholeness of Earth Interbeing because we hold ourselves and our powers greater than the sacred Earth Interbeing. Westerners use the wealth of what they have taken from Earth and life to take more from the Earth Interbeing. We now live in a collapsing Earth Interbeing. Mining the accumulated moral debt of privileged Westerners would resource an Earth Interbeing food commons for a very long time.

Reciprocity opens onto a culture of gift-giving and mutual aid. A gift implies the intention to form a relationship that cultivates mutual aid, a sense of debt owed to the giver and the expectation that the receiver will balance the gift's value in some way over time. An Earth Interbeing food commons would model such a way of living. When we give forward for what we take and share the gifts we have received, we delink ourselves from the taking economy and move into a gift-giving, mutual aid culture that ensures no one in the community will go without. Wealth accumulation would not occur within a gift-giving culture as mutual aid and sharing move the gift's value forward through the community.

We know our place as the ground of being and relationships with Earth Interbeing. The wholeness of the Earth Interbeing emerges in specific ways in specific places. Each place has great significance as it embodies the wholeness and sustainability of Earth Interbeing.

All life needs a place to be, grow, and live. In our place, we encounter all the elements of creation and have relationships with the other beings with whom we share our place of interbeing. Just as the whole has qualities greater than individual beings or species, the community of place has qualities greater than individual beings or species.

Within the place of the Earth Interbeing commons, we know our interdependence with all beings and the Earth. We know and reach out to all those who grow our food and the more than human from whom we take their life for food. We know and reach out to the hungry, undernourished, and exploited marginalized by Western society. Within our place, the Earth Interbeing commons honors and respects the place of all beings so that all may eat and live.

We live as unique whole beings within the Earth Interbeing. Every being has their own way of expressing wholeness within their lives. We each have our own unique talents, gifts, experiences, and life trajectories, which we use to fulfill our life purpose to care for the well-being of the Earth Interbeing. The whole person does what they can do for themselves even while knowing their mutual neediness and dependence upon the gifts of others. By adhering to the ways of wholeness, our being becomes whole. The wholeness of the Earth Interbeing depends upon the wholeness of its parts.

The whole person does not expect others to provide what they can provide for themselves. They do not expect others to do their work. They do not expect others to solve their problems. They shape their character of wholeness through self-discipline. They view difficulties from the perspective of others. They lightly bear the burdens of life and do not overreact to situations. They perceive the needs of others and care for them. Those who responsibly manage their harmful feelings and overcome their complicity with what harms can competently move through the difficulties and dangers of the transformation to wholeness within the world.

Nothing binds people more firmly together within a community than deeply rooted moral behavior because it appears to everyone as something worth achieving for themselves. Within wholeness, the community supports the qualities and values of wholeness. Commoners actively participate in the commoning of their place's food production, distribution, and consumption with all the beings that share their place's resources.

We know and resist what harms the Earth Interbeing through the ways of wholeness and stand in solidarity with the hungry, dispossessed, and exploited. We support and further Earth Interbeing food commoning everywhere, especially within our place. We bring to life the ways of the Earth Interbeing by acting in small ways within our community. We do what needs doing.

The privileged have sufficient wealth to access what they want and to take advantage of unlimited but unequal opportunities. The privileged do not care about the suffering of those they oppress because that very act of caring would undermine their privileges.

We, the privileged, must sacrifice our privileges by caring and acting upon our caring to meet the great unmet needs of the Earth, others, and all life that Western civilization oppresses and exploits. We further diminish our privileges by not buying what our money can buy. Instead, we distribute our wealth to those from whom it was taken. In these and other ways, we sacrifice our privileges while refusing to let go of our trust in life and our central core of integrity and wholeness.

By exceeding the Western cultural norm in small ways, we move closer to living within the wholeness of Earth Interbeing. We do not have to strive for bold, lofty goals to achieve this wanted correction. The great transformation occurs from within the small, when we make small steps toward a doable goal, staying close to what we can change within our sphere of influence.

Collectively, we still need to restrain what harms and shape more creative forces. We have the task of building a broad, large form in which all beings have a place and the means to meet their needs. Those excluded from active participation in this work would sabotage the process if the shaping prematurely concluded without them. We must continue to shape conditions until they reach the maximum point of expansion in a form so comprehensive and inclusive that, within the surging creative chaos, all life finds belonging therein. Only within such inclusivity can we finally know wholeness within the world.

We have the deep, enduring joy that comes from living in wholeness with the Earth

Interbeing. We celebrate the incredible beauty, diversity, abundance, and mystery of the Earth Interbeing. We rejoice in creatively bringing wholeness into the world. We joyfully restore and renew the Earth Interbeing's balance. We enjoy life.

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