

[Eight Principles for Our Simple-Living Journey](#)



The Belgian city of Mons has been named the 2015 European Capital of Culture. Art is enlivening the city throughout the whole year. Above, one of the pieces of art by artist Elodie Antoine — a colony of “sloths” in the trees of the Mons’ Place du Parc. Is this a life of voluntary simplicity depicted? “This light-hearted work also leaves you wondering, ‘Are they alive or not?’ Griet says. Photo Credit: Griet Bouwen

Eight Principles for Our Simple-Living Journey
Wednesday, October 21, 2015 -- Griet Bouwen

Curator’s Note: *Our dear friend and colleague, Griet Bouwen, continues a journey into voluntary simplicity with her family this fall. This outline of the principles shaping their journey strikes deep. Griet is a resident of a small hamlet in Belgium*

as well as author, consultant and fellow generative media maker. Watch for a new entry on the third Thursday of each month.

What do we refer to when we talk about a life of voluntary simplicity? For us, it means shoving away the veils of distractions to experience the greatness of life itself. When we use the word “Life,” we refer to consciousness of the interconnection of the whole. To reach that place, we have to unchain ourselves from ingrained patterns of inattentive consumerism and “time consuming on auto pilot.” In this blog, I’d like to share eight insights that are guiding my partner, Arno Vansichen, and me on our journey to a less complicated, materially more modest and spiritually rich life.

Arno and I have had some deep conversations, seeking to come up with shared insights that can lead us in our new simple-living journey. My purpose in sharing our principles with you is not to convince you of their legitimacy. Instead, consider this my invitation to you to start conversations with your own circle of people with whom you are sharing this time of your life.

Principle 1: Abundance is already here

We’ve been looking around in our life, and we’ve discovered: everything we need for a fulfilling life is already here. We don’t need to focus on material growth anymore. We are blessed with a safe and warm home, warm relationships, healthy food and lots of public resources we may enjoy to fulfill our needs for education, health, mobility, information. We feel blessed that we can concentrate our attention on taking care of and sharing what is already in our lives.

Principle 2: Taking care of what is here

We choose to dedicate our time and attention to cherish and sustain this existing abundance of warm relationships, comfort, safety and opportunities and to enjoy the resources of our community. If we choose to live this way, we need less money to spend on more material things in order to increase our experience of comfort. And if we need less money, we become more free to choose where to spend our life-energy. We can choose to cherish our relationships more than we did until now. We can choose to grow our own food and to commit our time to the realization of aims that we think are important for us and for the world we live in.

Principle 3: Money is life-energy

We dedicate life-energy to earn a living. So the money we get for work is the materialisation of dedicated life-energy. It becomes life-energy transformed into purchasing power. 'Power' is an important word in this concept. The question then is: What do we want to support with this power, earned by dedicating our life-energy? We choose to dedicate this power to a human economy that takes the regeneration needs of nature into account.

Principle 4: Inviting Kairos in our lives

We love the time concept of "Kairos," the other side of "Chronos." Kairos brings us to an experience of open time, not filled up with things to do, places to go, experiences to have. In Kairos, we can discover a more fluid experience of time, where the clock doesn't matter. In Kairos, delayed time or time as experience, we re-establish the connection with profound values like being together, feeling ourselves part of nature, deepening our spiritual awareness.

Principle 5: Honouring the natural rhythm of life

If we look very carefully, we can experience that the specific energy of every season, every time of year also flows through us as human beings. Instead of holding on to our own agenda and expectations, we choose to surrender to the specific energy of every season. Life is not only about taking all of our ideas seriously and running around establishing new projects. Autumn and winter for example invite us to be grateful for the harvest, take rest, be still, reflect and see what new seeds find fertile soil for spring and summer.

Principle 6: A safe future lies in relationships with other people

If we look carefully at what is happening in the world and with our Earth, we think we'd better anticipate shrinkage instead of growth, on less instead of more, on slow instead of fast. We think that safety for our family is much more based on the reciprocity of relationships rather than on the accumulation of possessions. A fat savings account will turn out to be less future-proof than a warm network of close relationships with people and place.

Principle 7: We can start doing something

We believe in the power of initiative, entrepreneurship and self-steering in relationship with other people. Yes, we have criticisms about the way our leaders

steer the country and our communities. And yes, we hope that one day we will have a progressive and sensitive government. But we don't choose to wait for that moment or give away to political leaders our right to take initiative. We choose small experiments and finding allies in our local community, for the purpose of starting to take initiative that can make a change.

Principle 8: Small is also beautiful

For a very long time, we've been thinking that it is our call and obligation to change the world by dedicating our time and energy to large projects, major shifts. We felt a responsibility that maybe, we now realize, is too big for us. We found ourselves exhausted by this endless trying and working very hard.

We now turn towards the idea of "being the change we want to see in the world." Yes, we can change the world by giving shape to an authentic life, starting in and around our own house, in our own family and community. Small actions can also be beautiful, rewarding and contribute to a worldwide shift.

Our eight modest principles were born out of deep conversations between my life-partner and me. These make sense for us. They help shape our thoughts, considerations and actions. It all comes down to re-establishing our relationship with life and Earth, to going back where we belong - our place in the mystery of interconnectedness with mother Earth and everything she gives life to. There, we can replace old patterns of pollution and depletion of the environment on which we so strongly depend on and are a part.

Your chain of principles may be very different. How do you envision a life of voluntary simplicity? What principles would help you on this life-changing path?

Would you enjoy some more inspiration?

- A good reading experience is given to us by Samuel Alexander & Amanda McLeod in the book *Simple Living in History: Pioneers of the Deep Future*; Simplicity Institute Publishing, 2014. Info: simplicityinstitute.org