

Trees for Life Journal: A New Adventure in Service

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Thirteen years ago, when I joined the non-profit movement Trees for Life as a fulltime volunteer, one element of this visionary movement struck a chord deep within me. The way Trees for Life went about serving people stood in contrast to the norm. It was not based on the idea of “charity”—I am rich, you are poor, so I am helping you. In this movement, everyone was giving, and everyone was receiving.

No matter if one was a materially “wealthy” American businessperson making large financial contributions, or a materially “poor” villager teaching others to grow and care for fruit trees—there was a clear demonstration that each person is extremely rich in their ability to give of themselves and serve others. Each one also received that indefinable sense of joy, gratitude and connectedness that comes with serving.

Throughout these many years, I have experienced this dynamic countless times. I have danced with lepers in India who were overflowing with the joy of being able to improve their lot through their own dedicated labor, which they did until their hands bled; I have watched with awe as children with learning disabilities spent their free time doing fundraisers to help kids on the opposite side of the Earth grow fruit trees; and several times I have seen hardened businessmen moved to tears with the realization that they are connected to others around the world in such a meaningful way.

I see the *Trees for Life Journal* as a natural phase of the same journey. It is a response in the same spirit to serve a specific type of need that came to our awareness.

Birth of the journal

The idea was first born out of work with the tree *Moringa oleifera*, which abounds in nutritional, medicinal and other beneficial properties. We saw that scientifically-based studies of this tree, and of the many claims about it from traditional societies around the world, were very much needed. On the one hand, such studies could bring much greater awareness and acceptance of the tree among scientists, medical people and other intellectuals. On the other hand, we understood that people most readily accept information that is generated within their own society—so local studies in many countries were needed.

A pertinent question arose—where could people get such studies published? Most of the information currently available was anecdotal, and we saw that informal studies and trials may be needed first, to bring the subject to the attention of scientists. But studies at that level do not make it into the peer-reviewed scientific journals.

So we decided to start a journal.

As the idea took shape, we received more and more confirmation that there was a real need for such a journal. Scientists and academicians told us that they needed to hear the voice of people at the grassroots level, in order to know what will best serve their needs. And our experience for more than 20 years showed that people at the grassroots were often not even aware of the huge stores of knowledge available that could benefit them.

A unique forum

The *Trees for Life Journal* is one attempt to bridge that divide. In keeping with the spirit of service I described earlier, it will go beyond the usual concept of a journal, and provide a forum for open and free exchange of ideas among anyone interested in beneficial trees and plants. We envision a forum for people in the field to share their traditional knowledge, their ideas, their concerns and questions. Scientific people can thus take the true pulse of the people, and be better equipped to render meaningful service through studies that can benefit people in the field.

Another unique feature is that anyone can perform and publish studies, whether they are a scientist or academician performing double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical trials, or a farmer or student simply using a nutritious plant as an additive in food or animal feed and recording the results. All contributions are valuable additions to the store of knowledge that can serve the world.

I look forward to the adventure of serving with you through this journal, and will always welcome your comments and feedback.

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Trees for Life Journal 2005, 1:2