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Saving the Seeds of Civilisation

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The civilisation process of the human race began about 10,000 years ago on the day someone recognised and collected seeds from the wild and then purposefully sowed them in order to grow some of their own food. Previously food had been gathered from the wild and humans had mostly been at least semi-nomadic.

Changing weather patterns and the end of an ice age, combined with the understanding that seeds could be gathered and hand sown, allowed people in parts of Europe, The Middle East and Africa to stay put and begin to form settlements. And so began the sowing of the seeds of civilisation.

One of the first types of seeds known to be collected and sown was beans. 10,000 years after the first bean seed ever collected was sown, I crouched yesterday in my garden and became the next in a succession of millions of gardeners and hundreds of generations to sow beans.

It is an awe-inspiring thought to imagine the story of the beans I held in my hands. Their story goes way back before humans even existed, happily self-sowing year after year; changing with natural selection and becoming many different varieties blown by the wind, carried by insects, then birds and then mammals and finally by humans to every corner of the earth.

I thought of the different lives people who had also sown these beans would have lived; from those first semi-nomads of the harsh climates of the Middle East, through the Romans of the Mediterranean, the adventurers and explorers who sailed the oceans in a by-gone era and the first settlers of Australia who had such failure with their first crops and nearly died before more supplies came from England. Each person crouched as I was, sowing the seeds one by one into their soil.

Every culture on earth now grows beans. But unlike in the 10,000 years of our ancestors when there were thousands and thousands of varieties, carefully selected and saved for free, every year by each farmer, home gardener and village cooperative, now the few varieties available to us are determined by large seed corporations, with an eye only for profit. Civilisation has lost control of its roots and roots are what hold us together.

Do you know where the seeds you buy in pretty packets were actually grown? Do you know how many chemicals were used to kill anything that might affect the profit of producing those seeds? Do you know how many tons of plastic were used to build the greenhouses they may have been grown in? Do you realise how much precious oil was used to make the artificial fertilisers and the plastic houses, and how much was used to ship the seeds to packaging warehouses, distributors, shops and then to you?

All this waste seems so futile when we think how easily we can save bean seeds ourselves and swap with our local friends. Beans do not cross with each other so all can be saved without any special attention. Simply let a few plump, healthy pods dry on the stalks. When the pods are brown and crisp, remove the bean seeds from inside the pods and put them in a labelled, open jar somewhere warm and dry for another month to be

sure they are completely dry. Put the lid on and keep until next year.

In these times of climatic uncertainty, horrendous floods, massive volcanic eruptions and savage wars, millions of seeds and thousands of varieties are being lost every year. ?Food security? is now in modern dictionaries and it is not someone else?s problem, it is ours. If your pantry is filled with seeds saved by you from plants that you grew in your area, instead of tinned food grown far away, you have no need to fear anything. Think of the last 10,000 years?. of how all the peoples of the world have provided for themselves without chemicals or big seed corporations or oil and start being part of the fabric that holds civilisation together and part of the bricks that will build resilience for the future.

The future of civilisation is up to us. Save seeds today.

Image (optional):

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