

THE LAUREL'S KITCHEN BREAD BOOK

A Guide to Whole-Grain
Breadmaking

Laurel Robertson with
Carol Flinders &
Bronwen Godfrey

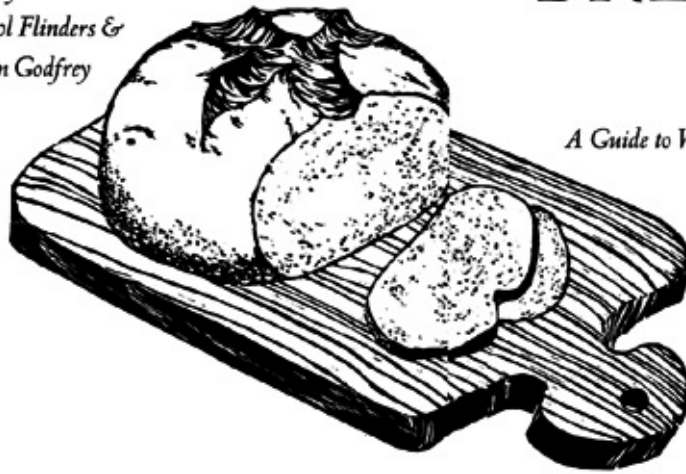


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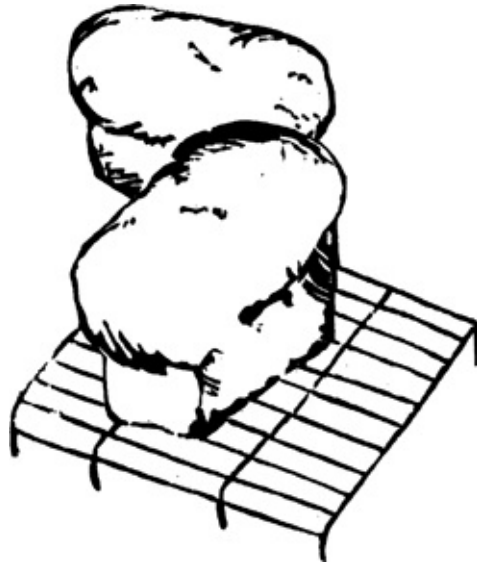
by *Laurel Robertson*
with *Carol Flinders &*
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A Guide to Whole-Grain Breadmaking



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Acknowledgments

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From Laurel



To our delight, ever since it was first published, this book has been a steady favorite of people who bake. In the present “launch” not much has changed—except, of course, for the brand-new chapter on bread machines! We had wished so much for something that would enable people who just can’t knead—or who simply don’t have time to be there to follow dough into loaf—to have good, fresh, wholesome bread every day. Our wish has been granted twice over: bread machines were invented in the years after the book went to press. And, wonderfully, hundreds of small community bakeries have sprung up, providing nourishing bread to their neighbors—and nourishing their neighborhoods, too, in a special way that only a responsive local bakery really can. Our hats are off to all of you, three cheers, and bravo!

Not much has changed? Well, maybe not much about how delicious and nourishing whole wheat bread is, nor the basic ingredients, nor even very much about the art of baking. But we are seeing a very important development in the world of nutrition science: a tidal wave of new research showing the benefits of whole-grain foods over their refined counterparts. Diets based on “white” foods show significantly worse statistics for diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and many cancers. It isn’t enough for a carbohydrate to be “complex”; it also needs to be *whole*. Learning to enjoy, yes, to *prefer*, such foods may seem impossible, but we are here to say *it can be done!* Tastes can change, and the artful creation of delicious whole-grain foods like those in this book can make the difference. Who, after all, can resist the smell of fragrant, fresh bread? To make such healthful, irresistible loaves in your own kitchen is a great gift to your family. It can reverse “white food” preferences of a lifetime. It can set your children on track for good habits on into adulthood. This isn’t an empty boast. We have seen it work in our own families and—really—it is the mission of this book.



So, as you might imagine, we have been baking happily all along, probably many more than 50,000 loaves since the book first hit the stands. Around here, the favorite bread is still Buttermilk—after Flemish Desem, of course. On the topic of desem, some news: what we know now that we didn’t know then is that you can (yes!) safely refrigerate your desem starter for many days and even weeks, and can freeze it even longer. Three consecutive feedings revive it and bring it back to full, marvelous vigor. (So now, at long last, you can take that trip...)

Second tip: a few years back, for the first time ever, an American team won the baking “Olympics” in France. From newspaper interviews with the bakers, we learned about the *autolyse* technique: after mixing your dough, let it rest for about 15 minutes before proceeding to knead. Try it and see what you think. We feel that that little rest makes a perceptible improvement in texture and rise.

And third: because our convection oven produced thick, dry, “flying” crusts, we got into the habit of preheating the oven to 450°F, putting in the bread, turning off the oven, and letting it bake on stored heat until the temperature falls to baking temperature. It usually takes about 10 to 15 minutes. At that point we turn the oven on again and set the dial to baking temperature, 325°F, or whatever it is for the bread at hand. This works better in regular ovens, not just convection ovens, and we recommend it for everything—loaves, rolls, pizza. The high initial heat not only makes a nicer crust but promotes oven spring, that ever-welcome bonus.

Finally, I want to say a few words in praise of the machines. I have come to appreciate them very much. Machines have their own rules: don’t expect them to follow the “normal” ones. But they do a great job. They are experts at kneading. They provide a splendid place protected from drafts for rising dough. Some are impressively good at shaping. None can preheat their little “ovens.” But if you give them the kind of dough they need, they will give you beautiful, flavorful whole wheat loaves—not to mention excellent dough-on-demand for rolls, pizza, bagels, pita, cinnamon swirls, chapathis, stollen, or any other kneaded fancy you might desire. And, best of all, you can wake up to That Wonderful Smell...



Always a Choice

THE GREAT IDEAS of the nineteen-seventies haven't all stood the test of time. You don't hear a lot about geodesic domes today, or open marriage, or macrame vests. But certain innovations took hold and never went away—not, typically, as mass movements, and not in a big public way, but quietly and steadily, moved along lovingly by individuals whose dedication seemed to get a little deeper by the year.

The organic gardening movement, for instance, has unfurled into a global network of activists who advocate a wide spectrum of inter-connected programs like Sustainable Agriculture, Community Supported Agriculture, cooperative urban gardens, and the use of fresh locally-grown produce in school lunches, and who defend the rights of small farmers everywhere, opposing vehemently the use of genetically modified organisms and the patenting of plant and animal species.

Whole-grain bread is another of those new/old “Well, whyever *not?*” ideas that sprang up alongside solar panels and vegetarianism and went on to win tenure. Not, mind you, that scads of people actually bake it: the workaholicism of the last couple of decades, and the seductive availability of not-bad take-out, caught up with just about everyone.

(“Cook?” says one friend, “Not for years. I *heat.*”)

People may not all bake bread at home, but inspired by the steady influx of good news about the nutritional benefits of whole-grain bread, they do go out of their way to find the best-baked loaves in their areas, and the number of small independent bakeries that specialize in bread made with unrefined flour is steadily growing. The authors of the *Laurel's Kitchen Bread Book* know this to be true, because we hear regularly from the bakers themselves, who write to say how grateful they are for this very book.

Why grateful?

Because it is the ONLY guide to baking bread that focuses entirely on whole grain flours and that tells you everything you need to know about how to turn out light, evenly textured loaves that are entirely free of refined flour.

Were we extremists in our desire to push past the *faux* whole-wheat breads that line today's supermarket shelves? I'd rather think of us as romantics: because, in fact, a certain kind of romance had attached itself to the very idea of wholeness. In every area of life, we kept finding out that the *given*—what was natural and right at hand—was substantially advantageous over the fractioned and manufactured surrogates most of us had grown up with. In questions of diet, transportation, housing, child rearing, clothing, and more, it became an almost conditioned reflex to ask oneself what the “whole” and “natural” alternative might be, and guess that it would be the better one.

Breast milk, for instance, turned out to benefit babies in so many ways that formulated products couldn't, including (pediatricians are just now telling us) protecting them against childhood obesity. And breast-feeding didn't just facilitate bonding between a mother and infant, it lowered the mother's risk of breast cancer as well. Natural fiber clothing was good for the environment, but it felt so good against the skin, too, and learning to spin and weave and knit linked us up with our grandmothers and great grandmothers.

No, if we'd really been extremists—if we'd made a cult of “wholeness”—we'd have gone on

eating the kind of whole grain bread we started out making, which was pretty dense for the most part, and, for reasons that went on eluding us, never quite the same from one baking to the next. In fact, because we did *not* believe that eating should be an ascetic exercise for anybody but ascetics, we began paying closer and closer attention to the happy anomalies—loaves that came out shapely and high, evenly grained and unusually flavorful. What had we done differently? What could other experienced bakers tell us? What was the *science* behind all this? It made sense to think there *was* a science to whole grain baking because, in fact, our “romantic” fixation on wholeness was grounded in sound scientific research. Unrefined cereal grains—whole wheat, brown rice, kasha, spelt, oats, etc.—meet human nutritional needs with uncanny precision. Take protein, for instance. As long as we thought more was better, we really could not see whole grains as anything but accessories to milk, cheese, eggs, tofu, etc. But now that excessive protein has been linked with a wide range of disorders that include osteoporosis, hypertension, kidney problems, and cancer, the relatively modest protein content of whole grains appears to work to our advantage. Still, half a dozen slices of plain whole wheat bread does offer 24 grams of protein—almost half the RDA—no meaningful contribution to anyone’s daily needs, even considering that wheat’s amino acid pattern is not quite complete by itself.

“Starch” was pretty much a dirty word until, under the more respectable designation “complex carbohydrate,” it won a brief moment of glory. The twist: complex carbohydrates have proven to be healthful foods only when they are *not refined*. “White” bread, cereal, and pasta contribute to heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and some cancers. Whole grain foods help prevent these, maybe because they include a couple-dozen vitamins and minerals, and soluble and insoluble fibers, that are removed when *whole* becomes *white*.

On nutritional and gastronomic grounds, then, we are more certain than ever that whole cereal grains, along with vegetables, legumes, and fruits, make the foundation for an ideal diet. But there is more to life than a smoothly functioning digestive system and a baby-smooth complexion—more, for that matter, than a long and healthy life. There is the vast rest of the world, too.

Frances Moore Lappe, author of Diet for a Small Planet, writes eloquently about world hunger —most recently in Hope’s Edge: the Next Diet for a Small Planet, co-authored with Anna Lappe.

Clear connections between hunger abroad and the meat-based diet of the wealthy West enhance our motivation for choosing a diet “low on the food chain.” Today, as we rely more heavily (and happily) on good brown bread, and feel even less need for relatively expensive concentrated protein foods like cheese and eggs, it seems more ironic than ever that there should *seem* not to be enough food in the world to feed everyone.

It is abundantly clear now that the diet which is most healthful for the individual is also the supremely democratic one; the one that offers the best chance of feeding us all. It *has* in fact fed most of us down through the ages. Cereal grains supplemented with legumes are the basis of a host of ethnic specialties ranging from falafel and fejoia, to pasta fazool and peanut butter sandwiches.

Today we know—Ms. Lappé has been among the first to alert us—that it will take a who

lot more to alleviate world hunger than just cutting out hamburgers. But it is equally clear that adopting a cereal-based diet is a most suitable place to start. In Ms. Lappé's own words: "... Where do we get the courage to begin? I believe part of the answer lies in making ourselves more powerful people—more convincing to ourselves and therefore to others. For me, part of that process is making our individual life choices more and more consistent with the world we are working towards." (F.M. Lappé, *Food First News*, Summer, 1982).

Ms. Lappé's remarks have exceedingly wide application: changing one's diet is really only a small part of what is implied. But my own grasp of what she is saying, and my wholehearted agreement, does have to do with food: There was a particular moment, in fact, when it all came home to me with special force.

My son was three, and I was watching him eat one of his favorite breakfasts: cornmeal ground fresh the day before, cooked into a buttery yellow mush, cooled down with homebrew soy milk, and sweetened with a trickle of maple syrup. He tucked it away with voluptuous appreciation. Watching, I recalled suddenly the picture I had been looking at just the day before of refugee children somewhere in the Third World. From huge kettles, relief workers were ladling into battered tin basins a porridge of corn and soy, mixed, as was my boy's, in a proportion intended to maximize nutritional benefits. It would take a lot of that porridge, though, eaten over many weeks, to flesh out the matchstick arms on those children, bring light to their shadowed eyes, and return to normalcy bellies distended from chronic hunger.

Knowing that my son's diet is simple, grain-based, and inexpensive did not begin to mitigate the sorrow I had felt on looking at his counterparts in that refugee camp. Nor should it have. But it did help keep that sorrow from turning into despair: which seems very important if we're to work toward solutions. To a small, yet meaningful degree, deciding to simplify one's diet and limit oneself to foods that *could* conceivably be enjoyed by everyone on earth, begins to diminish the terrible and disempowering gulf between "them" and "us"—between "those children" and our own.



I WOULD ADD, finally, that our profound attachment to whole grains has also to do with a feeling that has deepened steadily over many years' experience as bakers and eaters of these splendid foods, and which can only be called, at the risk of sounding somewhat balmy, reverence.

There it sits—a single kernel of wheat, maybe three sixteenths of an inch long, creased along one side and rounded on the other. At the bottom nestles a tiny oval compartment, the minute beginning of the plant's rebirth, called the germ. Above the germ is the endosperm, a protein- and calorie-rich food reservoir that will fuel the plant as it germinates. Enveloping both is a hard seed coat, impermeable for decades to anything but the warmth and moisture that will bring the seed to life.

What's so marvelous about this simple structure is that everything that helps the grain to preserve and reproduce itself also suits the needs of human beings and animals superbly well. It comes close to being a complete food, needing to be supplemented only by small amounts of animal products and/or legumes, and the leafy green and yellow vegetables that almost

any environment between the polar caps will provide in some form. The same hard seed coat that protects the seed's capacity to reproduce itself has also made possible for humankind the almost indefinitely long storage of a wholesome food supply.

There are those who can look on this kind of arrangement and keep their wits about them. There are others who can't conceive of it as anything but a sure, small sign of some large benevolence, hidden deep behind the appearance of things—and who feel, too, that nothing could be more fitting in response than to summon up all that is skilled and artful in themselves to bake a fine, high-rising loaf of uncompromisingly whole-grain bread.



YES, BREAD. For no matter how much we enjoy whole grains in other guises—creamy oatmeal, kasha cooked with mushrooms and potatoes, and platters of yellow polenta topped with tomato sauce and cheese—no matter how much we value the sheer variety for nutritional reasons as well as pleasure, we always come back to bread—the convenience food par excellence, ready at hand, good with anything or almost nothing, synonymous, in the West, with “food” itself.

So all right, whole grains—one hundred per cent whole, and no fudging. *Bread*, moreover, and not just a pot of steamed wheat berries. Are you ready, though, for the “home-baked and regularly” clause? For between the safely impersonal admission that, Yes, whole grain is a lovely food, optimal in every way, and, Yes, I'd adore to bake it twice a week from this moment on, there yawns a chasm wide and deep.

Right now, your week almost certainly does *not* include great chunks of hanging-around-the-house time. This doesn't have to stop you. Look long and hard at Laurel's suggestions for fitting bread into your life, and you may find that your current schedule need not be disrupted as much as you imagine.

It might possibly be, too, that someone else in your household would like to help. Many hands don't just make light work, they can also make high-quality work. Today, when there are so many more pressures on all of us to be out and away from home, the “divide and conquer” principle has become standard kitchen practice. Just because no one's home to cook all afternoon doesn't mean nobody's interested in good meals anymore. It *may* mean more innovative solutions are required to produce them: At one end of the spectrum, Friday night potluck with friends, at the other, communal householding.

One of my favorite cases in point is the annual Christmas-Hanukkah supper a friend stages each year, towards which everyone involved contributes one absolutely spectacular item. It is understood that Jeff will bring the pies, because he always does, and that they will be exquisite, because they always are, and that they will be described in lingering detail on the also exquisite hand-lettered menus that are Rhoda's gift to the evening.

The principle is infinitely variable—do you have a friend who'd love to trade homebake

bread for a panful of chili rellenos? A clipped hedge, maybe?

But let's suppose the worst. Suppose none of Laurel's optional timing schemes will work for you, and suppose that in response to all your gambits ("Wanna help? Wanna trade?") no one has flickered an eyelid. Still, you really yearn to see that bread coming out of the oven twice weekly.

For a long time, you may just be It, and being It may well mean giving up some activities you're not at all happy to part with.

If so, let me try to sweeten the cup. For there *are* compensations, not immediately apparent. Bring together four or five committed bread bakers, loosen them up with a strong pot of tea, and listen closely as they talk about the subtle, far-reaching, and distinctly positive changes that can take place when you begin to bake regularly...

First, on the personal level, there's the purely therapeutic effect. Watch a four-year-old burst in the door after a long morning with his buddies, still exultant, talking nonstop, but exhausted, too, from the sustained stress of it all. Watch him fall with instinctive good sense on a pile of play-dough, and pull, push, pummel and squeeze until finally all the tension has flowed out through his fingertips and he is at peace. Watch him, and wonder why on earth grownups shouldn't have access to the same very healing, very basic kind of activity. And in fact, they can. For kneading bread dough, forming it into coffee-cake wreaths or cottage loaves or long baguettes affords exactly this kind of satisfaction.

Good breadbaking is much more, though, than just a good outlet. At certain critical junctures, you really have got to block out extraneous goings-on and attend meticulously to small details. Far from being onerous, these more exacting phases of the baking process can also be the most calming—precisely because they do require such powerful concentration. And the very fact that so much of oneself is called upon, in the way of artistry and resourcefulness, makes the whole business that much more gratifying—enhances the quality of life overall.

That breadbaking—as well as gardening, spinning, beekeeping, and animal husbandry—in fact creative and exacting is often overlooked. Instead, they are regarded as “subsistence skills”—what you have to deal with to scratch out a bare living, reeling, as you do, from the endless labor entailed. You can hardly blame our parents and grandparents for having stood firmly behind them so rigorous and chancy a way of life, and for thinking a bit daft those of us who cast a rueful glance backwards. For it was with full, trusting, and grateful consent that people began to buy what they needed, use “convenience foods,” and adopt a full complement of helpful household machines. Hardly a voice was raised in protest when our traditionally home-centered, small-scale system of food production gave way, little by little, to what has been called “the corporate cornucopia.”

Today, though, there is good reason to question whether our present food system can be sustained—so profoundly dependent on petroleum is it, and so flagrantly wasteful of other resources as well. Good reason, too, to seek out more direct ways of meeting our food needs and to breathe a little easier when you find them. This ease of mind is yet another source of satisfaction that comes of being a competent whole grains baker. Revival of what is, yes, a subsistence skill, means you know yourself able to turn just about any flour or grain that might come your way into something that will nourish and even delight. Knowing this, you feel that much less vulnerable to circumstance. It's a subtle change, but it goes deep.

Reinstate breadbaking as a home-based activity, and you begin to change the home, to Once you have established a regular baking pattern and the people who live with you know that on, say, Tuesday evenings and Saturday mornings there will be fresh bread, and good smells, and you there, too, manifestly enjoying yourself, there begins to be more reason for *them* to be there as well. The place starts to exert its own gentle tug, a strong counterforce to the thousand-and-one pulls that would draw them out and away.

The creature comfort of a warm kitchen and people to chat with accounts only in part for this magnetic force. It's the baking itself: the artistry, the science, the occasional riddle of it. People of all ages, but particularly children, seem to draw immense satisfaction from hanging around a place where work is taken as seriously as we've come to take baking. We observed this when we first began the kitchen research that preceded *Laurel's Kitchen*, and had a chance to reaffirm it just last year, when we constructed the oven where our beloved "desem" bread is baked.

Building the oven, which extended along the top of an enormous fireplace as part of a large new kitchen, was a formidable undertaking. It drew in an architect, bricklayers, carpenters, a blacksmith, and several master bakers. It also drew in every toddler in the vicinity. At every opportunity, there they'd be, watching unblinking as each brick was laid in place and each fitting was forged. My own son was among them, and for months afterward, once the oven was working, he would watch twice weekly with equal fascination as the bread itself came out of the oven—loaf after round, brown loaf, sliding out on a wooden paddle we learned to call a "peel," caught in leather-gauntleted hands and then pitched onto racks to cool. Back in his room later, he would re-enact the entire sequence, molding loaves out of clay, using a spatula and my old driving gloves to unload the "oven" he'd built out of wooden blocks.

Now, at four, Ramesh proudly brings in firewood for the baking—and he's not likely to stop there. He is as crazy about the desem bread as we are, and he's well aware how much care goes into its making. To him, a kitchen is a place where unquestionably important things go on, and where everyone has a contribution to make. I'm profoundly glad he feels that way.

Much of what gives traditional communities their special character and form has to do with the way they go about meeting basic life needs. In the past, to get crops harvested, wheat ground, or a well dug and maintained, people had to come together in respectful cooperation, suspending for the moment any private grievances they might be nursing. Often, they even managed to get some fun out of what they were doing—enough, even, to lay some of those grievances to rest. It was in the course of carrying out all that work—the "bread labor" of which Leo Tolstoy was so enamored—that the essential values of a particular society got hammered out and then transmitted to the young people growing up and working in its midst.

Until quite recently, this has been true for families as well as communities. Just about everything people ate, wore, slept under and sat on was produced at home. Everyone took part in the producing and everyone knew he or she was needed. It was in work carried out together that relationships deepened and values were handed on. Kitchens, garden sheds, woodshops—workplaces of any sort that aren't dominated by machines too loud to talk over—are ideal places to exchange confidences as well as acquire skills. There's no more effective situation to impart "the way we do things here" than in the throes of a specific job—no better

place to show by example the patience to see out a task, or the good humor and ingenuity to set things right when they go awry.

In today's world, the home tends not to be as productive a place as it once was. We take jobs elsewhere, earn money, buy things and bring them home to use. If we want our families to benefit from work undertaken together, we have deliberately to set up situations where that can happen. A great many families are doing just that today, in a variety of ways. Breadbaking maybe, or a vegetable garden, the tasks assigned by age and skill. One family and friends maintains a cottage-scale spinning and weaving industry using wool from their goats. The proceeds from what they sell go into a college savings fund.

Still another friend, a single mother and full-time librarian, missing the fine, fresh milk of her native Scotland and feeling vaguely that something was missing in her admittedly hectic life, decided that what she and her teenaged daughter needed more than anything ... was a cow. Skeptical friends like me have been chastened to observe that she may have been right. Having the common, and thoroughly endearing focal point of a soft-eyed Jersey cow, knowing that she's got to be milked no matter who's overslept or who has a cold, having to arrange for grain, and hay, and visits from the vet, actually has *not* stressed the relationship of mother and daughter to the breaking point or sent either of them into exhaustion. Rather it seems to have compelled them to stay in closer touch than they would have otherwise, and they both find the outdoor work, the contact with the animal herself, to be a perfect restorative. Not for everyone, a cow, but it does illustrate the principle and makes a twice weekly baking seem small potatoes by comparison!



AS LONG AS we've known each other, Laurel, Bron, and I have shared with others at Nilgiri Press a strong interest in the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. (The first book we published in fact—which Laurel helped design—was *Gandhi the Man*, by Eknath Easwaran.) This interest was rekindled last year by Richard Attenborough's film masterpiece "Gandhi." More and more of late, along with a great many other people, we have been looking to the man and his writings, seeming to find there solutions to the mounting problems of our day—solutions, or at least inspiration to go on looking for them.

The fact that Gandhi is always in the back of our minds now has led us to see in the baking of whole-grain bread even greater possible significance than I've already proposed. This might seem odd, if you think of Gandhi primarily as a political figure. Baking bread, after all, is a domestic and private preoccupation—far removed from political goings-on. But the fact is, overtly political activity took up a relatively small amount of time in Gandhi's life.

For years and years at a time, throughout the nineteen thirties and forties, Gandhi virtually buried himself in village India, preoccupied exclusively with the daily minutiae of "rur

uplift.” This was because his idea of revolution was “from the bottom upward.” He believed that the people of India, the vast majority of whom lived in the villages, would be in a position to take responsibility for governing themselves effectively until they were also able to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves. This is where the spinning wheel or “charkha” came in: an all-important symbol of Gandhi’s effort to achieve authentic self-rule in India—symbolic but direct means, too.

Prior to British imperial rule, manufacture of cotton into textiles had been a cottage industry. Homespun had been the ideal complement to agriculture, enabling the villagers to clothe as well as feed themselves, and providing work that could be carried on throughout the rainy season. Everyone could take part, moreover—the elderly and disabled, even the very young.

Over the years, though, the British had systematically suppressed the cottage textile industry. By the turn of the century, Indian cotton was exported to Britain, manufactured into calico in the Lancashire mills and returned for sale to Indians—to be bought with money they had an ever-diminishing chance to earn. While spinning wheels collected dust in attics, the villagers themselves grew poorer, more dispirited, and ever more dependent on the British *raj*.

Gandhi offered a deceptively simple solution. Drag out those wheels, he urged. If you don’t know how to use them, get your grandmothers to teach you. Boycott foreign-made cloth, and wear only what we can produce ourselves.

Homespun cotton was just the beginning. Gandhi encouraged use of village-ground wheat, too, instead of mill-refined white flour; of locally processed raw sugar, called “gur” instead of white sugar, and greatly increased use of leafy green vegetables. He advocated employment of local materials for housing, and indigenous herbal medicines—even the conceivable form, in short, of individual and local self-reliance.

The poor of India did not need alms, Gandhi maintained, they needed work. Finding themselves able, after all, to meet basic life needs through their own skills, they would begin to trust their capacity to govern themselves as well—and they would have the courage to try. A people thus transformed would be free in the most meaningful sense whether they were officially recognized to be or not. It would be only a matter of time before political institutions caught up. Gandhi saw in this transformation of the individual the very essence of nonviolent revolution—its driving power.

It would be very easy to look at India today—at the serious problems she has yet to solve—and conclude that Gandhi’s ideas haven’t worked there. Easy, unless you realize that, in fact, they haven’t really been tried. The overall direction of development efforts in India has not been that of the Constructive Program. Even Gandhi’s closest followers did not all share his passion for homespun or his faith in what it promised for India. It seemed so terribly slow, after all, and the needs were so acute. Hoping to relieve their people’s suffering more quickly, many of these individuals were attracted instead to the industrialized models of the West, and they strove mightily, once they were in political office, to adopt similar patterns for India.

It’s quite understandable that Gandhi’s successors would have chafed at the long, slow process of change his approach entails. The darker side of life in the West probably didn’t look as dark to them as it did to him, and they may not have been as convinced as he was

that our highly industrialized and primarily urban mode of life was largely to blame.

In the long run, Gandhi's teachings might turn out to have fallen on more fertile ground here in the West, amidst people who have lived out the consequences of a highly industrialized, materially abundant way of life, and who have, like many of us, our own reasons to question it.



THE POSSIBLE relevance of homespun to life in the West is suggested in a scene that occurs well along in the Attenborough film. A bemused Margaret Bourke-White is struggling under Gandhi's direction to master the *charkha*.

"I just don't see it," she says wryly, holding up the hank of cotton her efforts have produced, "as the solution to the twentieth century's problems."

He smiles and demonstrates the process once again. They joke a little, and getting back to her challenge in what seems an oblique way, he says, "But I know happiness does not come with things—even twentieth century things. It can come from work, and pride in what you do. It will not necessarily be 'progress' for India if she simply imports the unhappiness of the West."

What Gandhi was insisting upon with that spinning wheel—he never quit talking about it and carted it all over Europe as well as India—was the absolutely vital importance of how we accomplish the most mundane things in life: the putting of clothes on our backs and food on our tables. There is always a simpler way to meet these needs, he taught, and a more self-reliant one—always an adjustment to make that will foster better health and draw you into more richly interdependent relationships with others. There is always a choice.

Are Gandhi's ideas applicable in this country today, so vastly different from British-rule India? A great many people would appear to think so, for they are at work in every area of life, introducing reforms of enormous diversity that would have won Gandhi's wholehearted approval: agricultural marketing projects; research into low-cost solar-heated housing; instructional programs in natural childbirth and breastfeeding; worker ownership of factories; and co-operative food-buying clubs; urban gardening schemes and a growing number of home-based businesses.

Whole-grain bread baking has a very special place along this spectrum—particularly because it's so immediate and personal, and so well within nearly everyone's reach. It's an ideal first step towards a way of life that is more self-reliant, and at the same time more consciously interdependent. We're tempted to see it, in fact, as the *khadi* of our own day.

We're tempted to think, too—taking our cue from Gandhi and judging from our own experience—that when you begin to adopt the kind of changes in life style outlined above you aren't *only* making choices more consistent with the world you're trying to bring about. Rather, you actually are bringing it about. The compass of that new world might at first seem no longer than the distance from your kitchen stove to the front door—but don't be deceived. The fact of what you are doing will most certainly make itself felt by everyone who comes in contact with you (by people, in fact, who happen only to walk past your house on baking day). Your personal example assures them that indeed life *can* be both simpler and more challenging, but much more satisfying in the bargain. It encourages them in the mo

irresistible way possible to take that first step themselves.

In short, the idea that life's really important and far-reaching changes come "from the bottom upwards" no longer seems to us romantic or overly optimistic at all. Let's begin, then, at the beginning ...



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