



PAM MONTGOMERY

FOREWORD BY
STEPHEN HARROD BUHNER

PLANT SPIRIT HEALING

*A Guide to Working with
Plant Consciousness*



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Pam Montgomery



Bear & Company
Rochester, Vermont

This story is for you, Cara, daughter of my heart. May its telling be a seed in your heart that sprouts and grows as you tell it to your own daughter, for the world will be shaped by the stories we tell our children.



PLANT SPIRIT HEALING



“Pam Montgomery lives the way of life she writes about in *Plant Spirit Healing*. Her extensive knowledge of plants is conveyed in the context of a wider spiritual path of healing and transformation. It honors and utilizes her direct intuitive experience as well as her rigorous studies as a highly respected herbalist and teacher.”

NICKI SCULLY,
AUTHOR OF *ALCHEMICAL HEALING* AND *POWER ANIMAL
MEDITATIONS*

“If you’ve ever found yourself having a conversation with a plant, feeling emotional towards a mountain, or hearing whispers on the wind this book is for you. We are urged to listen very carefully to the primal conversation of plants and join in, widening our community to really *include* them. *Plant Spirit Healing* offers practical icebreakers to establish relationships with our green friends, not just those currently used in herbal medicine traditions, but all plants.”

JOHN SEED, RAINFOREST ACTIVIST,
FOUNDER OF THE RAINFOREST INFORMATION CENTRE AND
COAUTHOR OF *THINKING LIKE A MOUNTAIN*

“*Plant Spirit Healing* is a book about communicating with the spirits of plants, and enlisting plant spirits to heal. Pam Montgomery presents a portrait of what it is like to live immersed in a living Nature. *Plant Spirit Healing* is an antidote to the excesses of modern life, stripped of meaning, spirit, and relationship. Words like love, joy, spirit, and life can be abstractions, but here they are real.”

MATTHEW WOOD, AHG,
AUTHOR OF *THE BOOK OF HERBAL WISDOM*

“Pam’s new book, *Plant Spirit Healing*, gets to the root of a profound way to wholeness—from modern physics to native tradition—then takes us through a growing process of learning and deepening our trust in connections with the loving power of the green world. She ultimately helps us create a flowering of this wonderful way of healing in our own lives and with our clients. In my mind, it is already a classic.”

BROOKE MEDICINE EAGLE,
AUTHOR OF *BUFFALO WOMAN COMES SINGING* AND *THE LAST GHOST DANCE*

“Every soul searching for truth will drink in the words on these pages like a healing potion, whether or not one has any experience using herbs. And for those who love Latin names and chemistry, this door opens a way to the power of plants that goes far beyond the physical.”

AMANDA MCQUADE CRAWFORD, MNIMH, RH(AHG),
AUTHOR OF *HERBAL REMEDIES FOR WOMEN* AND *THE HERBAL MENOPAUSE BOOK*

“Pam Montgomery has built a tangible bridge between the spiritual needs of people and the spiritual powers of plants. She shows us how to work with these powerful allies to heal our bodies and nourish our souls. This work presents a whole new arena for plant lovers and herbalists. At this time in our evolution, plant spirits can and will be our partners in a new paradigm of mutual understanding that might just save us all. Pam is a spiritual ambassador for the plant kingdom, urging us to view and sense plants in a profoundly deep way that honors their much overlooked spiritual gifts, and she shows us how to tap into this power for healing of ourselves and the planet.”

ROSITA ARVIGO, ND,
AUTHOR OF *SASTUN* AND *SPIRITUAL BATHING*



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Foreword

RECLAIMING THE INVISIBLE

Stephen Harrod Buhner

For the past two decades I have spent much of my time among plant people, vegetalista, herbalists. At conferences such as Green Nations Gathering (which Pam Montgomery began long ago) or The International Herb Symposium, plant people from every continent on Earth, from many tribes and all traditions, gather. At those conferences and gatherings I experience something I have found no other place. Those who gather there do so because once upon a time a plant saved their life. And once that happens, nothing is ever the same again. Something has entered inside them, something invisible, something that changes their lives and how they, in their lives, perceive and relate to the natural world around them. They have connected the most primal survival part of themselves to the wildness of the world. They have eaten the Wild Redeemer. And in so doing they touch upon a different kind of herbalism than that of medical reductionism. In this book Pam Montgomery explores that different kind of herbalism and the invisible thing that enters inside the people who turn to plants for their healing.

A human body just dead is much like one still alive, yet something invisible has left it. “In writing, as in life,” Robert Bly observes, “it is the invisibles that make all the difference.” The importance and power of the invisible, as Robert Bly observes, is not limited to words, it is an essential part of life. Yet there are few fields of human endeavor that understand and embrace it. The conflict between reductionist methodologies—the Richard Dawkins view of reality—and the invisible world is pervasive. Herbalism has not been exempt.

For the past two decades many herbalists have, with all good intent, been trying to prove that their field is “real” science—that it

should be taken seriously. In so doing they have, like so many in so many other fields, abandoned the invisible to the mechanical and allowed their field to be shaped by a worldview that is commonly understood, by a great many people, to be fatally flawed. Vaclav Havel, the former President of the Czech Republic, has commented succinctly on this fatal flaw:

*The relationship to the world that modern science fostered and shaped now appears to have exhausted its potential. It is increasingly clear that, strangely, the relationship is missing something. . . . Today, for instance, we may know immeasurably more about the universe than our ancestors did, and yet, it increasingly seems they knew something more essential about it than we do, something that escapes us. . . . The more thoroughly all our organs and their functions, their internal structure and biochemical reactions that take place within them are described, the more we seem to fail to grasp the spirit, purpose and meaning of the system that they create together and that we experience as our unique self.*1*

The thing that escapes us, that cannot be seen by modern science, does so because it cannot be found in any of the parts that are being studied. It is invisible. And in the West we have a very difficult time with invisibles. So much so that most of us refuse to even talk about it, as if it were something shameful that must be put away, hidden from casual view. This is more than regrettable; it possesses outcomes that degrade not only the richness of our interior lives but the environments in which we live.

Just as the most important interactions between people are invisible (for example, the love and caring that flows between people who deeply care for each other), so too are the most important interactions in the living systems of the Earth invisible. That plant medicines are used throughout ecosystems by insects, birds, reptiles, mammals, and other plants is something long overlooked by reductionist researchers. Overlooked as well is that plants can, and will, determine just what particular chemical an ill member of an

ecosystem needs, and further, they will then begin making it for them. This touches deeply on the invisibles at work in Nature. It also confronts deeply held assumptions about plants and their intelligence.

Pam shares her insights about some of these ecosystem invisibles. One that offered particular richness for me was her recognition of the co-evolutionary development of plants and the other life on this planet. Specifically,

Going back to the beginning of plants and animals, we see that amphibian plants, which are seedless vascular plants like horsetail and ferns, moved to land first, then reptilian plants like conifers moved to land next, and mammalian plants like angiosperms or ones who have internal development and protection of an embryo moved to land last. As plants moved to land their animal counterparts followed them so that mammals did not appear on land until angiosperms (flowering plants) were there to feed them.

Human beings are inextricably interwoven into the invisibles of the Earth. And while modern medicine has tried to reduce healing to a sophisticated manipulation of matter, we, as microcosms of the planet, also possess the same kinds of invisibles as larger planetary ecosystems, invisibles that such reductionism cannot see much less manipulate. This is true not only of the subtle actions of our bodies and their organs but also of just what is involved in healing relationships. One of the things that our ancestors knew that now seemingly escapes us is that many of the most important elements in human healing are in fact invisible.

For example: years ago I was privileged to work with Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. She told a story that has stayed with me all these years about the moment in time when she realized the importance of the invisible in healing. She was working as a physician in Denver, Colorado, mostly with cancer patients. And she noticed that some of her patients who should not be were getting better. So she began to observe closely, to try and understand what was happening. Every

morning they were better, significantly better, but by the end of the day, they were often worse. So she began to lurk around the hospital at night, trying to figure it out. She began to notice that one of the janitorial staff was spending a lot of time in each of these patient's rooms. So, one night she confronted the woman, asking her, "What are you doing with my patients?"

Scared by the confrontation, the woman replied, "Nothing! I'm not doing anything." And she turned and began to walk away.

Elisabeth caught up with her and said, "No, wait. I'm not mad or anything. I just need to know what you are doing."

The woman stopped, turned, and looked into her eyes and said, "I just sit with them and hold their hands. They are dying you know. It is very hard to die alone. It is hard to die without having someone there who cares for you, hard to die or even to live without love." And then she turned and walked away.

Elisabeth said that it was this exchange that moved her to begin the hospice movement in the United States, the moment when she understood the importance of the invisible in healing, in living, and in dying.

I want to make a point here: as you read that story, you didn't just read the words, you felt the impact upon you of what they meant. There was an invisible thing in the story that touched you, some deep meaning that came through, but was not of the words. In that moment you were experiencing the invisibles that exist in language and, in addition, some greater invisible that is essential for healing living systems.

Just as it is not necessary to have a degree in English to understand the meaning in words such as these, it is not necessary to have a degree in chemistry to understand the medicine of plants. There is a feeling to plant medicines, just as there is a feeling to the meaning that you experienced in that story. That feeling is the initial stage of understanding the deeper meanings of plant medicines as ancient and indigenous peoples did. It is the key to the invisibles that surround us every day of our lives.

The book you hold is among a growing number that explore the importance of reclaiming the invisible. In it, Pam Montgomery talks

about many of these invisibles and shares stories of her experiences with them. She is among a growing number of people articulating its necessity. Her comments on the nature of an individual's internal story, for instance, are striking: how the story—that invisible, yet meaning-filled narrative—we tell ourselves each day about who and what we are affects our well-being, our biological function, our relationships, and interior health. She explores the necessity to alter that story, to expand it, and to incorporate within it important invisibles of life, among them the invisible that is called spirit.

“Without the recognition of the spiritual aspect of our ecology,” she comments, “we are like a tree without roots, a wave without motion, or a heart without soul that continually longs for that which gives it life.” She recognizes that as human beings we have the innate capacity to perceive these kinds of invisibles but even more, that we who are herbalists touch upon them continually.

All of us who work with plants and healing know that certain plants feel right for certain patients more than others, despite the fact that many of the plants we are considering possess similar physiological impacts. Herbalists throughout time, and ours is no exception, have remarked upon the fact that when a person needs a plant, it is not uncommon for it to begin growing nearby. And a great many of us have had the experience of sitting with a client and having the image of an herb pop into our heads in response to our internal questing for just the right plant to use.

These are some of the common invisibles with which we work as herbalists. There are, of course, a great many more that become common the deeper within this world that we go. The healing that can occur if we embrace our tradition of working with invisibles, rejecting the merely mechanical as the ultimate ground of being for our work, can be exceptionally elegant, far beyond the outcomes to be found in reductionist medicine. For if we embrace our capacity to perceive meaning, our ability to participate in shaping it, realizing that plants are indeed containers for meaning (using our capacity for feeling to determine both the potency of those meanings and their rightness for a particular person), we shape the movement of meaning into our patients' lives. We act as an intermediary, a facilitator, of that movement. And in so doing, we bring a living text

into the lives of the people who come to us for healing, a text filled with deep meanings. These meanings do many things that are essential in the healing process. One crucial aspect, however, is that they act as an antidote to the meaninglessness that so many people now struggle with in our time.

The journey back to meaning is often a long one, for those of us who decide to take it. Books, such as this one by Pam Montgomery, play an integral part of finding direction in that journey. It is my hope that more of us who walk this path take the time to write of it, for there is not a one of us who does not need the deeper meanings that can sometimes be found in such books. As the poet William Stafford puts it,

*For it is important that awake people be awake, or a breaking line may discourage us back to sleep; the signals we give— yes, or no, or maybe— should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.*2*

“THE GILA WILDERNESS,” MAY 2007

STEPHEN HARROD BUHNER is an Earth poet and the award-winning author of ten books on nature, indigenous cultures, the environment, and herbal medicine, including *The Secret Teachings of Plants*, *Sacred Plant Medicine*, and *The Natural Testosterone Plan*. He comes from a long line of healers including Leroy Burney, Surgeon General of the United States under Eisenhower and Kennedy, and Elizabeth Lusterheide, a midwife and herbalist who worked in rural Indiana in the early nineteenth century. The greatest influence on his work, however, has been his great-grandfather C. G. Harrod, who primarily used botanical medicines, also in rural Indiana, when he began his work as a physician in 1911.

Stephen’s work has appeared or been profiled in publications throughout North America and Europe including *Common Boundary*, *Apotheosis*, *Shaman’s Drum*, *The New York Times*, CNN, and *Good Morning America*.



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I am grateful to all my students, friends, and clients who offered stories or inspired a story to be told, especially Jasmine, Jessica, Jennifer, Astaria, Wendy, Sara, Jackie, Melody, Linda, Jenny, Rizzie, Jeff, Tammi, Shirley, Barbara, Lisa, Nina, Letitia, Cathy, Julie, Judy, Jeannine, Elizabeth, Forrest, Helena, Brenda, Mary Louise, and all the rest of you for having the courage to attend the Plant Spirit Healing Apprenticeship, which is the basis for the material in this book. Where appropriate, names are changed in the stories.

It is undeniable that those who have touched you deeply are echoed throughout your work. And so it is that a very special man

and my teacher, Martín Prechtel, shows his face throughout this book. With utmost respect and deep gratitude, I thank you, Martín, for sharing your enormous heart and vast knowledge with those of us in Bolad's Kitchen willing to make an attempt "to plant seeds for a time beyond our own."

Writing a book is an unbelievable feat in focused attention, trust, and creative inspiration that, ultimately, is a very alone process. However, when those moments of doubt come up, there's nothing like a good friend to help remind you why you're writing a book to begin with. I am grateful now and always for my dearest of all friends, Kate Gilday. Thank you, Kate, for riding that wave with me, both the crest and the trough.

These words attempt to reflect the feelings of my heart, but they are mere shadows of the ecstatic experience of you, my dearest Mark. It is because of you my heart has cracked open enough to allow this book to be written. You are the one that has taught me to "be love" instead of to "be in love," showing me that together our "being love" serves that third thing, the Holy Heart, for which this book is written. Thank you, my darling, for bringing me home.

My deepest gratitude goes to the plants for their constant guidance, healing, and friendship. I am honored to be a spokesperson for you. Thank you, Marble Mountain and Heart Spring, for calling me to this land at Sweetwater Sanctuary and serving as my mentors.



INTRODUCTION

When I was a child, I spent my summers on my grandparents' farm in the eastern mountains of Kentucky. My Granny was a plant lover. Every afternoon, when her housework was done, she would go out to her prolific gardens, where she picked and pruned, talking and muttering the whole time. One day I asked her who she was talking to and she said, "Plants are just like people; they need friends too, and when you talk to your flowers they grow better." This was the secret to her green thumb; she talked to her plants. I loved my Granny very much, and she made talking to plants seem natural so, of course, I accepted this reality wholeheartedly. This is the story I carried about plants, beginning at a very early age. I thought everyone talked to plants. Later, when I was a little older and those precious innocent years were gone, I found out that many people were afraid of plants and carried a different story about them. This story implied they were dangerous and might kill us if we ate them. I was shocked. How could this be? It was not the story my Granny told, so I refused to believe this and defiantly defended my Granny and our ability to talk to plants. Now, all these years later, I'm still defending her and I thank her from the bottom of my heart for instilling in me that plants are beings worthy of our friendship and communication. The great gift my Granny gave me was that of never having to question my birthright of communication with the natural world. I didn't have to unlearn some false paradigm imposed on me from the powers that be. It was natural for me to think of plants having heart, soul, and spirit because I was never taught anything else. It was no wonder my early gravitations were toward people like

Dorothy Maclean, cofounder of Findhorn, and George Washington Carver who said, “When I touch that flower I am touching infinity. It existed long before there were human beings on this earth and will continue to exist for millions of years to come. Through the flower I talk to the Infinite, which is only a silent force. This is not a physical contact. It is not in the earthquake, wind, or fire. It is in the invisible world. It is that still small voice that calls up the fairies.”

I began teaching herb classes and began an herbal practice in the 1980s. At the time, herbs were rising to fame, and yet it seemed just a substitution for what we were all trying to avoid—the Western medical model. We were taking herbs whose chemical constituents have an effect on the body instead of pharmaceutical drugs that have even a stronger effect on the body. People were taking their herbs and got well for a while, until the illness showed up in another way. Nothing was really changing, especially not consciousness. It was then I began to investigate how to go beyond symptomatic treatment to source-level treatment, a way of working that shifts consciousness so true healing can take place. This required I look beyond the physical properties of the plant to see if healing could occur at deeper levels. Never doubting my abilities to communicate with them, I went directly to the plants to find out how they could assist me. What I have learned over the years is that plants are vastly intelligent, multidimensional beings with tremendous capacity for healing at a source level. Working with their whole beings, not just their chemical constituents, is what can effect this type of healing. I must make it very clear, I am not suggesting the nonuse of tinctures, teas, essential oils, or any useful part of the plant for physical healing. This is one aspect of plants, but it is not their entire, uniquely complex, and true nature. Similarly, our physical bodies are only one aspect of our diverse nature. Instead, I am suggesting working with all of the plant—the trinity of heart, soul, and spirit—to access healing for the heart, soul, and spirit of people.

In my work, I have placed emphasis on the spirit aspect of plants, because everyone else (with a couple of exceptions) is doing just fine discussing the physical aspect. Working with plant spirits has naturally led to my investigating the spirit force in life. I discuss how spirit lives and moves through us, bringing it into reality instead of

keeping it in the abstract realm of religion. At times I found it challenging to describe the experience of spirit to you in this book. The words don't fully do justice to the spirit's magnitude, but hopefully you will understand or begin to get a glimpse of the "experience of spirit." However, one seldom fully grasps something until they experience it themselves. The good news is we *all* can have experiences of spirit, healing, communion, and raising of consciousness. It is our birthright. We are meant to love, to heal, to understand, and to live according to our own true nature.

There is rising evidence in the scientific arena that supports many of my experiences as well as those of my students—the same kinds of experiences that indigenous and traditional healers have had for eons. Throughout this book, I have supported my theories and practices with information from science and traditional wisdom, as much as it is available. Science is on the verge of a huge breakthrough, and I hope it will soon be commonplace to see, for example, studies concerning the healing, vibratory resonance of plants.

The first part of this book is the theoretical basis for Plant Spirit Healing, the second part is the practical application, and the third part, my favorite, is the stories of the plants. There are so many plants that could have been written about, but the ones I have chosen offer you a unique holistic view in hopes of revealing their true nature. Ultimately, I'm just translating what they want me to tell you about themselves.

I have included a chapter on the triple spiral. I have discovered that the spiral shape is fundamental in nature and that the trinity manifests throughout nature and other aspects of life. Likewise, Plant Spirit Healing follows a spiral path through the triple aspect of heart, soul, and spirit.

I hope you enjoy the beautiful spirit-being images of Linda Law. I first saw a mirrored image while canoeing in the Adirondacks on a very still lake. The trees and plants on the shore reflected into the water, causing a mirrored image. Along the shoreline faces and beings emerged much like a totem pole. I was amazed at how alive everything felt with so many beautiful beings sharing the lake and

shore. I didn't see this again until I saw Linda's photos, which visually made the plants come alive in a new way. The cover photo by Linda is of Lady's Mantle. I sat with this image for the longest time wondering about the alien being that is so prominent. This being has a masculine quality to it, and I was surprised to not see a more feminine being. Then, in a flash I saw it wasn't an alien after all but, instead, a wise old alchemist. I've started to call him Arturo and, of course, *Alchemilla* (Lady's Mantle's Latin name) would reveal such a being. You will find that each plant reveals different beings, some are sweet and others are almost disturbing, just like life. These most amazing photos give you a rare opportunity to delve into the essence of a plant, where spirit healing takes place. When I look at Linda's images I can feel this healing taking place.

Linda studied with me the summer of 2006 and, when I saw her work, I knew it needed to be a part of this book. Linda says of her work,

I am a digital and holographic artist whose work focuses on connecting with Nature. Photography has always been a tool for me to open my awareness and step into a wider vision of the world around me, a way of focusing my inner self. My camera is the vehicle I use to open my senses and go below the surface into the deeper realms, to those places where we are no longer disconnected.

After working creatively with photographic film for over twenty-five years, the shift from conventional film to a digital camera was a liberating experience for me. By opening my vision, it freed me to explore a new way of working, a balance between the moment of connection and the extended moment of revelation. This second step in my work, the extended moment, is the process of revealing the true nature of the image in the computer, of painting with light. I stay connected to the place of magic experienced while taking a picture out in the woods, under a cloud-filled sky at the transition from night to day, or in the place of wonder as light dances on the surface of a pool filled with golden light. The extended moment has

become the place where I open myself and the image to new possibilities and where mythical creatures present themselves for revelation.

This technique has evolved through several stages. In some of these images I have taken the original and mirrored it and then proceeded to “reveal” what is already there. The computer allows me infinite control over this stage (akin to the photographic technique of burning and dodging). New digital cameras, at higher resolution, allow me to see into Nature with much finer detail. A wondrous array of beings are revealed, layer upon layer, worlds within worlds—the fractal realm that, science tells us, exists. Working with these images, I move into the arena of mythic creatures—archetypal images that resonate with a power beyond our everyday existence. These beings speak of a timeless realm, a place of oneness that underlies our world—the place from which we dream.

In this work it is my intent to open the awareness of my audience to these realms. Making a conscious request to the Universe, I ask to open a portal through my images into this dream state and provide a gateway to a place that challenges our concept of what is real; a place of connection to that state of consciousness where we are no longer alone but connected to a vast and wondrous magical world of possibility.

During the summer of 2006, I studied Plant Spirit Healing as an apprentice with Pam Montgomery. This choice was made with the desire to further open my connection to the natural world. Having already studied herbs for three years, with an Englishwoman’s love of gardening and a commitment to co-create with Nature, I entered Pam’s magical garden with the intent to explore the possibility of creating images that would further my connections to plant spirits. My images in this book were all created during that period of time.



Most of this work has taken place at my home, Sweetwater Sanctuary. I was called here eight years ago by the water and the mountain who have been my mentors. My work broke through to new levels when my dear heart, Mark, moved from his life-long home of Minnesota to Vermont, where we now share a special life together. Together we have stepped into “being love,” and it is from this profound yet simple way of being that my work and play with plant spirits flourishes. What I now realize is that the plant spirits are “being love” with us, and when we meet them in this beingness, we arrive home—exactly where we were always meant to be.

This information, instead of a bunch of rules and regulations to follow, is a guidepost to the many ways of practicing Plant Spirit Healing that I have found to be effective. You will have your own experiences that may be different from mine, so please pay attention if a different way of working is better for you. My experience with plant spirits is evolutionary in nature; therefore, I am always learning something new. This ancient knowledge of the plant spirits is emerging within a new context appropriate for our times. The wisdom being shared by the plant spirits is both old and brand new—new stories, new paradigms, and new ways of living on Gaia, our beautiful home.



Part 1

The Theoretical Basis for Plant Spirit Healing

*Every breath is a giveaway dance between you and the plants.
Breathe this in. Plant Spirit Healing vibrates like a harp string,
shimmers like a spider web, and is destined to be a warp
thread in the re-weaving of the healing cloak of the Ancients.*

SUSUN WEED



One

SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY

There's nothin' like early spring days with the ground softening, birds singing as loud as they can, and the total aliveness in the air. I meander up the stream, seeing spots where the ice still drapes over rocks, picking up stones, scraping away leaves to find the buds of leeks that are popping out of the ground and enjoying the sun through trees with no leaves. I come to the spot in the stream I have always felt attracted to and that has a different energy than other places. One year, when it was so dry, the water came down off the mountain and went into a hole in the streambed and then reemerged at Heart Spring behind the house. I thought that was strange. Another time I came across a huge oyster mushroom that was on a log at this spot near the stream. The rocks are different here, too. They are flat schist rocks that are angled upward as if there is a great force underneath pushing them up. Today when I arrive at this special spot it is as if I've never been here before. I see things I haven't seen before, like a rock jutting out that is perfect to sit on, with its soft blanket of moss, above the tumbling water. Then I notice there is bright green moss covering all the rocks, and it seems a little early for it to be so green. There's something about the way the light plays on the water and dances across the rocks that has a vibrant quality to it, even more so than in other spots. What is it about this place that makes it different? I settle in on my commanding perch with the couple turns of the stream in full view. Softening my gaze helps me to shift into my intuitive sense. Through the shimmering veil of light I see what is here everywhere, on the trees, the stones, the way the leaves are patterned on the forest floor; they all have faces: old men, dancing women, a mama bear, a gnome, a dragon, three children holding hands, and a big presiding grandmother. Now I see the crevices and cracks in the rocks and the holes at the base of the trees, the homes of those who live here. My eyes can see clearly, this is where

the nature spirits live. That is why this place has always seemed so vibrant, so teeming with life, and so special. I feel blessed in this moment to have been shown their faces.

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At the foundation of the triple spiral path of Plant Spirit Healing is spiritual ecology. Within this path there is recognition that spiritual ecology does indeed exist and that a balance within this ecology is maintained. Ecology is defined as the relationship an organism has with its environment or its surroundings. Spiritual ecology then could be described as the relationship of an organism to its spirit in its environment, recognizing that we relate to our internal and external surroundings. Spiritual ecology is also the relationship one has with the environment of spirit or spirit's environment. A further nuance is one's relationship to an environment filled with spirit. Each of these perspectives is a little different and yet all live within the spiritual ecology of life.

RELATIONSHIP TO AN ENVIRONMENT FILLED WITH SPIRIT

In looking at an environment filled with spirit we turn to James Lovelock's Gaia theory that states: "the earth behaves as a living organism, and that life actively creates the environment it needs to survive by maintaining environmental factors like temperature, humidity, and composition of the atmosphere." The Gaia theory also "sees the earth as a responsive supra-organism that will tend to resist adverse environmental change and maintain 'homeostasis.' But if stressed beyond the limits of whatever happens to be the current regulatory apparatus, it will jump to a new stable environment where many of the current species will be eliminated." This illuminates the fact that the earth is a creator of its own existence and that environmental homeostasis or balance is necessary for life as we know it to be maintained.

Spirit is defined in Webster's dictionary as "the vital principle held to give life." The ability of the earth to create itself is the ultimate in vitality, without which there would be no life. It is in every leaf, every

blade of grass, every breeze, every rock, every drop of rain, and every ray of sunshine that the vital principle gives life. It is in its inherent aliveness that spirit exists. One cannot exist without the other because they are one and the same. It is not spirit that we hope to find, because it is in each one of us as a given by the mere fact that we are alive. Rather, it is the constant striving to achieve a balance that is our challenge. Recognition, maintenance, and nurturance of that which gives life are where the balance is found, and in this balance we experience harmony.

Indigenous cultures across the globe have recognized for millennia the spirit in all life and the interconnectedness of people with the natural world. In this relationship spirit is found. There is an understanding that our bones and the stones of the earth are made of the same minerals, that our breath comes from the trees and plants, and that our blood is of the ocean. The vital principle of spirit being alive in all things is indicated in this excerpt from a Hopi prayer: "I am a thousand winds that blow. I am the diamond glints of snow. I am the sunlight on the ripened grain. I am the gentle Autumn's rain. When you awaken in the morning hush, I am the swift uplifting rush of quiet birds in circled flight. I am the soft stars that shine at night." It is also reflected in this sentiment from Chief Seattle of the Suquamish, "Every part of all this soil is sacred to my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove has been hollowed by some sad or happy event in days long vanished. We are part of the earth and the earth is part of us."

THE RELATIONSHIP TO SPIRIT IN OUR INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENTS

When considering our relationship to spirit in our surroundings, we look both internally and externally, separately and together. Our internal relationship to spirit is not about speaking to God in our heads or imagining one's place in heaven; it is the way in which we speak to ourselves, the internal monologue with oneself. Our internal story is one of the most influential aspects of our inner psyche. It can affect biological function, emotional balance, and overall well-being by aligning our vibrations with the external world. When our internal

environment is filled with war (conflict), that is what we align with in our external environment and, conversely, when our internal environment is filled with peace, we align with peace in our external environment. If this story is life-giving, then we can assume we are in a balanced relationship with spirit in our internal environment. On the other hand, when we tell ourselves how we are not good enough, pretty enough, smart enough, or not worthy enough, we begin to wage an internal war that destroys life. It is this internal warring that can cause imbalance, lead to depression, and contribute to illness, as well as align us externally with the vibration of war. If one is at war internally, it is unlikely that the wars in the world will be able to stop. For many this internal war of spirit killing begins at a very early age, reinforced by messages from parents, teachers, peers, TV, advertising, and religion, resulting in what is called spirit loss. In this condition the internal flame of spirit is burning low, becoming a mere flicker or perhaps nothing but an ember. When our internal vibration of peace is in alignment with our external vibration, we are in harmony and this homeostasis supports the ecology necessary for the spirit flame to burn brightly. It is this same homeostasis that Gaia strives to maintain for the continuance of life on this planet.

Through co-creative partnership we step into experiencing spirit in our external surroundings. Co-creative partnership is a way of relating to our environment—where all creation is alive, has a purpose for being here, and is entitled to its equal place in the web of life. As Chief Seattle says, “Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web we do to ourselves. All things are bound together, all things connect.” However, a fundamental paradigm shift is required for those of us who were raised with the basic understanding that we are superior to all other organisms, as suggested in Genesis 1:26. “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” This is a very strong belief that has been carried down through generation upon generation, and yet it may be an issue of translation as Rev. Fletcher Harper of Green Faith indicates: “That passage in Genesis was never meant to be

interpreted as a dominion of exploitation, but rather a dominion similar to the dominion of God, which is one of loving kindness and compassion.”

This paradigm is further promulgated by early scientists such as Isaac Newton, whose *Principia Mathematica* says, “the universe operates in a completely rational and predictable way following the mathematics used to describe the universe; the universe then, is mechanistic.” Newton further suggests that this mechanistic universe can be manipulated by man. Not only can man manipulate nature but Francis Bacon, father of the scientific method, takes it a step further by saying, “It is important to use the techniques of the Inquisition to tease and torture the secrets of Mother nature out into the open.” He is referring to the techniques for torture put forth in the most widely distributed book of the time, other than the Bible, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, otherwise known as the Hammer of the Witches. It is interesting to note that Francis Bacon was not actually a scientist but a lawyer—one who was dismissed as Lord Chancellor from Parliament for accepting a bribe. It is from this man, who could easily have been beheaded instead of merely dismissed from his position, that our entire way of approaching science (the scientific method) has been founded. These two extremely influential bodies of authority have formed a paradigm of superior domination over a mechanical earth for the majority of the Western world (with a few exceptions) that has existed for centuries. This belief pattern has created an abstract relationship with nature and plants in which personal, intimate partnerships are impossible. By embracing the Gaia theory, we have an opportunity to create a new paradigm by stepping out of “dominion over,” or power over, into a view of plants as equal partners. We can begin to see a landscape full of conscious beings filled with intelligence—intelligence that may be even greater than our own—making it possible for us to continually learn from these plants as well as acknowledge our thread in the web of all things that are connected.

It is important to note that this old paradigm is beginning to shift as indicated by the new translation of the Bible by Eugene Peterson, a pastor and teacher who translates the original languages in which the Bible was written—both Greek and Hebrew. This modern version

takes out the archaic language and puts the text into modern terms that are more readable and understandable. The same passage of Genesis reads, “So they can be responsible for the fish of the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and yes, Earth [capital letter] itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.” Similarly, in the scientific arena, the unified field theory strives to reconcile the unification of the four fundamental forces of nature, which moves significantly away from viewing nature mechanistically.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE ENVIRONMENT OF SPIRIT

The holographic view of the world perceives the entire whole within a small piece of the original. A laser projecting a three-dimensional image will maintain that image, regardless of the number of times it is divided. When viewing spirit as a hologram, we recognize that the “vital principle held to give life” as a force field is completely contained in its individual parts. For example, each plant is alive and in this aliveness spirit is inherent and yet has its own individual nature. Let’s compare Dandelion to Violet. Dandelion loves the sun and people’s lawns whereas Violet loves the shade and the seclusion of the woods. Each plant has its own personality or, in the words of the Tzutujil Mayan shaman Martín Prechtel, “lives according to its own true nature,” so that Violet is soothing, cooling, and contains mucilage whereas Dandelion stimulates digestion, tones the liver, and aids the gall bladder. Violet is shy and unassuming while Dandelion is bold verging on aggressive. Spirit is alive in each of these plants but makes room for the diversity of their individual natures so that each has its own unique spirit and at the same time contains the wholeness of spirit within it. Within the holographic view of the world purported by scientist David Bohm and neurophysicist Karl Pribram is the idea that the entire universe is a hologram, and this image is projected from a place outside of time and space, indicating a dimension beyond our own that projects the image. Martín Prechtel suggests it is spirit that projects this hologram from its simultaneous dimension, making our world a “footprint” of the spirit world. Given that these two dimensions exist

simultaneously, it is possible to step into the world of spirit—where spirit, in its wholeness, lives and where the parts of the whole, the individual expressions, live. The individual expression of Dandelion (its ability to heal in its own unique way) is more than just its chemical constituents affecting the physical body. Dandelion's true nature has a beautiful story to reveal when we take the time to go beyond its physical features and explore that which gives Dandelion its unique nature. We have the ability to visit with the spirit of Dandelion and to become acquainted with, learn from, and eventually become co-creative partners with the many aspects that make up this living being. Later, we will discuss the many ways to visit with the spirits in their environment.

This aspect of spiritual ecology is the one that modern people have the most difficulty with, because many religions deny the existence of individual spirits associated with plants, animals, rocks, mountains, or anything of the natural world. Anyone experiencing these spirits is seen as pagan or primitive. Traditional cultures like the Peruvian Amazon tribe of the Ashaninca, as described by Jeremy Narby, refer to “invisible beings, called maninkari, who are found in animals, plants, mountains, streams, lakes, and certain crystals and who are sources of knowledge.” These “invisible beings” are the individual spirit aspect with which we can form a relationship. We are in balanced spiritual ecology by recognizing, maintaining, and nurturing our relationship with these spirit beings. As the relationship grows into a co-creative partnership, their knowledge is revealed to us.

RECOGNITION, MAINTENANCE, AND NURTURANCE OF SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY

Without the recognition of the spiritual aspect of our ecology, we are like a tree without roots, a story without origin, a wave without motion, or a heart without soul that continually longs for that which gives it life. I encourage the recognition of spirit in the environment by having my students sit with nature and begin to sense who is watching them. I ask them to shift their focus from being the observer to being the observed, and then see who is paying

attention to them, who is attracted to them, and who is calling to them. One day we hiked to Snake Falls on Marble Mountain, and I gave the class an assignment that would help them sense the spirit of the woods and focus on who was watching them. Tammi sat on a rock in the middle of the creek, not really knowing what to expect. “As I sat wondering what we were supposed to be doing, I noticed a large tree across the stream; I remembered I was not supposed to do the noticing. As I continued to sit, I realized that the three Trillium plants at the base of the tree were watching me. Why I felt this is hard to explain, but the whole patch of Trillium seemed brighter, more vibrant and alive than the rest of the forest. As I gazed back at them, my perception shifted; I had this huge sense of benevolent belonging. I began to weep as my heart cracked open and I saw myself through the eyes of Trillium who said, ‘Of course you belong here.’ I then had a cascade of thoughts of a personal nature, but one stood out: ‘If everyone could have this experience, the world would be a different place.’”

Spiritual ecology is just as important to maintain in a balanced way as our relationship to our physical environment because, ultimately, they are one and the same. To maintain a balanced spiritual ecology we must view the world as one that we can partner with co-creatively. The key to successful co-creative partnering is effective communication; a skill we all can develop. Communication comes in many forms and can be as simple as an experience that opens a particular door of perception, thus inviting connection. While driving home one day, I rounded the corner and there laid out before me in all its majesty was Marble Mountain, at whose base I live. It was a winter day, and the sunlight was shining through snow flurries, creating a rainbow effect on the mountain and in the air. I had never seen such a sight and was immediately struck by the wonder of it. In that moment, a doorway of perception opened onto the mountain and I saw it as I have never seen it before—alive with shimmering waves of prism light. It was no longer just a mountain, one of many in Vermont, but instead he was an elder holding the wisdom of the ages in his arms where I could walk, listen, and learn. I continued to drive, transfixed by this image, and when I returned home, the epiphany continued as I was told by Marble Mountain that I was to

apprentice with him and the Heart Spring (the pure water spring outside my door that I had already begun to learn from). He is the masculine aspect of the teachings and the spring is the feminine aspect of the teachings. The teachings were to begin with the heart, and I was to learn to “be love.” This most profound communication had come from my willingness to open to an experience of wonder and to receive the gift it had to offer.

The nurturance of spirit in all life comes by feeding spirit in both small and large ways. Several years ago, I went on a pilgrimage led by Five Element Plant Spirit Medicine teacher and practitioner, Eliot Cowan, to a sacred mountain in California. We hiked for hours until we came to a high rocky point. There above the rock ledge that we shimmied around was a large hole where the spirit of the mountain lived. Here we offered candles and chocolate to feed the spirit of this magnificent high peak. I make my own small pilgrimages up the mountain to Snake Falls. On a flat rock above the falls is an opening where I place beads, candles, food, chocolate, and handmade gifts. This is one way I feed the most formidable teacher I have ever had, the spirit of Marble Mountain. Another small way of feeding spirit is by offering tobacco or cornmeal, which is a traditional Native American practice. I offer homegrown tobacco to plants as I work with them or, more preferably, a shell bead or something of beauty that I have fashioned with my own hands.

The view of spiritual ecology as a living model presented by K. Lauren de Boer and excerpted from *Earthlight* magazine is a “vision of a vibrant Earth community for future generations of all species and a mission to live, communicate, and celebrate a story that vitalizes our sacred relationship with the living Earth with the principles of:

- sacred relationship where we acknowledge and honor the Spirit that brings us forth in interdependence and in so doing we live in sacred relations;
- conscious evolution where we actively explore how we as individuals and as a species can move toward a way of living that embodies mutually enhancing relations with all Earth’s life-forms and natural systems and in so doing, we live in connection to and with reverence for all life;

- collective wisdom where we honor the essence of the world's wisdom traditions as important sources for learning values of compassion, reverence, and gratitude and in so doing, we awaken to a deeper, contemporary wisdom;
- engaging in mutual learning experiences as we create an Earth community listening and speaking from the heart and in so doing, we are informed by one another's wisdom and compassion;
- conscious choice where we recognize that our daily choices, even the small and habitual ones, have an impact on Earth's species in both beneficial and destructive ways and we seek to promote lifestyles that lead to social justice, sustainability, and ecological security for all the life on Earth and in so doing, we live with conscious intent;
- inclusivity where we embrace the challenges and joys of truly diverse viewpoints and values in all areas of life in order to more fully accept and understand the depth of each other's experience and value Earth's diversity of life and respect the rights of each species to flourish in its unique expression and in so doing, we foster and encourage the unique gifts in one another and in all life;
- we celebrate the human role as a positive, life-enhancing agent in Earth's unfolding story and in so doing, we live in the wonder and mystery of the living Universe.”



TWO

THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF PLANTS

Stepping out into the cold morning air, light reflects from the millions of tiny crystalline structures—each a unique expression, together becoming a rainbow of dancing light, glistening with the promise of this new day. I head out, up the Eagle’s Nest Trail, filling my lungs with the crisp air, breathing heavier as the trail gets steeper, and watching the clouds of breath flow from somewhere deep inside like a steam engine on a roll. Slowing now as the weight of my body slips into my awareness, I wonder, “What’s the hurry?” Here in this moment of now, I see the tall pines towering overhead like giant sentinels, their menthol freshness sending life-giving oxygen to each of my cells. I stop and breathe, and breathe again, here in the quiet where, in a long-ago forgotten time, these needles were gathered to make into tea to chase away the winter woes, here where I stand, perhaps, breathing, letting the green breath of this elder pine fill me with oxygen. Then slowly I exhale, watching my steaming carbon dioxide-laden breath float to the outstretched arms of my sky-touching friend, and I breathe. In this one ecstatic moment, I know this pine to be the one who shares with me the green breath of life, and I know myself to be the one who shares carbon dioxide so this pine, through photosynthesis, may use that carbon to make the cellulose that is part of its roots, bark, and needles. Ah, you give me breath, I give you breath, you give me needles, I give you my health, and life goes on in a cycle of symbiotic harmony.

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Plants led organisms onto land from the sea some 400 to 450 million years ago, developing from a single algal lineage. Their evolution has continued, with plants becoming 99 percent of all living

organisms on the planet. They have the unique ability to capture sunlight, using this energy to extract carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. The extracted carbon dioxide is then combined with hydrogen and oxygen from water to form sugars that help make up the plants' leaves, stalks, roots, seeds, and flowers, all of which contain starch, fat, and proteins. The byproduct of this process called photosynthesis is oxygen, which is necessary for the maintenance of human life. Besides providing us with our very breath, plants provide us with all of our food, either directly or indirectly from an animal that ate plant material or an animal that ate an animal that ate plant material. As author Thom Hartmann explains, "Every life-form on the surface of this planet is here because a plant was able to gather sunlight and store it, and something else was able to eat that plant and take that sunlight energy in to power its body." He continues that humans cannot "create tissue directly from sunlight, water and air, as plants can," thus making humans completely dependent on plants for their very existence.

Going back to the beginning of plants and animals, we see that amphibian plants, which are seedless vascular plants like horsetail and ferns, moved to land first, then reptilian plants like conifers moved to land next, and mammalian plants like angiosperms or ones that have internal development and protection of an embryo moved to land last. As plants moved to land their animal counterparts followed them so that mammals did not appear on land until angiosperms (flowering plants) were there to feed them.

As flowering plants became dominant, they perfected their ability to reproduce or pollinate. Random pollination occurs by wind, but more efficient pollination occurs through insects, bees, birds, and animals. Plants, particularly the flowers of plants, have evolved as the epitome of sexual display, because their sexual parts are inside the flower, and the plant's primary focus is to attract pollinators to their sexual organs. Many plants have both the male (stamen, which produces pollen) and female (pistil, which contains the ovary with eggs, style, and stigma) parts within the same flower, others have two different flowers on one plant, and others have male plants and female plants. When a pollen grain lands on the stigma, which is a pad at the tip of the style, an interaction occurs in which an enzyme

in the pollen eats its way through the stigma into the style and then grows a tube down through the style into the ovary. The germ of the pollen then fertilizes the egg in the ovary by fusing with it. Pollen from each different plant has its own shape, size, protein coat, and resonance, making it unique to its own kind so that when a pollen grain of a different kind of plant lands on the stigma, no interaction takes place, and, conversely, when identical proteins engage, resonance matching (vibrating at the same frequency) occurs and the process of pollination begins.

Flowers have developed elaborate ways to attract pollinators to them. Some have bright colors, some have strong perfume, while others raise their temperatures. All have nutritious pollen to eat and the greatest treasure of all, nectar. Flowers have ingeniously designed themselves so the nectar lies deep inside, causing bees, insects, and birds to have up-close and intimate contact with them in order to retrieve a precious drop of nectar. Many plants have only one pollinator so that a symbiotic relationship between the two ensures their survival. Biologist David Attenborough describes just such a relationship: “A pink gentian grows in southern Africa, which is pollinated by handsome furry carpenter bees. The flowers of the gentian spread their petals wide, revealing to all a curving white style and three large stamens. Each stamen ends in a long thick anther that seems to be covered in yellow pollen, an obvious temptation to any passing pollen-feeding insect. But that is something of an illusion. The yellow anther is hollow and the pollen is held inside. The only way it can escape is through a tiny hole right at the top of the anther and there is only one way of extracting it. The bee knows how. It arrives at the flower making a high-pitched buzzing noise with its wings as most bees do. As it alights on an anther, it continues beating its wings but lowers the frequency so that the note of its buzz suddenly falls to approximately middle C. This causes the anther to vibrate at just the right frequency needed to release the pollen and the grains spout out of the hole at the top in a yellow fountain. The bee then industriously gathers it up and packs it into the carrying baskets on its back legs.”

THE HUMAN-PLANT CONNECTION

Symbiotic relationships with plants are not only for pollinators; plants and people have a symbiotic relationship that is undeniable. Plants' by-product of photosynthesis is oxygen, which we need to live, and our by-product of respiration is carbon dioxide, which plants need to live. Granted, plants would still have enough carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to continue to live without us, but we cannot survive without the oxygen provided by plants. We could even say that our close relations with plants are more crucial than any of our relations with animals. Some may argue that we are dependent on animals for the protein they provide. It has been demonstrated by the vegetarian movement that humans can survive on plants alone (even though the long-term effects of this have not been documented).

Both chlorophyll and hemoglobin are structured around a porphyrin ring, which is the building block of both molecules, with the difference being that the core of hemoglobin is iron, whereas the core of chlorophyll is magnesium. Each has its own unique function, and yet both are very similar in that they are the carriers of what gives life—chlorophyll is necessary for photosynthesis and hemoglobin is the red blood cell that carries oxygen to every cell in the human body. Hemoglobin's relationship to chlorophyll is that hemoglobin is a respiring, iron-containing protein that takes the oxygen we breathe, produced by photosynthesis, for which chlorophyll is critical, and distributes it throughout our bodies. In other words, plants are the *only* source of oxygen on this planet, and because oxygen requires chlorophyll for its production, it follows that we must have chlorophyll for hemoglobin to carry out its function.

All of our food comes from plants or from animals that ate plants, which then creates all of the tissue that makes up our bones, organs, and flesh. Plants can create their tissue directly from sunlight and water, but we must depend on plants for the formation of ours.

Concerning respiration, it is important to note that both human and plant cells contain mitochondria, which are bodies containing fat, protein, and enzymes, and which are vital to cell respiration.

PLANTS' ABILITIES TO COMMUNICATE

Recently a new scientific field of study has emerged called Plant Neurobiology. Its first symposium was held in May of 2005 in Florence, Italy. This symposium brought together leading scientists from across the globe who are investigating plant intelligence and the ability of plants to communicate. One of the leading figures in this investigation is Anthony Trewavas, a professor of biology at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. He asserts that “for centuries, plants have been regarded as passive creatures. Their development is thought to be predetermined, with only temporary interruptions in response to stress. Because plants lack obvious visible movement, they seem to be bereft of behaviour and intelligence. Yet they dominate every landscape, representing 99% of the biomass of the Earth. There is a clear conflict between the commonly held view and the success of plant life. Only now are we beginning to expose the remarkable complexity of plant behaviour. A revolution is sweeping away the detritus of passivity, replacing it with an exciting dynamic—the investigation of plant intelligence is becoming a serious scientific endeavour.”

One of the outgrowths of the symposium is a new peer-reviewed journal, *Plant Signaling and Behavior*, whose mission statement includes, “Our viewing of plants is changing dramatically away from passive entities being merely subject to environmental forces and organisms that are designed solely for accumulation of photosynthate. In contrast, plants emerge as dynamic and highly sensitive organisms that actively and competitively forage for limited resources, both above and below ground, organisms that accurately compute their circumstances, use sophisticated cost benefit analysis, and that take defined actions to mitigate and control diverse environmental insults. Moreover, plants are also capable of a refined recognition of self and non-self and are territorial in behavior. This new view sees plants as information processing organisms with complex communication throughout the individual plant. *Plants are as sophisticated in behavior as animals* [author’s emphasis] but their potential has been masked because it operates on time scales many orders of magnitude less than that operating in animals.” Others, such as Nobel Prize–winning geneticist Barbara McClintock, have called plant cells “thoughtful,” while Darwin referred to their “root-tip

brains.” Leslie Sieberth, a biologist at the University of Utah, says, “If intelligence is the capacity to acquire and apply knowledge, then, absolutely, plants are intelligent.”

What is becoming clear is that plants have an enormous capacity for computing and for making decisions about complex aspects of their environment like light, water, gravity, vibrations, chemicals, temperature, sound, and predators. They have intricate signaling systems to alert their neighbors when danger is near. They can forage and compete, as well as receive signals from other plants and then remember all of this in order to set future intentions of intelligent choice. Their large protein molecules can handle immense amounts of information, which results in an enormous capacity for complexity in communication and retention. This information becomes knowledge when it is retrieved and used to modify further behavior. As Jeremy Narby says, “Science now indicates that plants, like animals and humans, can learn about the world around them and use cellular mechanisms similar to those we rely on. Plants learn, remember, and decide, without brains.”

I offer you this fairly scientific viewpoint to illustrate how science is, finally, catching up with what many, including indigenous peoples, have known all along. Corbin Harney, an elder and spiritual leader of the Western Shoshone peoples, says, “Everything has spirit. I don’t care what it is. Water likes to talk to us. All you have to do is go sit by a creek somewhere, and it’ll start singing to you. If you listen carefully, you can hear a voice in it. It’s also important to go out and start talking to trees. If you start drumming in the forests, pretty soon you’ll see the trees begin moving with the rhythm of the drum—that’s the spirit of the tree. Trees have special powers. If you sit under a tree or lie there daydreaming, the tree will give you energy. If you pray under a tree, the tree will give your prayers energy.”

Within the shamanic tradition, shamans communicate with plant spirits in various ways, but at the core of their healing powers are the gifts given to them from the plant spirits themselves. Ralph Metzner, Ph.D., of Harvard University, notes that, “shamans say that they receive hidden knowledge directly from the sacred plants, which are referred to either as deities or as ‘plant teachers.’ There is a spirit

intelligence associated with plants and that spirit communicates [with them].”

Many years ago, while walking in the woods, I came across a most exquisitely beautiful white flower that had just emerged. In the early spring woodlands where only small shoots were beginning to peek out under the leaves this striking flower was a surprise. I was so stunned I immediately fell to my knees to observe this flower. The leaves, having an unusual shape like nothing I'd ever seen before, were curled around the flower almost as if to protect it. I scanned the area in which this plant was growing and saw that it liked a partially shaded, moist but loamy wooded spot with good drainage, as it was growing on a slope. There were only a few plants growing in a small area that was a bit off the beaten path. It seemed these plants liked to be quiet and kept to themselves. As I settled in with the warm spring sun filtering through the trees, I had such a sense of calm and peace. In my mind's eye I saw the Buddha sitting on a lotus flower in deep meditation. Of course, this flower looked nothing like a lotus blossom, but I imagined it to carry the same energy as a lotus. The delicateness of this “northeastern lotus,” like a fine piece of china or lightly spun silk, had a softness and purity of color that defined its beauty. In this moment, I found myself falling in love with this woodland treasure. After this encounter, I was like a newly smitten lover who can do nothing but long for another embrace. I read everything I could get my hands on about the plant I came to know as Bloodroot. As my relationship with Bloodroot grew I longed for a deeper connection, and then I journeyed (entered an altered state to travel to the dimension where the plant spirit lives) to the spirit of Bloodroot. I found myself deep in a forest glade where there were very bright lights, almost blinding to the eyes. This was where the spirit of Bloodroot lived. She appeared to me as a very kind older woman dressed in a shimmering silver gown. She looked almost like Glenda, the Good Witch of the South. She had what seemed like a wand, but it could also have been a walking stick. I asked her about the gifts that she offered to people. She said that her main gift was that of purity. She purified the blood, the emotions, and the spirit. She then asked me if I wanted her to enter into me, which, of course, I said, “yes.” She touched me with her staff and I fell into a state of

indescribable peace and clarity—purity of spirit. From that time on Bloodroot has lived inside me and I have used her healing gifts often. My personal use has been in a mouth rinse that I use daily. With clients I use the spirit of Bloodroot to purify where toxic thoughts or emotions could cause damage. Bloodroot called to me from the very beginning, knowing that I would be her friend and that she would become a plant ally. Now that she lives inside me, I can call on her anytime by stepping into her light essence and vibration.

PLANTS AS TRANSMITTERS OF LIGHT

For eons plants have been seen as having a particular ability to raise one's spirits. Flowers are given to people when they are ill, as an offering of courtship, or to mend an argument. Perhaps it is the oxygen they emit that enlivens our cells, or maybe it is their vibration. Russian Professor Alexander Gurwitsch made a profound breakthrough in biophysics when he discovered that plants had rays of ultraviolet light that could affect one another. His original experiment was with an onion. He pointed it, without touching the growing end of the onion, toward the side of another onion and found that, within three hours, mitosis (cell division) began. When he placed glass in front of the onion, mitosis stopped, and when he placed quartz crystal in between, it began again. Glass does not transmit ultraviolet radiation whereas quartz does. He called these rays "mitogenetic radiation" because they caused mitosis, and he showed that these rays alone changed the growth pattern of the receiving onion. Unfortunately, when these experiments were being performed in the 1920s, the climate for this type of information was not receptive. It was not until much later, when others followed through with his initial research, that his hypothesis of ultraviolet radiation coming from cells was discovered to be true. It was found that all living cells—plant, animal, and human—have "biophotons" or light rays that they emit. Fritz Popp, the German biophysicist, is a leading proponent of Gurwitsch's work, and he reports that, "the weak photon current from biological systems, which—as we know nowadays covers the whole spectral range at least from UV to infrared and which we call "biophotons"—may well suffice to take the

role of regulating the whole biochemistry and biology of life.” Plants and people have at the core of their being, within their very DNA, particles of light that can become coherent. Coherence is the ability to not break apart into points of light but to maintain a beam of light that radiates out and affects that which it comes in contact with. It is this light that carries intelligence and is the foundation for the ability of plants and people to communicate with each other “at the speed of light,” as Fritz Popp suggests.

While visiting my friend Jeannine in California, we began discussing flower essences, the imprint of a flower’s vibration infused in water by sunlight shining through it. She told me of her recent experiences with orchids. The flower essence of an orchid had helped her heal from a physical trauma that had occurred in her neck and shoulder, but only when she was able to identify and begin to work with the emotional component that was behind it. Eventually, a large transformational shift occurred on many levels for her. I have worked with flower essences for years but there was something about her story that intrigued me. I arrived home to springtime in Vermont and began preparing for my classes. Before each of my classes, I take walks in the woods and through the fields to see what plants are gracing us with their presence. This particular day I was walking along the stream, not far from the house, where I noticed a shimmering in the air. It was coming from the area where I had set up an outdoor altar a few years ago. I walked in the direction of the light and came upon several patches of exquisitely beautiful little orchids. I was stunned at their presence; I had never seen them here before. The whole area was glowing with a quality of light that one might see when light shines through mist or when early morning light reflects off water. I sat quietly near the little orchids and allowed the light quality to permeate the air around me; it was like being bathed in their shimmer. Then I remembered the story Jeannine had told me. Here were orchids growing practically outside my doorstep. What a gift! It was almost as if they appeared in this moment because they knew they were needed and they called to me with their shimmering light. Later I brought my advanced students to be with the orchids and Linda said, “It was so amazing to return to these orchids because I had seen them on another occasion while at

Sweetwater Sanctuary yet later during that same weekend when I went back to find them, I couldn't. It was like I was in a trance and the plants were in between worlds. The feeling that I had when I was with them was so transformative; it seemed that, in order to find them again, I had to be at a certain frequency. When I had gone back to find them, I was like a consumer—I had to find them to get something from them, and, as it turned out, they would have none of that. Then, when Pam led us to them, I was overjoyed. It was like coming home to an old friend; I just wept! This validated for me the layering of the worlds—this plant travels between dimensions and helps us to do that as well. Pam gave us a flower essence made from the orchid. When I have taken the flower essence I sense a shift to the next world where we are headed, the one where our true spiritual nature will flourish.” Both Linda and I experienced the high frequency of this orchid, for me in the form of light and for Linda within her own vibratory resonance. The Latin name of this fabulous flower is *Orchis spectabilis*. Yes, they are quite spectacular! ([See color plate 1.](#))

PLANT SONGS

Sound, like light, is a form of vibration through which communication can take place. Everything in physical existence has a molecular structure that vibrates, and through this vibration a resonance can be heard. Likewise, light particles that become coherent form a beam of light that has a certain frequency and can be heard. Sound occurs when two objects or energy waves come into contact with each other, such as a beater hitting a drumhead or two pulsing vibrations encountering one another. When the vibrations engage and ride on the same wave, their sound becomes harmonious and is called music. Pythagoras, who was the father of the musical scale, “recognized that music was an expression of *harmonia*, the divine principle that brings order to chaos and discord.” Fritz Popp, in his research, found that he could record the sound of biophoton emissions and that when he recorded them as points of light, there was discord. But when he allowed biophotons from two cells to communicate, the coherence that this created caused the sound to

become harmonic. From this harmony the song of the biophotons emerges. Richard Alan Miller suggests that “Superposed coherent waves of different types in the cells interact to form diffraction patterns, firstly in the acoustic [sound] domain, secondly in the electromagnetic [light] domain.” These patterns then lead to a “quantum hologram—a translation between acoustical and optical holograms.” This is found at the core of the cell in the DNA, and it is believed that these phonons and photons are responsible for an intricate communication network throughout all living cells.

Traditionally, sound has been used for communication and healing in many cultures. Jeremy Narby says, “According to the shamans of the entire world, one establishes communication with spirits via music. Angelika Gebhart-Sayer discusses the ‘visual music’ projected by the spirits in front of the shaman’s eyes: It is made up of three-dimensional images that coalesce into sound and that the shaman imitates by emitting corresponding melodies.” The Ulchi shamans of Siberia use song throughout healings that they perform, with each journey having its own unique song so that the song is the wind upon which they travel to the spirit realm. Throughout the indigenous tribes of North America, plant songs were an integral part of the healing process. It was when the plant had given you its song that you knew you had received the healing gift of the plant. In Stephen Buhner’s study of sacred plant medicine he says, “I found that many cultures believe that all plants have their own songs. It is felt that the power of Spirit, the plant, or that of healing is experienced and expressed as a song. It is believed that each plant possesses a song that must be learned; power to heal is given by the conveyance of that song.” David Winston, a carrier of the Southern Cherokee tradition, says, “We believe each species of plant (not each plant) has a song. Once you know the song the plant will tell you everything it knows. The song is the way we safely interact with the conjuring (mind altering) plants. Without the song, these plants are very dangerous to us and often wind up owning the users/abusers. The songs must be learned from the plant. If another person teaches you the song they simply do not work. On the other hand, if I learned the poison ivy song and you had also learned it we could sing it together and sure enough it would be the same song.

The songs are fairly simple and in my experience have an odd tonal scale that is very different than human songs.”

While attending a plant spirit medicine training some years ago, Natalie was taking her graduating exam that consisted of performing a treatment for a volunteer client. As she was walking to the classroom that morning to present her case, she passed a clump of woodland flowers who clearly called to her. She continued to walk until they started yelling at her. She stopped and returned to the little flowers where they proceeded to give her a most beautiful song. She entered the classroom and went straight to the teacher to tell him of the song. She was certain that this song was part of the healing that was necessary for her client. He said that she needed to follow the protocol that he had set forth and not to sing the song. A couple of ways in which success of the treatment is measured is through change in color and pulse, and when Natalie performed the series of steps to cause a change toward health and healing, nothing happened. She consulted with the teacher and he suggested another series of steps to cause a shift. Again nothing happened. She then looked at him longingly, imploring with her eyes to be able to sing the plant’s song. He gave a curt nod with his head and she proceeded with the song. Immediately the color came up in her client’s face and, after checking her pulses, they too had shifted into a harmonious state.

In another story Helena, a midwife, found herself on two occasions at births that had become difficult—where the birthing had come to a standstill. Helena found herself stepping outside where both times a large maple tree was present. She looked up at the tree and asked for help with the delivery, and each time the birth progressed immediately with positive outcomes. She noticed this at first as a coincidence, and then, the next time she asked for Maple’s help, she suggested that they work together co-creatively. This opened a doorway for her to begin a more intimate relationship with Maple, where she has now received the “mama maple song” that she co-created and uses in her deliveries. Maple has given her its healing gifts, and together their birthing song helps women labor successfully. ([See color plate 2.](#))

PLANTS—THE MOST ACCESSIBLE AVENUE TO HEALING

The experiences that I and others are having with plants are the same as those that were documented several years ago in *The Secret Life of Plants* by Peter Tompkins, in which he described the work of research chemist, Marcel Vogel: “man [and woman] can and does communicate with plant life. They radiate energy forces that are beneficial to man. One can feel these forces! They feed into one’s own force field, which in turn feeds back energy to the plant.” A further indication in Vogel’s work states: “there was an interchange, even a commingling or fusion of energies when plant and man communed.”

It is important to recognize that plants are the *most* (not the only but the most) accessible avenue to healing available to us and, when employed physically, emotionally, and spiritually, the healing is complete. Because of the vibratory quality of light and sound and the high level of intelligence of plants, their ability to communicate and heal is superior to that of any other life-form including humans. This is confirmed through new scientific evidence, ancient healing traditions, and empirical knowledge. The practice of Plant Spirit Healing is not only for people who are interested in, attracted to, or who have knowledge of plants, it is for everyone. Plant spirits’ abilities to maintain balance and harmony, within and without, is a gift that anyone can benefit from.



Three

THE TRIPLE SPIRAL PATH

I followed the moose tracks down the mountain, stepping carefully not to miss even one. Deep half moons facing each other are the hooves of ones so big and ambling, never in a hurry. It is rare this time of year to follow along, as it is usually too cold for them to sink in, or else their tracks disappear in the deep snow. This year it is fifty degrees in February and no snow, how odd, but not surprising given the changing weather patterns across the planet due to global warming. I place my hand in the track, cupping it sideways to make a moon shape. My hand fits so nicely in the grooved-out spot, made by a big fellow or maybe a gal. Where do these wanderings lead? Probably to the striped maple also known as moosewood—a favorite delicacy at this time of year. I stop at a striped maple and nibble a twig, very astringent, but there, on the back of my tongue, almost sweet. A stream of memory begins to flow of following a well-worn track with an inner map, a map my feet recognize, carrying me along to a place my body knows. I continue down the mountain, led by the moose veering now to the right, and the sound of gurgling comes to my ears—water, there's water here! Of course, we are going to water, to drink from a spring.

JOURNAL ENTRY, FEBRUARY 2006

It has been said that the spiral is the oldest symbol of human spirituality. Nature manifests in a spiraling motion, returning with new life each year. In early human times this must have seemed like a miracle, and, after too long a winter in Vermont, the song of the first robins heralding spring is indeed a miracle. The earliest known spiral was found on a mammoth-tooth amulet dating twenty-four thousand years ago. Some suggest that the double volute spirals carved on

the tooth by Cro-Magnon hunters indicate migrations of people—the comings and goings, moving from place to place with the seasons or in larger cycles—always returning to the place known to give life. Others say it is the representation of the movement of the sun through the sky and that the two connected spirals indicate winter solstice moving into spring equinox. Spirals obviously indicate movement, perhaps continuous movement of time going from birth to death to rebirth again. In the book *Symbols—Encyclopedia of Western Signs and Ideograms*, Carl Liungmann tells us that spirals also may have been an indication of water. The spiral symbol can indicate “potential energy” or “the seed of life,” or, as Monica Sjoo suggests, “the spiral is the symbolic key to immortality or the eternal process.” Jill Purse, author of *The Mystic Spiral*, says, “The spiral is a cosmic symbol—a natural form of growth, and has become, in every culture and every age, humanity’s symbol of the progress of the soul towards eternal life. As the inward winding labyrinth, it constitutes the hero’s journey to the still centre where the secret of life is found. As the spherical vortex, spiraling through its own centre, it combines the inward and outward directions of movement.”

There is a magnetic current that flows through the earth that is referred to as ley lines or “earth-force.” According to Monica Sjoo, this earth-force “causes wave motions and forms spiral patterns. The spiraling force forms an energy network all over the earth’s surface, affecting the germination and growth of trees and plants as well as animals.”

The spiraling force at the very core of our beings is the double helix of our DNA, which looks like a spiral staircase with pairs of nucleotides making steps, which are attached to two strands of sugar phosphate backbone that are the stair railings. The ladder or rope or staircase is an image throughout the shamanic world that indicates the place from which knowledge springs. I remember the first time I journeyed to the underworld; I was merely instructed to go without any indication of how to get there. As I closed my eyes and let the drumbeat alter my brain waves, allowing me to shift into a multidimensional state, I saw in front of me a golden spiral staircase that wound down into the earth. Years later I found that this was a common image described by shamans as the way into the very core

of a plant to learn of its healing properties. Similarly, the image of two snakes spiraling around each other is found not only in shamanic art but also in modern medicine's Caduceus symbol, which consists of two serpents spiraling in a double helix around a rod—the rod carried by Mercury and the physician Asclepius.

The energy movement around the chakras (energy vortices of the body) also creates a double helix spiral of downward, involutory energy movement that is spirit becoming matter, and an upward, evolutionary energy movement that is matter becoming spirit. These alternating forces of expansion and contraction are what cause the spiraling movement between heaven and earth.

The spiral is a compelling visual image we observe in seashells, leaf patterns, seed heads, and pinecones as well as in a hawk's dive for its prey, but it is even more powerful when seen as the force created by water moving downward, in wind during a storm, and the spinning of the galaxy through the universe. It seems that the spiral is fundamental in the mapping or structuring of nature, with the divine proportion of *Phi* (1.618) creating the spiral shape. Each seed in a sunflower head is exactly *Phi* from the next, and the first complete revolution is exactly the ratio of *Phi* to the next. It is the same with pinecones, seashells, and leaf patterns—all throughout nature and seemingly the universe. ([See color plate 3.](#))

THE TRINITY

The triple spiral, also known as a triskele, first appeared at Newgrange in County Meath, Ireland, around 3200 BCE. It was thought perhaps to be a fertility symbol, because the sun moves in a spiral fashion every three months, and three movements of three is the same amount of time as human gestation. In Celtic cosmology, the triple aspect was the basis for their material and spiritual existence. The triune of earth, water, and sky and their interrelations ruled the people's physical lives, while life, death, and rebirth ruled their spiritual lives. It is also suggested that the triple spiral at Newgrange acknowledges the movement of the seasons because, at winter solstice, the first rays of sun shine directly on the triskele. Looking at the older spiral and its connotation of "tribal movement"

and the ley lines of the earth, one might wonder if the ley lines are in fact spiral waves moving through the earth and if the early peoples felt their magnetic pull. Perhaps the triple spirals were maps of migrations showing where they had traveled and how they returned home again—all in accordance with the energies of the earth. Guy Underwood, author of *The Pattern of the Past* and a water dowser, suggests that the underground water veins are what animals follow, that early people did the same, and that these tracks were considered healing and holy so that by merely walking them, you maintained your health. These tracks would converge at wells or springs, and it was here that shrines and temples were built to honor the healing qualities of the water. The earth, water, and sky were integrally enmeshed with the lives of these early people so that the macrocosm was reflected in the microcosm of their bodies and the two were experienced as one and the same. Unfortunately, we have lost touch with this spiraling movement of the earth and the heavens as Monica Sjuo suggests, “Modern technologies tend to cut across the lines of the earth-force, arbitrarily and unconsciously separating human activities from the energy radiations of the earth, and so setting humans and the earth against each other in a force-field of antagonistic vibrations. The old science and technology found ways to locate and tap the earth’s natural force-flow, integrating human and earth energies, through ritual, in a strong, harmonious field.”

The trinity or triple aspect is present in most areas of our lives: the father, son, Holy Spirit; in pre-Christian times there was the triple Goddess of maiden, mother, crone and, for the Celts, the triple Goddess Brigit who was a healer, smith-crafter, and poet. The natural worlds of sun, moon, and earth; of earth, water, and sky; of germination, growth, and decomposition; of conception, gestation, and birth are relationally tied. We exist as heart, soul, and spirit in a time of past, present, and future. Heart surgeon Dr. Phillip Bhark points out that the heart is three-dimensional in that it squeezes, twists, and turns in three directions, all in a spiral fashion. The flow of blood through the heart is in a lemniscate, meaning it flows in a figure eight or infinity symbol pattern that spirals as it moves. The infinity symbol is an extension of the double volute spiral, the first spiral pattern drawn by humans.

My observation is that when something crosses your path the third time it is a knock on the door, a wake-up call, an invitation to receive a gift, a message, a lesson, or a deeper understanding. I ask my students to pay attention to things that come to them in threes, especially in their plant work. In my intensive herb classes I ask my students to work with one plant ally during the several months they are in class. They must decide which herb it is they are to work with, and I prefer they choose this plant in a nonlinear manner, meaning through a dream, a journey state, or a vision or, in other words, they let the plant choose them. I remember a particular student, Janet, who was having a difficult time discovering her plant ally. By the third month of class she still didn't know and, as she was to be working with this plant throughout, valuable time was slipping away. Janet was struggling with opening to her plant ally in a nonlinear fashion. Finally I said to her, "Just ask for a plant ally to show you its face." The next week she was pulling weeds in her flower garden and noticed a "weed" that had never been there before. She picked a leaf to see if she could identify it. Because most field guides are organized by flowers, it was difficult to identify the plant by the leaf alone. That same week she went to an acupuncturist who was helping her with menstrual irregularity and cramping during her cycles. After her session the acupuncturist gave her a formula to bring home and begin taking. The day after the treatment, she was cleaning her shelves at home and her field guide fell off the shelf to an open page with a picture of a plant whose leaves looked very similar to the one in her garden. She raced outside to compare the picture with the leaf, and, sure enough, it was the same. It was as if a light switch turned on inside her. She ran to look at the formula the acupuncturist had given her and discovered the main ingredient was the same plant! All this time she had been working so hard to "figure out" her plant ally with no results, but when she finally let go to receive her plant ally, it appeared. She went on to have a very close and intimate relationship with Motherwort and has received an enormous amount of healing from this ally.



***A triple spiral on the Newgrange entrance stone in County Meath, Ireland.
Photo by Laurie Young.***

The “spiral of life,” as the triple spiral is referred to, is a map for us to follow. When we come to understand its significance, we see that it is nonstatic, constantly moving in a nonlinear fashion and always returning us to a different place on the spiral, just as the sun returns year after year, regenerating in a constant spiral of life, death, and rebirth. We understand the spiral’s movement, which follows underground watercourses with their magnetic healing properties, and leads us to sources of the Holy in the form of springs. Guided by its pattern, we follow the triple spiral path as we navigate the waters of Plant Spirit Healing. Heart, soul, and spirit are the trinity we spiral through as we find our way back to the ancient tracks that lead us to the Holy—that which is divine and gives us our very life—with plants being our pathfinders on this journey.



Four

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

The morning star hangs in the eastern sky like a beacon to those who venture into the newness of the day just as the light begins to grow. Here in the hush of dawning nothing stirs, even the air is without a breath and the only sound is silence itself. All the other stars blink out as the sky changes hue, with only the Goddess of love left to carry the beauty of the day into my heart. A small stretch of clouds hover on the horizon, waiting to be kissed by the sun himself. That great old grandfather who toils each day, climbing to carry the ball of fire high into the sky only to trudge down again, hot and sweaty and tired from the heavy load of his own body, and then—sweet surrender to darkness that eases his daily zenith trek.³ Shades of rose fill the cotton-candy clouds with the increasing light. Phoebes, chickadees, and nuthatches begin in earnest, as if it is their song alone that will bring the sun back to warm this earth one more day. What a long, slow dawning—one to be savored like a soft lingering kiss from a lover. Now more puffs arrive seemingly from nowhere, filling the sky in anticipation of the crowning event only minutes away. And then, a shimmering on the ridgeline behind the tall pine announces the arrival as I wait in silence for the promise of this new day. With my eyes closed I gradually feel the warm radiance wash over my body followed by the first breath—the movement of air that the heat of the sun pushes before it. The fullness of the sun now upon me, my heart opens wide as I take in the first breath of the sun. Breathing, I feel my heart move into syncopated rhythm with the sun-soaked earth.

JOURNAL ENTRY, MARCH 2006

Heart disease is the single leading cause of death in the United States, claiming more lives than the combined next four causes of

mortality. Fifty-eight percent of all deaths are directly or indirectly related to cardiovascular disease, as 2,500 people die of heart disease each day or one every thirty-five seconds. Health care related to heart disease costs Americans 403 billion dollars a year with one in every three persons having some form of cardiovascular disease, according to the American Heart Association's 2006 statistics. Two-thirds of all men and women who die suddenly of a heart attack had no previous symptoms, and 65 million people have high blood pressure that is due to unknown causes in 95 percent of cases. Hopefully, the shock value of these numbers has gotten your attention, for these alarming statistics indicate that our hearts are in trouble and that the cause is more than diet and lifestyle. According to heart surgeon Dr. Philip Bhark, only half of heart attacks are caused by known risk factors like tobacco and obesity. What, then, is causing such massive heart disease? Could it be that we are dying from broken hearts? And if so, what is causing them to break? The heart is made up of 10 billion cells that synchronize in electrical wavelike patterns. Dr. Bhark says that more than half of heart-related deaths are from sudden cardiac death, which is an abrupt disruption of the electrical pattern in the heart. It seems that high levels of stress interfere with the electrical rhythm of the heart. Stress is not just a fight or flight reaction. It can also result from tension created in the body while having to process varying degrees of ever-present external challenges, thus disrupting our inner connection with the laws of nature and even affect the synchronization of our natural rhythms. Additional tension can also result from the interference of manmade electrical fields. The natural wavelike pattern found in nature is one cycle per second, which is the same rhythm as the heart's. Could it be that our loss of connection to the natural world, created by modern life, is the original wound and this primary separation is causing our hearts to break?

HEART AS THE PRIMARY ORGAN OF PERCEPTION

New research, much of which is discussed in the *HeartMath Solution* by Doc Childre and Howard Martin, shows that the heart is the major

organ of perception instead of a mere mechanical pump that circulates blood throughout our bodies. In a fetus, the heart starts beating before the brain has completely formed; therefore it is a primary organ. When the brain does begin to develop, it does so from the bottom, the location of the primal brain that houses the emotional centers, and moves upward. As Childre describes the process, “the thinking brain grows out of the emotional regions.” A beating heart is present far before the brain, and the emotional part of the brain far before the rational part of the brain. Data enters through the heart first and is transmitted to the brain, which categorizes it and sends it to the body—including the heart—so that a two-way communication constantly occurs between the heart and the brain. There are four ways the heart communicates with the brain: neurologically (the transmission of nerve impulses), biochemically (hormones and neurotransmitters), biophysically (pressure waves), and energetically (electromagnetic field interactions).

There are 40,000 nerve cells in the heart as well as neurotransmitters such as noradrenaline and dopamine (known emotional mediators), that the heart synthesizes and releases. “With every beat of the heart, a burst of neural activity is relayed to the brain,” Martin explains. “The heart senses hormonal, [heart] rate and pressure information, translates it into neurological impulses and processes this information. The neurological signals that the heart sends the brain have a regulatory influence on many of the autonomic nervous system signals that flow out of the brain to the heart, to the blood vessels, and to other glands and organs.” The signals do not stop here though; they continue to the higher centers of the brain that affect emotional processing, decision-making, and reasoning.

When atrial natriuretic factor (ANF) was discovered in 1983, the heart was officially reclassified as part of the hormonal system. Childre explains, “This hormone regulates blood pressure, body-fluid retention, and electrolyte homeostasis. [It] exerts its effects widely on the blood vessels, the kidneys, the adrenal glands, and many of the regulatory regions of the brain. In addition, studies indicate that ANF inhibits the release of stress hormones, plays a part in hormonal

pathways that stimulate the function and growth of our reproductive organs, and may even interact with the immune system.”

As the heart beats it produces pressure waves that precede the flow of blood because they move faster. This is at the foundation of what is felt when a practitioner “reads” a pulse. “Pressure waves force the blood cells through the capillaries and provide oxygen and nutrients to all our cells,” Martin describes. “In addition, these waves expand the arteries, causing them to generate a relatively large electrical voltage. The waves also apply pressure to the cells in a rhythmic fashion, causing some of the proteins contained therein to generate an electrical current in response to the ‘squeeze.’ All of our cells ‘feel’ the waves of pressure generated by the heart and are dependent on them in more than one way.”

The energetic connection between the brain and heart is created by the heart’s electromagnetic field, which is as Childre describes, “by far the most powerful produced by the body; it’s approximately five thousand times greater in strength than the field produced by the brain. The heart’s field not only permeates every cell in the body but also radiates outside us; it can be measured up to eight to ten feet away.”

Overall health of the heart is no longer measured by a steady heart rate but instead by what is known as heart rate variability. Heart rate variability is the change that occurs in the rhythms of the heart and can be seen in patterns from one beat to the next. When the rhythms are in a unified pattern or in a focused order they are coherent, and, conversely, when they are random, chaotic, or jagged they are incoherent. Childre’s research indicates that when the heart rate variability is coherent, “increased order in the autonomic nervous system produces beneficial effects throughout the body—including enhanced immunity and improved hormonal balance.” With incoherent rates, “blood vessels constrict, our blood pressure rises and a lot of energy is wasted. The health implications are easy to understand: disharmony in our heart rhythms leads to inefficiency and increased stress on the heart and other organs while harmonious rhythms are more efficient and less stressful to the body’s systems.”

The heart's powerful rhythm tends to entrain other body rhythms. To *entrain* is to "draw along with or after oneself," which is a curious definition when discussing the entrainment of the heart with the brain. When I read how the first entrainment was discovered, I fully understood this definition. It so happened that a pendulum clock-maker put all the clocks in one room and they all began to tick in harmony. This happened because the pendulum with the largest and strongest rhythm pulled or "drew" the others into synchrony so that they were all on the same wavelength. Entrainment can also happen in music so that when many different instruments are in entrainment a beautiful symphony ensues, but without entrainment there is dissonance. Among people, when entrainment occurs, there is connection and true communication. When you say, "Oh, I get it," entrainment is occurring, and it is only during entrainment that true learning and understanding can take place. When the heart, the largest oscillator or pendulum in the body, emits coherent rhythms and the brain entrains with them, "we're at optimal functioning capacity," according to Martin.

POSITIVE IMPULSES TO THE HEART

It is only recently that the heart has begun to move out of the arena of sentimentality and take its rightful place as the primary organ—the pilot, the one in the driver's seat—even though the mind still reins supreme in most circles. The exquisite discussion of the head and heart in Glenda Green's book *Love Without End* helps us to understand the head and heart relationship from the perspective of the Sacred Heart. The abilities of the mind by itself are fairly limited. It is linear by nature in that it needs two fixed points of reference in order to function. It has no understanding of infinity because its two points of reference create polarities that result in dualistic action. The mind without heart brings about abstraction, causing a lack of connection to what's real which leads to chaos. Comparatively, "the heart is a magnetic vortex through which the blessings of all essences and potentialities are received, integrated, and focused into living. Through the laws of electromagnetism, that power is converted into life energy. By comparison to the mind, the heart is a

function of intelligence based on the ultimate in simplicity and synchronicity. Its matrix is a synergistic center of awareness which perceives a unified relationship with all that is.” It is not my intention to badmouth the brain; I am suggesting there has been an overemphasis on its singular abilities, and how we use our brains is what we must reinvent. When the brain and the heart work coherently, creativity flourishes, communication flows, and healing takes place.

Interestingly, I have discovered that both esoteric texts and scientific investigations use similar emotions to help elevate the heart to its true nature of coherence and harmony. Doc Childre and Howard Martin’s research shows that the positive heart-based feelings of appreciation, love, compassion, and care “generate the smooth and harmonious HRV [heart rate variability] rhythms that are considered to be indicators of cardiovascular efficiency and nervous system balance.” There are many “core heart feelings,” but the simplest and easiest to access is one of gratitude or appreciation. Showing appreciation elicits an immediate response in your body that lessens the stress response, causes entrainment with the brain, and affects the electromagnetic field around you with ordered coherence. It is easy to come into coherence while in a state of gratitude, because your heart responds immediately to any appreciation you can elicit even if it is not about the situation at hand. This causes your nervous system to naturally come into balance, lessens the burden of stress, and frees up energy to be available for creative outlet. Gratitude is a highly magnetic state and when one is in the state of gratitude, it is returned to you easily. Many religions suggest that prayers are to be ones of gratitude instead of asking for this or that, and that by merely being sincerely grateful, blessings will come to you tenfold. Each morning as I begin my day I step outside and give thanks to the sun for its warm breath, give thanks to the earth for its sustenance, give thanks to the trees for the oxygen they provide, and give thanks to the pure water at Heart Spring that is the life blood of this land and provides the moisture needed to maintain my body. In each of these I recognize the face of the Holy—the spirit that vitalizes and gives me my very life—and I am grateful. To start the day in such a fashion sets the tone and allows appreciation to

open the doors of the heart, letting the abundance of gratitude fill the vessel within you, easing challenges and freeing your energy to co-creatively engage fully with life.

Another positive impulse for the heart is that of innocent perception. This is the state of nonjudgment in which your view is like looking through the eyes of a child. With this perspective you see the world anew with freshness and are able to be present. Judgment is a part of our make-up, because in our evolutionary development humans have needed to make quick judgments, for example, to know how fast and far we needed to run to avoid the saber-toothed tiger. Judgment is a part of our fight or flight mechanism and helps keep us safe. However, the dangers that we now face are different from those ten thousand years ago. Constant judgment that creates a stress response is more harmful than helpful. Now it is more appropriate to let our hearts be discerning, allowing ourselves to make decisions that are more holistic, with less personal attachment, and to embrace other's opinions. It is then that we experience gentleness with ourselves as well as others. When I look at Dandelion and say that I know all there is to know about it, I'm not viewing it with innocent perception. Instead I am closing the door to any other possible experience or understanding about its character or healing qualities. My relationship does not continue to grow and the subtle nuances of Dandelion's gifts pass me by. When we sit in judgment we limit our experiences of life as well as our choices.

Forgiveness is a quality that is harder to achieve than the previous two impulses but one that when accomplished is most rewarding. The difficulty lies in our responses to greed, betrayal, loss, shame, and dishonesty—actions that have hurt us to the point of locking down our hearts so as to never be hurt again. This vise on our heart causes it to atrophy, harden, and ooze power as if from a festering wound. It is also in this arena that we come up against some of our hardest challenges, ones that hold us in bondage and suck our life force. Forgiveness must begin with oneself before it can move on to others. If we can't forgive ourselves, our parents, our spouses, our neighbors, and our government then it is unlikely we could ever forgive the desperate act of a terrorist. And yet, it is this very forgiving that puts healing into motion by removing the shackles from

the heart, allowing it to invigorate with coherence leading to compassion. If you continue hardheartedness you are hurt not just once but repeatedly by the energy you expend holding on to your grudge. But forgiving, as Howard Martin so eloquently states, “releases you from the punishment of a self-made prison in which you are both the inmate and the jailer.”

During a Plant Spirit Healing class one homework assignment was to give positive impulses to the heart. Anne shared, “What I experienced when I practiced positive impulses to the heart those first days, was an incredible opening . . . [a] softening of my heart toward my stepdaughter. For several months I had been burdened with negative, judgmental, fearful thoughts and emotions around our relationship. With several days of practice, those thoughts and emotions ‘magically’ disappeared. Somehow I had let go of the heaviness of it all. I wasn’t afraid to visit her, and when I did the ‘wall’ between us was no longer there, and I was much more comfortable being with her; my negative thoughts dissipated; I was more understanding and compassionate toward her; I had become unstuck and freed, after such a long time being captive to the negativity. I could move forward in such a positive, open-hearted way. And so it remains a relationship of ease to this day. I wouldn’t say enjoyment yet, but no more struggle, certainly. Amazing!”

These positive impulses or core heart feelings are what lead to coherence in your heart rate variability, which leads to entrainment, allowing the brain to serve your heart to its fullest capacity and creating balance within and without. It is also what leads you to the Holy Heart, which is the infinity point in your heart that connects you to your soul, thus accessing spirit. This infinity point is mentioned in a verse of the Chandogya Upanishad, “As vast as this space without is the tiny space within your heart: heaven and earth are found in it, fire and air, sun and moon, lightning and the constellations, whatever belongs to you here below and all that doesn’t, all this is gathered in that tiny space within your heart.” In Christian doctrine the Holy Heart is the seat of your covenant with God as accessed through Jesus. A more secular view is that the Holy Heart is of the Earth and is the Mother of all or is the equal partner, the queen. Dr Phillip Bhark suggests that the apex of the heart could be the actual physical

location of the infinity point, since it is here that evidence of stress first appears. To me the Holy Heart is the place within that connects to without; it is greater than the sum of the parts, and yet, within each part, its wholeness is held. It is the sacred space from which I derive meaning from life and, through my service to the Holy Heart, I am connected to all life. Stephen Buhner refers to the spiritual heart as the space where, "We feel the touch of the world upon us, and those millions of unique touches hold within them specific meanings, sent to us from the heart of the world and from the heart of the living beings with which we inhabit this world. This interchange changes the quality of our lives and reminds us that we are never alone." As poet Marta Belen says, "Through the door of an open heart the universe is known" and it is here with the heart that the triple spiral path of Plant Spirit Healing begins.



Five

THE CONNECTING LINK—OUR SOUL

The south winds blow, warming the earth and carrying the robins back to hungrily look for bugs and worms thawing in their earthen homes. I watch as the robins scurry here and there. Some begin to pick up twigs to begin their nest building, preparing for the time when they will sit for long hours patiently waiting for the crack in the egg, the emergence of a scrawny long-necked baby whose mouth is nearly as big as the rest of its body, only to begin the scurrying all over again to fill those wide-open caverns. I continue with my task at hand, tapping the maple tree in order to drink the best spring tonic of all, the sap. The first few drips clang into my bucket and then form a continual stream; it will be a good run today. I place my tongue at the hole in the tree, drinking the sap as if I were suckling at the breast of a great mother. The lifeblood fills my body with the sweet essence of Maple—it's invigorating and returns vitality to my sluggish winter-mode cells. Here in this blessed moment, I am integrally connected to Maple with her sap giving me new life, new vigor to begin again the cycle of the growing season. I notice the swelling in my heart and the tears forming in my eyes at the incredible gift Maple is giving me. The sap opens a floodgate in my heart, and my "indigenous soul" pours through, remembering that spirit is the fabric from which the cloak of life is made and love is the thread that weaves it all together.

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The soul, its nature, and even its existence have been debated since ancient times with varying understandings. In Plato's idealistic world-view, the soul was "pure, unchanging, simple, invisible, coherent and eternal," whereas his student Aristotle placed the soul much more within the body as "that by which we live, feel or perceive, move and

understand.” Pythagoras saw the soul as invisible and immortal, and through the lens of his immortal soul he was able to recall many of his previous lifetimes, which he called the “circle of necessity,” it being the true nature of the soul to manifest in different bodies at different times. Most Christians see the soul as the receptacle for the Holy Spirit. It is the immortal essence of a human being that, at the time of death, is either rewarded with heaven or punished with hell by God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says the soul represents the spiritual principle of man. Even though there is predominantly a non-soul belief in Buddhism, some sects refer to “original nature,” which is another way of referring to the soul. The Bhagavad Gita of Hinduism refers to the soul as a part of God that is made up of eternity, knowledge, and bliss. Johannes Kepler, a German astronomer, was the first to bridge the mystical and the scientific by describing the soul as “a central point pouring itself forth into a circle like radial lines connected to circular waves issuing from a stone dropped in a pond. The soul radially moves out then, to the exterior of the body, according to the same laws by which the stars shine . . . and the soul communicate[s] with the body by emanation.”

The soul carries the true nature or essence of a living being and is the basis of sentience. It is this ever-present consciousness of our higher selves that has access to the sacred and can translate the sublime language of the spirits. The soul as the intermediary between the heart and spirit is the vehicle that drives us to connect with life as well as what serves as the portal to the divine. Serving in this middle place between the “two wings of the butterfly,”^{*4} it is essential for the soul to understand the workings of both the heart and the spirit, the seen and unseen, the manifest and unmanifest. As our manifest being moves toward liberation, freedom, and expansion—evolving toward spirit—our soul strives to be involved with the experience of life, always longing for the journey we choose to be in accordance with our soul’s earthly covenant. Glenda Green translates, “The soul is crying for a reality experience which only physical life can give to it. The body is crying for an immortality experience which only the soul can give to it.” To further describe the relationship between ourselves and our souls, physicist Dr. Fred Wolf says, “the soul’s fundamental purpose is the shaping of

knowledge into material form” and “anything that comes into existence did so through the soul’s desire to manifest.” He continues, “the soul communicates instantaneously with the self by collapsing its boundaries. Similarly, the self is capable of communicating with the soul by expanding its boundaries.”

SOUL LOSS

From a shamanic perspective, the soul is viewed as an entity, distinct from the physical body, that carries the vital essence of a person and has control over their physical, emotional, and mental aspects. One of the primary “jobs” of a traditional shaman is to retrieve the soul or its parts when it wanders, is frightened away, or is stolen. This soul loss is seen as a spiritual illness that has physical consequences. Because the soul is the intermediary between spirit and heart (physical body), the two become disconnected from each other during soul loss. Our vital force, necessary to fuel the inner flame, becomes diminished, thus causing our hearts to dwindle in their ability to operate in a coherent state. We lose our direction because the soul is not there in its entirety to guide us on our path. Modern day shaman Sandra Ingerman says of soul loss, “whenever we experience trauma, a part of our vital essence separates from us in order to survive the experience by escaping the full impact of the pain.” In this context it is seen as a safety mechanism for the soul, by which it can retreat from the trauma of life and “live a parallel existence in non-ordinary worlds.”

Soul retrieval is integral to Plant Spirit Healing because the entire point of the practice is to help a person become more fully who they are, living according to their true nature and walking the path they came to walk this time around. This is unlikely to be achieved if only a portion of their soul is present. I perform soul retrievals with almost all of my clients at some point in their series of treatments, especially when I feel their progress has come to a standstill or they exhibit behavior that is unexplainable after eliminating all other possibilities. In one instance, I worked with Laura for a long period of time through a challenging time of near breakup with her husband due to an engaging encounter with another. This behavior was so unlike her,

because she held firm to the belief that when you are married there is no room for intimacy with someone else. I supported her through this time, and Laura and her husband stayed together, realizing there was much to lose from a breakup, even though there were lingering shadows of the shame, guilt, betrayal, and grief that Laura felt. Laura continued to struggle, not understanding how she could do such a thing when her value system did not support such behavior. Nothing I did seemed to relieve these feelings so I decided that soul retrieval was necessary.

One late fall day Laura and I met to do her soul retrieval with the express purpose of, hopefully, getting to the source of the shame. Laura had also had encounters as a young child with adult men who shamed her by inappropriately touching her body. It was possible that a part of her soul had left at this point. As I calmed myself and was carried by the beat of the drum into the underworld, I met with helpers and asked to be taken to the part of Laura's soul that was ready to return. Instead of wandering through the nonordinary reality of the underworld, I was taken by Jaguar up, up into the heavens far from the earth. Here I felt myself disintegrate into tiny particles that became a part of everything. It was an exhilarating feeling of nothingness and oneness, existing as nothing and yet being a part of everything. Then Jaguar tugged on me and I reassembled as myself in another time and space. I was in a temple much like Delphi or Gantija on the Maltese island of Gozo. There I saw Laura dressed as a priestess in exquisitely beautiful robes, her hair woven with jewels. She had a demeanor of royalty, holding her head high and moving with the grace of a swan. I saw others coming to her for counsel and she performed divinations for them. I watched as she entered an inner chamber that was covered with beautiful silks, soft pillows, and furry sheepskins. Here was a young man waiting to be initiated into the art of pleasure, which she performed as one of her duties to initiate young men into the service of the Goddess. As this young man left I noticed a rustling behind the curtains, and from here a furtive young man stepped into the chamber. Laura rushed to the door and locked it, then turned and ran into his arms. In hushed whispers they talked of their love for each other and how and when they would be able to see each other next. A loud banging sounded

at the door and shouts were heard as the young man ran from the chamber, slipping out another way. Next I saw Laura in front of a court where she was being tried for breaking her vows and disgracing the position she held as high priestess by falling in love with an initiate. She was delivered a punishment worse than death, banishment from the temple and her exalted position. I watched as Laura was disrobed and escorted out of the court to wander aimlessly begging in the streets for food. It was here that I approached her, asking her if she would like to return to her present self. She was so consumed with shame and guilt at her betrayal that she could barely look at me. I explained to her that present-day Laura was ready to incorporate her into her life without carrying the shame forward any longer and that she was ready to embrace her priestess self. Together we returned. I blew priestess Laura into her chest and the top of her head and welcomed her home. As I told Laura about the scene at the temple she began to cry, realizing that she had so desired her priestess-self back that she had reenacted the betrayal in her present life knowing full well it was “against the rules.” One of the things priestess Laura needed in order to reintegrate was an initiation ceremony to bring her back into the fold as a high priestess. Laura and I planned a lovely initiation ceremony to be held on Imbolc, the day of Brigit, which traditionally was the day to celebrate initiates. Laura prepared by dreaming the ceremony into being, with each part carried out just as she had envisioned it. Since the ritual she says, “I am standing in my own power and speaking my truth. I have let go of shame, betrayal, and grief,” and she reports that she and her husband “are in a better place than we have ever been.”

What was different about this soul retrieval from others was that the soul part was retrieved from a previous lifetime. The soul loss was so dramatic that it bled through to the present time and then played itself out again as a way to alert the present-day Laura. This is a case of a soul part so desperately wanting to reintegrate that it created the same scenario to get Laura’s attention. It was a wake-up call that plunged Laura into deeply searching for an aspect of herself she longed for—her Goddess self.

Another aspect of our soul is what Martín Prechtel refers to as our “indigenous soul.” This is the part of our true nature that is most at home in the natural world, connected to all its living beings. Martín says, “every human being alive today, modern or tribal, primal or over-domesticated, has a soul that is original, natural, and, above all, indigenous in one way or another. And like all indigenous peoples today, that indigenous soul of the modern person has either been banished to some far reaches of the dream world or is under direct attack by the modern mind.” He continues that this “homeless soul has become a fugitive” and that “for there to be a world at all, every indigenous, original, natural thing must start singing its song, dancing its dance, moving and breathing, each according to its own nature, saying its name, manifesting simultaneously its secret spiritual signature.”

SOUL CONTRACTS

Before we are born we make contracts with those we are closest to in this lifetime, the most predominant being the ones with our primary relations, our immediate family. These contracts are what we agree to learn from each other this time around to further our soul’s evolution. The way in which these contracts are carried out is open to the free will choosing of the individuals, but the lesson does not change. It is important for us to honor our contracts so that we can continue to grow each lifetime, staying in the flow of the universal current of evolution. When we don’t honor our contracts, it becomes like a logjam slowing the flow to a mere trickle and impeding the movement of our evolutionary river.

I recently had the great good fortune to receive a Soul Source session from a man named Forrest Green. He refers to his work as Soul Source energetics and describes it as, “The soul source process recognizes that each and every person has a unique vibration, frequency, or soul ‘signature.’ This sound comes from the source of our Divine connection and is anchored in our body. When you become attuned to or in resonance with your soul ‘note,’ you are literally in harmony with yourself and all of your surroundings, resonating within the universal harmony of all creation. With this

conscious connection, self and universal knowledge, wisdom, and love become much more accessible. Within this space there is a sense of peace and power and a greater capacity to ‘listen and to know,’ to more deeply perceive or sense what is right for you on your soul path and in living your soul purpose. The Soul Source process can greatly assist an individual in attuning to their unique soul frequency signature and allowing for a more natural, healthful, and fulfilling life.”

During my session I felt as if I was in a healing chamber of light with all my helpers and guides around me as well as some I didn’t know. One of my objectives during this session was to renegotiate my soul contract with my father. We had recently had an exchange that was very disturbing to me, putting me on the verge of choosing to terminate my relationship with him. Forrest instructed me to approach my father’s soul, whom he had brought in. I wasn’t exactly sure what to do, but the spirit of Sacred Basil stepped forward and escorted me to my father’s soul. We were able to talk in a way that I have never done with him in the flesh—it was so heart to heart, well, actually soul to soul. It wasn’t that I wanted to change the contract; I just wanted the way in which he was carrying out his part of the agreement to change. I explained what I needed in order to continue a relationship with him and his soul agreed. It induced such a sense of peace in me to know I could converse with him at this level. I also was pleased to see that Sacred Basil could help with soul work. I have used Sacred Basil in other ways, which I will discuss in a later chapter, but never to assist in soul work. Forrest proceeded to work with my soul on other levels and I left feeling much lighter and very content. Since then I have been in a constant creative stream with ease of communication and abundance pouring through my life. Interestingly, shortly after my session, my Dad called and we talked with ease. I was certain our soul conversation had filtered down enough to urge him to pick up the phone. If I start to feel like I have veered off the track of my soul or can’t hear my soul “note,” I call in Sacred Basil to help me stay in alignment with my soul’s resonance.

What I have come to learn about walking the path my soul has laid for me is that this is what leads me out of exile from the source of my being, my essential true nature, and brings me home to the Holy

Heart, the place I access spirit. In this home of my heart I no longer seek love because I am love. Being love resonates with the notes of my soul song while spirit orchestrates the harmony.



Six

SPIRIT HEALING

When the corn was in the large field, the bears would come down the mountain every night to fatten themselves before their long winter nap. Occasionally a few deer would wander along the edge, nibbling the corn left after harvest, or a line of turkeys could be seen hunting and pecking. The coyotes don't find particularly good hunting in the field so they use it only as a shortcut from one edge of the woods to the other. Now it is winter, which brings the snow buntings with their white bellies, brown streaked wings, and scale-descending whistles. Suddenly one day they are all here together, practicing their acrobatics, dipping and diving across the field. In one instant, brown flashes and, with a flip, they have disappeared, white bellies against the snow, only to reappear with another tumble. The spirits of these little birds move in concert with the greater spirit essence of Snow Bunting. There are no individual stunts—only a group effort, flying together as if with one mind in total synchronistic flow. Then, as if on some invisible cue, they all settle to the ground. Is it shared telepathy that lets them know precisely when to turn so that not one wing flutters adrift, or does their group consciousness come from an ancient imprint embedded in their very essence?

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It is difficult to give a definitive explanation or meaning of spirit, as the very defining of it places limitations on that which is limitless. For our purposes here we will refer to Webster, who says spirit is “the vital principle held to give life or that which animates physical organisms.” Its etymology is from the Latin *spiritus*, meaning breath. Breath is seen to animate or give life to an organism, and it is this breath of spirit that separates a living body from a corpse. Clearly,

spirit is identified with the presence of life, and it implies intelligence, consciousness, and sentience. From an indigenous perspective there is Great Spirit as well as individual spirit existing in all living things. This suggests that there are not only individual spirits but also a greater unity—universal consciousness or what some scientists may refer to as a unified field. Anthroposophy, the study of human wisdom, furthers our understanding by suggesting that “all spirits connected form a greater unity, the Spirit, which has both an identity separate from its elements plus a consciousness and intellect greater than its elements; an ultimate, unified, non-dual awareness or force of life combining or transcending all individual units of consciousness.” This implies that plants, rocks, animals, and others of the natural world carry a portion of spirit that is of the Great Spirit or the universal spirit, and it is this vital principle that animates and gives life. Spirit then is all-pervasive on both an individual level and a greater unity level, while being intelligent, coherent, ordered, and holographic in nature. Glenda Green explains that “Spirit is in all things, around all things, with all things, and of all things. There is no such thing as spirit being isolated to a pure zone, apart from manifest creation.” Our understanding continues to broaden to encompass all life including the Earth herself. Through the Gaia Theory it is shown that the Earth is a living organism that sustains life. The very nature of the Earth is of spirit, as without the Earth and all she provides there would be no life or vitality. The Earth is a large hologram of spirit; in each of its parts the whole of spirit exists and can be experienced. Our connection to spirit then begins with our connection to the Earth and the elements that sustain life. It is here in the natural world that our connection to spirit is readily found and easy to experience because it is intrinsic to the earth. I recall a spring day several years ago when I was walking in the woods feeling the exquisite luxury of a warm day early in the season. I stopped in a sunny spot to bask in the delight of the gift of the day. I felt myself drop into a peaceful place where my mind quieted for a bit. I was aware of the solid earth underneath me holding me so firmly with the embrace only gravity can give. I took the moment to close my eyes and drift into the pleasant feeling of my calm inner environment, letting the sounds of nature settle into the places where

only a short while ago there were human voices and the distractions they bring. As I sat in that state of grace I became aware of a particular bird song and slowly opened my eyes to see who was singing to me. My field of vision seemed as if I were looking through a wide-angle lens in which I took in both the detail and the full scope of the landscape. I saw the gentle curves, the deep crevices, the jutting rocks, and the softness of the leaf-blanketed forest as well as the woodpecker holes in the tree, the tiny green shoots just emerging, the drop of moisture from the morning dew, and the light dancing across it all. As I continued to perceive with my heart a slow undulation began and I felt the movement of the Earth. Then I realized that the birdcall, the wind shifting through the trees, and the rustle amongst the leaves all resonated in rhythm with the slow wavelike motion. These seemingly individual aspects manifested in a coordinated orchestration in which each unique part had its place in the whole, creating an incredible symphony of sound, light, and movement. As I continued to observe this incredible display of coherence my perspective began to shift and I suddenly was no longer sitting as if watching a movie but I became a player in the scene. I, too, became a part of the design in this masterpiece of creation. It was as if I had stepped into a dimension where I was privy to the co-creative synchronization that goes into composing that which we call life. In this moment I knew in the core of my being that there is a conscious intelligence that lives in each of the aspects I was observing and that this dynamic vitality is part of a greater unified field of spirit.

SPIRITUAL MALNOURISHMENT

Our challenge is to not let the modern world and all that comes with it close us off from the spirit that exists all around us. We experience our environment through our senses and our electromagnetic field, with the heart being the primary organ of perception. Our electromagnetic fields are scrambled by the constant bombardment of waves from all directions: cell phones, microwaves, TV, electric lines, computers, and the alternating current in our houses, just to mention a few. Our senses are dulled by the smell of exhaust fumes

or pesticides sprayed on lawns, the sound of the constant drone of traffic or Muzak in the grocery store, the feel of concrete under our feet or the touch of synthetic clothing on our skin, the sight of skyscrapers or identical houses all in a row, and the taste of chlorine in our water or the old grease of fast food. Our hearts close down their ability to perceive because of the constant bombardment from images of death and destruction throughout the world, the culturally accepted prejudice of mind over heart, and the shattering we experience through the misguided understandings of love that our society confuses with sex. When our exposure is constant over long periods of time a kind of forgetfulness, or what Martín Prechtel calls “amnesia,” sets in. We forget what it is like to be connected to the earth and to the spirit that is inherent in every plant, every tree, every rock, every stream, every mountain, and every animal. Because it is this spirit that gives us our very life, when we are cut off from it withering occurs and spiritual malnourishment begins. It is the lack of interaction and connection with nature as the source of our sustenance—partly caused by the anthropocentric view—that allows nature to be seen as a commodity to be used and thus usually abused. Spiritual malnourishment has reached epidemic proportions in the Western world, with the rest of the world following close behind as modernity and globalization continue to encroach with their life-killing ways. The commodification of nature is a direct reflection of our separation from our own true nature, the aspect of ourselves that knows our connection to spirit through the Earth, and this blatant disregard for the Earth and her sustaining ways indicates a great disease is among us.

This separation from spirit causes stress reactions in our bodies, because our bodies know that spirit is the difference between life and death. Biochemist Bruce Lipton explains, “When environment is perceived as safe and supportive the cells are preoccupied with growth and maintenance of the body. In stressful situations, cells forego their normal growth functioning and adopt a defensive protection posture. Prolonged stress interferes with required maintenance of the body.” Our bodies have evolved for millennia with the natural world, and it is wild food that our cells recognize as that which optimally nourishes. It is the structure of moving fresh

water that surrounds each cell and thus nourishes it. It is the smell of moist earth in the spring that tells our cells the shift in the cycle is here, and it is time to change our metabolism; likewise the sound of geese flying south in the fall signals our cells to shift into wintertime mode. The natural world is what our bodies recognize as safe and supportive, thus causing maintenance and replication of cells. Our bodies do not recognize processed foods; therefore, they have to work harder to digest and assimilate any minor nutrients that may be derived from such food. Stress is not just the fight-or-flight reaction that produces adrenaline, it is also the added hard work of digesting, filtering, pumping, eliminating, and integrating what is perceived as foreign to our systems. It is extremely detrimental to our overall health to continue in stressful life patterns that lead to lack of coherence, erratic signalling, depleted immunity, and low vitality—all of which rob us of the most important nutrient of all: spirit.

Spiritual malnourishment is the beginning of spirit loss, which presents itself as a kind of melancholy that can progress to depression and, in some cases, can lead to suicidal tendencies. When the inner flame of spirit is burning low and continues to be dampened by our attitudes, beliefs, environment, and lifestyle, it is important to feed that flame instead of letting it dwindle to a mere ember. This dangerously low inner light can be the precedent to terminal illness. The first thing I do for folks suffering from spirit loss is get them out on the Earth where they can take in the source energy of the sun and the Earth. I have them eat wild foods, drink water from a spring that comes straight from the ground, and listen to birdsong. I also work with the plant spirit of St. John's Wort to add fuel to the inner flame of spirit. Many cases of spirit loss come from limiting belief patterns that suggest we either don't deserve to or can't walk in the fullness of our radiance. We damp down our flame to be what we perceive as "normal." Nelson Mandela paraphrases Marianne Williamson when describing this syndrome in his inaugural speech of 1994. "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve

the world. There is nothing enlightening about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us, it is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

The plague of spiritual malnourishment is the single most devastating crisis humanity faces. This spiritual crisis is the root of environmental degradation, deteriorating health, massive consumerism, social injustice, and wanton war. It is the imperative of our time to evolve in consciousness to a level of spiritual understanding that recognizes the spirit in all life and engages in a reciprocal nurturance.

RELIGIOUS OVERLAY

Various religions refer to spirit as God or an aspect thereof, so many people's immediate reaction to the word "spirit" is one of religious connotation. What I find in religion in general is that the structure of religion tends to limit the spirit that is at its core. The foundation of rules and regulations that underlies the structure of the house of religion and the trappings of how to get to heaven become far more important than the spirit that dwells in the house so that, in some cases, the house seems vacant. Glenda Green interprets, "While structure is necessary to physical existence, it results only in isolation, frustration, judgment, and arrogance when given power in the spiritual realm. This has been a recurring problem within organized religion, and many spiritual empires have failed simply because they were based on structures of the mind and human authority." What is important to remember is that religion came about because of spirit not the other way around. The fabric of one's beliefs that is woven into a cloak of religion is a useless garment without spirit to wear the cloak. Pastor Shirley Oskamp recognizes that "spirituality is the life breath of religion and must be a part of it" and that you can't go to church each week and "expect easy answers or pray in this way and you'll be all better. Living a spiritual

life is about taking responsibility and taking action,” engaging with spirit in all its many forms.

In working with spirit within and without, we must let any confinements imposed by religion fall away and not get stuck in the orthodox view of spirit that ingrained religion may impose. What is necessary is a new paradigm, a new story of spirit, that, regardless of any religion, is available to us at all times, connecting through our soul and manifesting by way of our heart.

SPIRIT AND ENERGY WORKING TOGETHER

I have been asked many times why I refer to my work as plant spirit healing instead of plant energy healing. I know that it would probably be more widely accepted if I changed my terminology, as energy healing both in a traditional modality like acupuncture and in the newer versions like Barbara Brennan’s “Hands of Light” have become quite commonplace in the alternative health world. I have searched not only my heart for the answer to this question but also scientific theories and ancient philosophies to gain an understanding of the differences and the similarities between spirit and energy. Energy in scientific terms refers to the ability of a physical system to do mechanical work. It is the fundamental concept pertaining to the ability for action. There is only one kind of energy, and it can neither be created nor destroyed even though there may be different manifestations of that energy in the form of light, heat, movement, and sound. These various manifestations appear in electromagnetic fields, which can be measured. The question then could be asked, “Is spirit the same as the energy that moves through an electromagnetic field?” From the religious point of view one would say that spirit is of God, which is more than energy moving through an electromagnetic field and may be why folks are uncomfortable with the use of the word. From a scientific point of view, it has only been recently that energy as a force existing in a unified field is being discussed, and, even though the word *spirit* has not entered scientist’s vocabulary, it is on the verge of recognition in connection to this life force.

Scientist James Oschman says, “Mechanists hold that life obeys the laws of chemistry and physics, and will ultimately be totally explained by those laws. In contrast, vitalists have historically held to the belief that life will never be explained by normal physics and chemistry, and that there is some kind of mysterious ‘life force’ that is separate from the known laws of nature and that distinguishes living from nonliving matter. This concept is ancient and universal, appearing in some form or another in many different cultures and religions.” Similarly, Gita Elgin, Ph.D., says, “Energy medicine seeks to unblock, harmonize, and balance the bodily energies. Here the focus is less on correcting or compensating for specific physical conditions and circumstances, and more on restoring and enhancing the free flow of life force.” The life force, traditionally known as Chi or Qi, is fundamental to Chinese culture. Etymologically the ideogram means “steam rising from rice as it cooks.” This may refer to the breath or air extending to life force or spiritual energy, the current understanding of Qi. Some, mostly Buddhists and Taoists, believe that matter actually arises from Qi, which would insinuate that Qi is of spirit. These ancient cultures tend to see spirit and energy as being integrally connected with life force, that which animates—one of the original definitions of spirit. Energy is the action that is directed by the sentience of spirit. Implicit in my choice of words, plant spirit healing instead of plant energy healing, is that the vital principle of spirit within plant consciousness guides the energy in its movement.

THE VEHICLE OF SPIRIT IN THE BODY

The body makes what is known as the “spirit molecule,” which is believed to be produced by the pineal gland (from *pinus* because it looks like a pinecone), the gland that is responsible for the management of light in our bodies. N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT) is the only endogenous (produced in the body) chemical that has been found to have psychoactive properties. According to Rick Strassman, M.D., “the pineal gland produces psychedelic amounts of DMT at extraordinary times in our lives,” such as birth, death, and orgasm. DMT is also released during high stress times, making me wonder if this is our body’s way of helping us to be in touch with spirit on a

very physical level when we most need it. DMT itself is not of spirit necessarily, but it is the vehicle through which we may access spirit. It is also important to note that DMT can cause psychotic states in some individuals, which leads me to believe that the body reacts differently to different kinds of stress. The stress of an orgasm is different than the stress of processing toxins or surviving a high-powered job. It seems we have a built-in mechanism to help us reach spiritual realms and yet that very vehicle can plunge us over the brink if we are driving down the wrong road.

A WORD ABOUT HEALING

The thoughtful reasoning for the use of the word *healing* instead of *medicine* is the inherent implication of regeneration and repair leading to restoration. Medicine is the use of therapies and substances (usually chemical) to heal disease. It is concerned primarily with pathology instead of well-being. Paramahansa Yogananda says, "Medicine has its limitations, life force has none." When we work with spirit to direct the life force, the level of vitality is limitless. Plant Spirit Healing is the use of the vital principle or spirit of plants to direct the life force to fill the space in order to restore balance, well-being, and vitality. So it is that Plant Spirit Healing helps us to be more fully who we are, living an inspirited life according to our own true nature.



Part 2

The Practical Application of Plant Spirit Healing

As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world—that is the myth of the atomic age— as in being able to remake ourselves.

MAHATMA GANDHI



Seven

THE DREAMTIME OF PLANTS

What an exquisite day for mid-November, soft warm air and lots of sun! Mark and I wandered up the stream meandering up the east side, not a way we normally go. We arrived at a spot where we could look down on three curves of the stream. The breathless quiet of this place settled into our entire beings. In silence we sat, content to just be. Then up the next rise, dark shadows moving and scratching until the light reflected and there, like old hunched-over men with shiny armored feathers, turkeys were pecking along. Stillness again, then we saw the sleek grey movement of a soft-eyed doe, quietly nibbling her way down the mountain. We began to follow, finding her tracks as she crossed the stream. We lost sight of her as she slipped into the dark green, brown, and gray landscape. Wandering down the mountain, we stopped at the falls to leave an offering—prayers of gratitude for the blessings of the day. We picked our way through the forest nibbling wintergreen berries, delighting in their fresh flavor. On the slope just above the stream we dropped down on all fours, putting our lips to the water bubbling up from the ground. Is this a dream, this sweet surrender to the bliss of simple presence with the wild? Perhaps my love for this green earth, this sweet water, these breathing trees and bright red berries makes this daydream real. Like Thoreau says, “Love is an attempt to change a piece of dream world into reality.”

JOURNAL ENTRY, NOVEMBER 2006

The last forty years have seen a continual rise in people’s interest in traditional cultures that engage with the unseen forces of nature and the spirit beings that inhabit the dreamtime dimension. This fascination with what is called shamanism is occurring in the

Western world and seems to be a response to our malnourished spirits that long for connection with the greater web of life and the meaning that comes from that connection. This movement toward spirit is perhaps an evolutionary one, or maybe it is a return to our birthright. Our very DNA has encoded in it a memory of a time when we all lived close to spirit and its individual manifestations. This form of shamanism, in which we all have access to spirit in our everyday lives, is what Eliot Cowan, author of *Plant Spirit Medicine*, refers to as “household shamanism.” This is not an appropriation of an indigenous culture’s customs or beliefs, but rather is a natural progression of human evolution to live within a spiritual ecology. People working and living in this way are not shamans but instead are those who practice in a shamanic way. This understanding of the term *shamanic* recognizes spirit as the unified whole while at the same time acknowledging the unique individual expressions of the spirits. This way of working with spirit is not a system of faith or a religion but is based on one’s personal experience with the spirits. Even shamans of the Ulchi, who are from the Amur River area of Siberia popularly regarded as the birthplace of shamanism, are instructed directly from the spirits. As Roberta Louis tells us in her article in the magazine *Shaman’s Drum*, “Once a person is selected by the spirits to be a shaman, the spirits themselves provide the bulk of the training. Each shaman has his or her own helpers, and it is those helping spirits that—through dreams or auditory messages—teach the shaman how to play the drum, what songs to sing, and how to heal.”

One of my interns, Wendy, had an experience with Striped Maple during which she was given clear instructions on how to scan a person’s energy by superimposing a Striped Maple leaf over their body. The veins in the leaf would correspond to the energy meridians, and, where the energy needed to be cleared, a red dot would appear. She would then ask Striped Maple to remove the energy blockage, which was then taken and stored in the bark of the tree. Interestingly, she was initially given a ruby ring from the spirit of Striped Maple and, while visualizing this ring, she called on the spirit of Striped Maple. This is an example of the tree spirit teaching her how to call him in, how to track the energy, and how to remove the

energy blockage not unlike, perhaps, how Siberian shamans were instructed by their spirit helpers. ([See color plate 4.](#))

The following is another student's experience of instructions given for her personal healing: "One beautiful, sunny July day I gathered all I needed to make Daylily flower essence: chair, journal and pen, magnifier, clear glass bowl, spring water, and medicine rattle; I then settled myself for an afternoon with the flowers. Remembering all that I had been taught, I tuned in with all my senses to Daylily, examining her thoroughly in every detail. Eventually, I was ready to ask her for her plant spirit medicine. Journeying with my guide, I reached a large stand of Daylilies with a glowing white and orange ball—the Spirit—in the center of them. I respectfully asked for her gifts, but received no response. At the suggestion of my guide, I offered her water from a nearby stream, but still no reply. I had no idea what to do next, so I looked again to my guide. He suggested I get off the chair and move onto the ground and nestle into the plants. I stopped rattling and did so. Once again I asked for her gifts. This time she responded by saying, 'no.' *What? No?* After I had spent most of an afternoon working up to this point, I was refused by a plant? (Notice that little prejudice about who's more important? Glad to say I'm smarter than that now.) Daylily told me I was not ready for her gifts. I kept questioning, trying to find out what I was supposed to do. For me, she said she is about finding ecstasy and joy in my sexuality. She told me I needed to work on my forgiveness issues around sexuality. She told me to journey to some past lives to discover what sexual issues I may have brought forward, then come back and see her. She told me it was not for my higher good to work with her right now. On my return to waking reality from the dream journey state, I stopped at the place of the Wise One who holds my sacred space when I journey. I must admit I whined about being rejected saying, 'I thought I had worked on my forgiveness issues.' This beautiful Old One chuckled and gave me suggestions as to which of my guides might be best to work with me on the past lives journeys and what sort of questions I should ask. At the time, I was quite chagrined at not being able to complete my goal of the day, but, on reflection, this is one of my most powerful and favorite journeys. First of all, it was certainly not my wishful thinking, but a

true message. I had a totally different agenda from the one that developed. Secondly, it gave me a great feeling of comfort to know that the spirit of Daylily wanted to work for my highest good. Many good things have come from that journey, including several past life journeys and a deepening of my work with the Wise One.”

In this encounter with Daylily, Melody was given specific instruction for her own personal healing and was also aided by one of her guides. Her instructions were clear that she could not progress to the level she would like until some foundational work was in place.

THE SHAMANIC NATURE OF PLANTS

Plants, being highly intelligent beings, are not confined to affecting only the physical body with their chemical constituents. Plants respond to human emotions, thoughts, intentions, and prayers, as shown in the groundbreaking work of Cleve Backster, a lie-detector specialist. Plants were hooked up to a lie detector, and, when thoughts of harm or love were directed at them, there was a response strong enough to register. No action was necessary—just the thought. A particular plant also was able to pick, from a group of people, which person had caused harm to another plant. Distance or barriers to electromagnetic waves were not deterring factors. The plants were able to feel across time and space. This level of perception is very shamanic in nature, in that it opens the doors to a greater reality, one that is beyond the physical dimension. Plants actually have a greater capacity than humans to exist in a simultaneous reality because the distractions of human activity and the ensuing disconnection from source do not hamper them.

When entering into the spirit dimension, an altered state of consciousness is required. Many people believe that in order to work in a shamanic way with a plant, the plant must have psychotropic (mind altering) properties. This, of course, is one way to enter the spirit dimension of a plant, but it is certainly not the only way—it is actually more often the exception than the rule. Entering into nonordinary reality—the reality that is simultaneous with the ordinary reality we experience—is a distinguishing feature of shamanic consciousness. Oftentimes this dimension is called the dreamtime

and can be experienced as a nighttime dream, a daydream, or a dream journey.

The following is Linda's story of entering the dreamtime. "While taking photos for Pam's book I made a connection with a Maple tree. I knew when I shot the image that it was important and I had recorded something powerful. However, I was still gathering images and storing them away for the winter months to be edited later. This particular image waited patiently for me to rediscover it.

"During our classes that summer I was almost overwhelmed by the massive amount of materials we were absorbing and the many encounters and experiential processes Pam was exposing us to. Coupling this with the overflowing abundance of her garden and my huge task (to capture the essence of the spirits of the plants abiding there), I realized it was important to just allow myself to be in the moment and see where I was led rather than trying to consciously decide where to focus my attention.

"In September I was beginning to edit some of the images, looking for new images that I might include in an upcoming show at the Lifebridge Foundation's retreat center in Rosendale, New York. One particular image, the one from the Maple tree, kept calling me, and I began working with it. It seemed to have a life of its own. The process of working with the emerging image was long and deep, flowing into a most commanding image. Its strength possessed a fierce grace, making me reluctant to include it in the show; it seemed almost scary in its fierceness. I showed the finished print to friends who had a strong reaction. They looked at it and suddenly jumped backwards with excited exclamation. When I asked them about their impressions they spoke about the power of this being, his commanding presence and essential energy, which echoed my own feelings. I had made a connection to a powerful energy on the land Pam stewards.

"Shortly after encountering 'Bark Being' I returned to Vermont for our last weekend of classes. We were vision questing during this time— my first experience of this nature. We were instructed to find our spot, a place that resonated for us, and prepare ourselves for a day alone in nature. I chose a place at the foot of a very old and

gnarled tree beside the rushing stream that runs down the mountain. Throughout the day I drifted between sleep and waking. I moved through many experiences: being with the water rushing down the mountain, being rooted in the earth, slowing down, feeling the heat of the sun, connecting to air through my breath and lungs. I digested the meaning of being rooted in the earth. I felt myself to be the tree my back was leaning against, consciously breathing oxygen into my lungs, knowing that it was the exhalation of this tree being and that it, in turn, was breathing in the carbon dioxide I was breathing out. We were linked. I found myself slowing down, entering a different energy cycle, experiencing a different perception of time and space and expanding outwards.

“That afternoon was filled with a flow of ideas that support the core of my work as a co-creative artist. I experienced a flow of time that was outside of my everyday experience; a place I can return to whenever I choose. With that tree I stepped into another realm (or, you could say, I stepped out of my limited vision) and into the reality that exists simultaneous to our everyday one—what the shamans call the dream-time. The tree that gave me this gift turned out to be Maple, whose energy was a part of the same continuum that gave me the image of Bark Being.” ([See color plate 5.](#))

ENTERING THE DREAMTIME

Nighttime Dreams

Gaining insight and information through the dream state has been practiced in many cultures throughout the ages. Asclepian dream sanctuaries, where healings took place, were prevalent throughout the Mediterranean during 1600 BCE–400 BCE. The Enarees—Scythian soothsayers and diviners—were famous for their spirit travel in the dream state and could be found in the dream temples of Anariake. The Aborigines of Australia have an entire culture built around the Dreamtime. Tony Crisp in the *New Dream Dictionary* describes, “The experience of Dreamtime, whether through ritual or from dreams, flowed through into the life in time in practical ways. The individual who enters the Dreamtime feels no separation

between themselves and their ancestors. The strengths and resources of the timeless enter into what is needed in the life of the present. The future is less uncertain because the individual feels their life as a continuum linking past and future in unbroken connection. Through Dreamtime the limitations of time and space are overcome.” From a shamanic point of view, the dreamtime dimension is where much information is gathered, whether it is for the healing of another, understanding one’s own direction, or for bringing balance to the earth.

Many years ago I had a nighttime dream in which my brother-in-law came to me in my dream. In waking life he had Lyme disease. In the dream, I saw dark spots of energy throughout his aura—the energetic field around his body—and I knew that this was where the illness was residing. I took out a hollow tube and began sucking all the dark energy out of his aura. I remember having to be careful not to suck any of it into me. I then blew through the tube to empty out all the contents into a hole I had dug in the earth. I didn’t understand this dream until a couple of years later, when I was traveling with a group led by healer and teacher Rocio Alarcon in the rainforest of Ecuador. That evening the Chachi village had planned for three shamans to come and do healings for us. My daughter was chosen for one of the major healings. The shaman took out a goat horn and sucked on the back of her head at the base of her skull. He pulled out of the horn black stringy stuff that he then burned. Suddenly I realized that I was witnessing exactly what my dream had shown me—a way in which to bring healing to my brother-in-law. This was a shamanic technique of removing energy that preceded illness or perhaps disease that had already manifested on a physical level.

Lucid dreaming is a state of dreaming in which you are aware that you are dreaming and you can direct the dream. This can be a form of shamanic dreaming, through which you can visit particular plants and ask for instructions on how to heal with them, or you may set the intention to go into the illness of a person and be shown what they need for healing. Lucid dreaming is more colorful and seemingly more real than waking time; it is more fantastic, more memorable, and can even be described as a spiritual experience—all of which is shamanic in nature. The scientific community has recognized lucid

dreaming as verifiable and continues to explore this dreamtime phenomenon.

Daydreams

Daydreaming is another way of accessing the spirits of the plants and is the most natural avenue to other dimensions, yet it is the least commonly used. Unfortunately, in Western culture daydreaming has become demonized. If you daydream you are considered lazy and, in our modern production-mode society, this behavior is considered one of the worst of all evils. Christina Frank of WebMD says, “But daydreaming can be beneficial in many ways and, ironically, can actually boost productivity. Plus, it’s something almost everyone does naturally. Psychologists estimate that we daydream for one-third to one-half of our waking hours, although a single daydream lasts only a few minutes.” Because daydreaming is not dramatic like the experiences provided by psychotropic plants and has been given a bad rap by society, it isn’t an arena that has often been considered part of shamanic practice. However, it is considered to be an altered state because it is akin to a meditative calm during which one’s brain drops into alpha waves. The conventional view of daydreaming is that one is oblivious to his or her external environment and instead is occupied in a fantasy reality. Shamanic daydreaming is more expansive—you are aware of all that is going on around you and, at the same time, of existing within another dimension where the spirits live. In this middle world where physical and spiritual realities merge, one realizes that instead of two separate realities, they are part of the same unified field in a holographic universe.

One day, while sitting by the stream and contemplating what felt like a dire financial situation, I asked for a plant to come to assist me. I felt myself slip into a daydream, and imagined what it would feel like to be financially secure. My gaze wandered to Jewelweed, growing most abundantly along the stream. The windless day found one stalk waving energetically at me. I picked one of its leaves and put it in the water, watching as the silvery sheen sparkled. I played with the leaf in the water, aware of its fluid motion, and allowed my consciousness to move into the daydream of Jewelweed. Suddenly I was walking through silver birch and other silver plants onto the

grounds of a silver castle. There was a paradise of beautiful gardens, with jewels in the rocks, waterfalls, and a large pool with a silver fish swimming in it. The fish stepped out of the pool and became a silver Queen. She said, "I am only silver in my fluidity and so you must stay fluid." She took my hand and led me into the water where I swam through silver water, becoming like the fish. I stepped out of the water and she poured silver fluid into me through the top of my head, reminding me of the abundance in my life. She urged me to pour fluid silver into myself so as not to forget abundance. As I became aware of the leaf in the water, I again felt as fluid as the leaf and realized how stuck I had become in a negative thought pattern about money and how it was binding up my energy. A few days later I received an unexpected check in the mail thanks to the help of Jewelweed. Now I carry Jewelweed with me as a constant reminder to stay fluid and appreciate the abundance in life.

On another occasion while in California I sat with Rosemary, a plant I know on one level but had never had the opportunity to be with when blooming. My stream-of-consciousness daydreaming went like this: "Flowers, blue and lavender cups with indigo stripes like antenna—pistil is completely indigo, full of busy bees. There's a dog roaming the hillside to the North, birds are singing, smells antiseptic. I'm walking on a dirt path with sandals in a white robe, like in Greece. Voices are calling; a woman is running, calling to the dog. Tastes very menthol, numbing—lots of saliva, feels so soft and sticky. There's a sensation in my head, behind my eyes. My third eye opens, stepping out of amnesia; I begin to remember with a fresh perspective. A bird swoops down making a loud call—a validating sign. The wind comes down the hill, lots of swirling air, oh so Vata. Sounds of a clanging metal wind chime—lots of air, heady, metallic, metal element maybe. A lofty presence like an angelic being with gossamer wings floats by. There's that dog again, barking loudly. Do I need protection from that dog? Fear rises, and the wind brushes Rosemary against my leg. Of course, Rosemary. Heart of Rosemary protects, soul of Rosemary remembers, spirit of Rosemary connects to higher self." This daydreaming is an example of the interweaving of dimensions with Rosemary. I was aware of Rosemary through my senses by seeing the colors of blue, indigo, and purple or lavender—

all upper chakra colors—and by tasting the numbing on my tongue, indicating antibacterial properties, and by smelling the antiseptic quality, all leading me to assume Rosemary is helpful to the immune system. By feeling its stickiness, I became aware that there are lots of volatile oils, an attribute of a highly medicinal plant. My feeling sensation was in my head, specifically in my third-eye chakra. The external world and all that was going on around me gave many indications about Rosemary's essential nature. The dog came from the direction of the North, which is the direction of the wisdom keepers, the elders, and the dreamtime. The air swirled around and all was so heady, indicating the Vata dosha. Then there was the metal chime clanging loudly and the very lofty, angelic presence, so much like the spiritual nature of the metal element. The flash of a possible time in Greece—was this the remembrance aspect of Rosemary? The dog was such an interesting addition to the daydream of Rosemary. It seemed to be an intruder, one I was a bit fearful of, who turned out to be lost. When we get lost in our amnesia or need protection, Rosemary is here to help us. You may say the wind often blows, the lost dog was coincidental, or I felt Rosemary in my head because I didn't sleep well the night before. Why was it at that particular time the dog appeared and on that particular day the wind blew hard and on that particular day I chose to sit with Rosemary? When I stepped into the daydream of Rosemary it was not just the plant with which I was engaged. I encountered an entire landscape of connection that contributed to the daydream of Rosemary, with each component having significance and adding meaning to the whole experience. Stephen Buhner, in his book *Secret Teachings of Plants*, refers to the experience of meaning in our environment as direct perception of nature. He says, "As we deepen our capacity for direct perception, we find that all things are aware, that all are looking at us, that all are communicating with us. And these communications of meaning go deep. They literally are communicative touches of living beings, much more than mere informational bits encoded within words." Psychologist William Braud's work showed that our natural state of being is one of relationship not only with each other but also with our surroundings. It has clearly been shown that the subatomic particles we are made

up of cannot be separated from the space and particles that surround them. Physicist David Bohm, a leading proponent of the holographic view of the universe, sees the deeper reality, the implicate order—what we would call the dreamtime—as the primary reality that gives birth to our more explicate or physical reality and that the two realities or orders are constantly flowing, blending, and exchanging with one another. Even though on an explicate order level there is seeming separateness, Bohm maintains that, “everything in the universe is part of a continuum, a seamless extension of everything else.” We live in a universe where all things are in relation to each other and operate in simultaneous dimensions, one being the reflection of the other. This vast interconnected web we call life is not filled with coincidence or accidents but with relationship and meaning. Everything we encounter we are in relationship with. When we have intention in our environment we can engage in a coherent way as our hearts and minds integrate the rhythms of our surroundings, creating syncopation of matching wavelengths.

Dream Journey

The dreamtime journey is another way of entering into an altered state to access the dimension where the plant spirits live. This is usually accomplished by the use of musical instruments, chanting, or songs. Michael Harner, author of *The Way of the Shaman*, maintains that the use of a drum beating at 220 beats per minute creates altered brain waves, and that this is a primary method used throughout shamanism to enter into the dreamtime world. Piers Vitebsky, author of *The Shaman*, says, “The experience of the spirit realm in shamanism is closely tied to music. In particular, there is a powerful connection between trance and the rhythmic regularity of percussion instruments. In virtually every region where shamanism is found, the drum is the shamanic instrument par excellence.” To enter this type of dreamtime, relax by breathing slowly, deeply, and rhythmically while listening to the repetitive beats of a drum, preferably played live by another person. Set a very clear intention for your journey, one where you are visiting the underworld (or above world) to meet with your guide who will then take you to where the

plant spirit lives. If it is your first time going on a dreamtime journey, it is helpful to use your imagination. I guide my students in visualization by suggesting they place themselves in a canoe for crossing a lake, to walk down the beach after arriving on the shore of the lake, and then to walk down a woodland path that turns off from the beach. Coming upon a rock outcrop where there is an opening to a cave with a golden spiral staircase that goes deep into the earth, I suggest descending the staircase to arrive in the underworld. Going downward in a spiral fashion seems to enhance the ease with which you enter the dreamtime. In shamanic art you often see images of spiraling vines or snakes that correspond to the spiral of our DNA. When we spiral, we go deeper into ourselves—all the way to the core of our light essence where memory is held and space and time do not exist. Once you have entered the large cavern, the walls are covered in crystals that emanate light connecting you to the biophotons at the core of your DNA. Here you meet with your Wise One, your higher self or inner guide who resides inside you and whom you always have access to. I find it is important to connect with the Wise One within, as this can be one of your most important helpers and guides. Because this dimension is not one in which you live, it is always a good idea to have a guide to help you negotiate in this other dimension. It's like going to Detroit without a map or directions; most likely, you will get lost. Many people have animal guides that help them, but, as you become proficient with plant allies, you will find there is a specific one or maybe two that can help you in the dreamtime journey. Now that you have arrived in the underworld, met with your Wise One and called upon a guide, you ask to be taken to where the particular plant spirit you want to work with lives. It is important at this point to continue on in the dreamtime journey with innocent perception, that place of no expectation. Dreamtime journeys can come in many different forms, and it is essential for you to stay open to how it comes to you. So many people expect wide-angle screens in technicolor with surround sound. This is one way but not usually the most predominate. You may feel things, sense things, see only colors and shapes or hear words in your head. You may be in an otherworldly place or someplace quite familiar. The entire experience may not make sense in the moment, but, as time

passes, you find that it becomes more clear and understandable. You allow the experience to unfold, gaining insights and perhaps even receiving the healing gifts of the plant spirit. When your journey is over (drumming usually lasts twelve minutes), you return to ordinary reality the same way that you went into the underworld.

Many times the spirit of the plant comes in some kind of a personification like the Celtic-looking priestess of Eyebright or the playful sprite of Daisy; other times, it is an animal-like creature like the giant pink-purple butterfly of Red Clover. It can also be an energy essence, like the brightly shining star of Borage or the large oval yellowish-white energy field of St. John's Wort, or even an energy pattern like the cross-stitch of Cedar. My representations may differ from yours, but each carries a visual image and a feeling sense, which is crucial to calling the plant spirit to you when you need it. The key is to clearly identify the plant spirit in some way.

While in Montana one summer working with Brooke Medicine Eagle, I had the great fortune to meet with Fireweed. After I'd sat with Fireweed at length, Brooke drummed for me so I could go on a dream journey. I went down the spiral staircase and met with Lela, my Wise One. She instructed me to go to the softness to meet the spirit of Fireweed. I was not sure how to do this so I asked Lela for her help; she said for me to go to the softness of my heart. Lela then took me in her arms and held me. I found myself floating in velvety softness and at the same time I could feel the heat of passion rising up my spine. I heard a voice calling me and as I looked around I saw a beautiful redheaded Irish woman dressed in luscious soft silk. She introduced herself as Fiona, the spirit of Fireweed. She had an incredible mix of passionate, powerful energy combined with softness and kindness. She held these two energies in a complementary balance. She explained that before one comes to passion they must first experience compassion. Fiona suggested I soften my hard edges, and, through this softening, my heart would mature into passion. She invited me to step inside her where I felt the heat in my heart, melting barriers. This particular journey was one where I received personal assistance. With time and through my deepening relationship with Fiona, I began using Fireweed to help others work with their hearts. Fiona has become one of my closest

allies. I believe it is because I so clearly feel and see her presence that I have such easy access to her, and each time I visit with her our connection grows stronger.

These three different aspects of the dreamtime are all ways to access the unified field of spirit where the individual natures of the plants are approachable. In these nonordinary reality states we are able to tap into the soul of the plant who translates the language or wave interferences of spirit. In scientific terms, wave interferences are how all life communicates; they can occur in a nonlocal way, meaning across distance without a force or charge of energy. In other words, we can communicate with plants without them being present, especially when we enter into an altered state of receptivity and allow ourselves to come into sync with the wavelength of the plant.



Eight

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PLANTS

The brilliant sunlight dances on the constant movement of the water rushing down Marble Mountain. The swirls of water resound over stone, each striking a chord but together creating a harmony of singing eddies. As light dancers skip across the coursing flow in step to the gurgles and bubbles, I find myself in awe of this majestic interplay of light and sound. My eyes lose focus, and a million sunbursts of dazzling light flood my field of vision as the watery sounds spin and twirl the light about in a playful frenzy. I slip into a kind of reverie as the tentacles of my heart caress the waves of light and sound on water. As my heart's perception awakens to this touch, I have a flash of profound understanding that sound and light are essential to my very existence and the rest of nature as well. I see the web of life, and each of the threads connecting the web is a strand of light and sound. They are what hold the web together. My heart fills up with this vision, and a wave of knowing washes through me. The image fades as my eyes focus on the patterns of criss-cross light refracted on the bottom of the stream—webs of light laced with music, a symphony of light and sound on water.

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The foundation for building relationships with plants is already in place by the mere fact that we exchange oxygen and carbon dioxide. This is a very basic and yet crucial component to the interweaving with plants because it is an automatic bond, one that is undeniable and exists for everyone. The life force inherent in our breath is so rudimentary that, without it for more than a few minutes, we can no

longer survive. Every single human being realizes life-giving breath and yet the conscious awareness of where our life breath comes from stops at our nose. The ability to make the connection between our breath and the green beings enables us to shift our attitude toward them, resulting in a deep appreciation and respect—key ingredients for deep, meaningful, intimate relationships.

Our personal experiences and the investigations in many areas of science verify that life is based on interconnected relationships. It is not one block built on top of another but instead a vast web of interwoven vibrations of light, sound, and sensation that we are able to feel. Lynne McTaggart, in her book *The Field*, says of what is decisively verified by quantum physicists: “Subatomic particles had no meaning in isolation but could only be understood in their relationships. The world, at its most basic, existed as a complex web of interdependent relationships, forever indivisible.” In this given place of relationship we find the foundation for Plant Spirit Healing. Your ability to work with plant spirits is directly connected to this relationship and how intimate it becomes. Deep intimacy is possible with plants, even to the point of moving sexual energy.

One of my students relates this experience with Trillium: “Trillium and I lay down on a soft couch facing, with our arms wrapped around each other. There was a beam of light from Trillium that came into me through my root chakra. It was warm, expansive energy that filled me up. We started spiraling together, slowly moving up from the root chakra. My heart was very open as the energy kept building. The feeling was sensuous as we meshed into one another. We continued to raise our energy until we were fully vibrating. Then we burst out of our skins, dissolving from form into what felt like divine love. There was a nonverbal transmission of energy that we exchanged about love that was also erotic. We were not ‘in love’ but were ‘being love’ and this expression included creative passion.”

SENSUAL AWARENESS OF PLANTS

We have evolved as sensual beings: our senses are one of the main ways in which we perceive the world in all its many guises. Unfortunately, our senses have become dulled by modern-day life

and all that comes with it—walking on pavement, smelling exhaust fumes, hearing motors running, tasting dead food, and seeing skylines of buildings. This dulling of the senses is one of the things that has caused us to be less connected and forgetful of our essential nature; yet when we are in nature and walk barefoot, smell the sweetness of a flower, hear the sound of running water, taste the burst of flavor in a wild plant, and see the outline of mountains, we come back to our true selves. Our cells wake up, are filled with recognition and remember that we, too, are a part of nature, capable of engaging with the Earth and all her beings in a deep and sensual way. My gratitude goes to Susun Weed for introducing me to learning from plants through my senses.

As you begin the journey of building a relationship with a plant, it's essential throughout the process to always be paying attention to the feeling sensation you receive from the plant. This feeling sensation brings an emotional response in you. You will continually have emotional feelings as you work with plants and it is important to hone your ability to identify these feelings. We are constantly in some form of emotional state, which is a state of being not doing. In this undeniably experiential place meaning begins to emerge.

Our approach in beginning to establish a deeper relationship is always one of respect. Just like beginning a new relationship with a potential lover, we walk softly, not trying to seduce but instead extending a hand in courtship. We invite the possibility of a friendship that may grow into intimacy. Often, this invitation is initiated by the plant itself and can come in unexpected ways. Pay attention when the plant crosses your path the third time; it is trying to get your attention.

Our relationship building begins with the acknowledgment of our exchange of breath, realizing that this breath is more than just oxygen but also carries life force that originates from plants and trees. We begin building our relationship with a plant by engaging all of our senses, starting with observation.

OBSERVATION

When we choose a plant to work with, an attraction wells up inside—to the color of the flower, the way in which it grows, the feeling in our heart when we look at it, or something that pulls us toward this plant. We approach it with an attitude of respect, give thanks for the opportunity to meet with this plant and affirm that it is our clear intention to begin a courtship that could develop into receiving the healing gifts from the plant. We bring an offering or gift, perhaps a turquoise bead or, even better, something we have fashioned with our own hands. Beginning in this manner sets the tone and establishes a certain rapport; the plant knows your intentions are friendly.

We start by observing the aerial view of the plant's surroundings. What are the specifics of this plant's habitat and who are its neighbors? By learning a plant's companions, when you see the same kind of community in other locations you will have an idea of which plants may be growing there. Perhaps this plant likes to grow in full sun. Solar energy is active, warming, stimulating, and drying and carries that masculine energy of outward movement. On the other hand, perhaps this plant likes to grow in the shade where the energy is cooling, moist, and calming. This earth energy is more receptive and feminine in nature. Maybe this plant likes a bit of both and grows in part sun and part shade, embracing aspects of both the sun and the earth.

After observing the wide-angle view of the plant, you then want a close-up view. For this you will need a 10x magnifying lens, a tool all plant people need. Looking closely at plants opens an entirely new world where you are able to observe the intricate details of the plant — those not detectable with the naked eye. You are able to clearly view the sexual parts of the plant and observe in more detail the pistil, stamens, and pollen. Sometimes the pollen may be iridescent, filled with sparkles and reflections from the light, or maybe it is sticky, clinging to your nose as you bend close. Observing how a plant reproduces reveals valuable information about its nature. Many flowers have male and female parts within the same flower, others have a male flower and a female flower on the same plant, while others may have separate female and male plants. You also may see the colorful spotted runway on the petal of a flower that directs a

pollinator to the nectar that lies deep within. You will be able to see the very tiny hairs on the stalk or the sectioned veins on the leaf, unavailable for your viewing without the 10x lens.

When observing the environment of the plant, you want to pay attention to the quantity and its proximity to people. Dandelion may grow in great profusion right outside your doorstep, or you may only find a couple of rattlesnake plantains growing deep in the woods. As a general rule, the plants growing close by in large quantity will be the ones you will eat and use for nourishment or as tonifying medicine. You also want to be aware of plants that grow near you, follow you around (show up a year after you have moved to a new location), or that suddenly appear. Plants that you need for your physical, emotional, and spiritual healing gravitate to you. An herbal friend of mine had a poke plant come up on her property in Vermont. Poke is not commonly seen growing in Vermont, but here it was in her yard! She wasn't sure why it had appeared until a year later her husband needed to boost his immune system, and two years later she needed lymphatic draining in her breast. Poke root is a good example of a plant that rarely grew (in the northeast) near people and now is beginning to come closer. Is this because people's immune systems, in general, need more support now?

An observation that may need to take place over a period of time is that of a plant's growth cycle: annual, biennial, or perennial. An annual plant goes through its entire cycle within one year; the cycle is complete with the formation of seed after which the plant dies back. Annual plants usually produce an abundance of seeds because this is how they reproduce. You may find the plant in the same location the following year only because it dropped its seed and began a new cycle of growth. This does not always happen, especially if the plant is very sensitive to cold.

Biennial plants complete their life cycle in two years. In the first year they produce leaves, and in the second year they produce flowers and seeds, completing their growth cycle. When harvesting the roots from biennial plants, such as burdock, you would never harvest the root in the fall of the second year because it is at the end of its growth; the root is old and pithy, no longer carrying vibrancy.

Your harvest time would be in the fall of the first year or in the spring of the second year.

Perennial plants are ones that leaf, flower, and seed in one year but return the following year. Perennial plants often have extensive root systems, assuring their survival through the winter. If you know a plant is perennial, then you can look forward to its return the following year.

Color is an important area of observation; it is often what we first notice and many times is what attracts us to a particular plant. Color is a foundational aspect of our experience of life as we are constantly surrounded by, and clothed in, affected color. Color is visible light that falls within a narrow band of the electromagnetic spectrum, ranging from red to violet, with red having the longest wavelength and least frequency and violet having the shortest wavelength and greatest frequency. Each color has a particular quality to it that is determined by its frequency. Dinshah Ghadiali, an Indian born doctor, developed a form of color therapy called Spectro-Chrome. He was able to determine that individual frequencies of the colors had specific effects on physiology. By applying colored light directly to the body he was able to affect all manner of physical injury and illness.

In another case, Peter Mandel, a German naturopath and acupuncturist, found that the meridians in the body transmit light and that acupuncture points that emit light served as doorways to the light stream within the body. By applying certain colors to the points, Mandel could bring disrupted life force back into balance. Generally speaking, the warm colors of red, orange, and yellow added energy or stimulated whereas the cool colors of green, blue, and violet sedated or calmed an overheated condition or one of excess energy. How, then, does the understanding that color has healing properties apply to plants? In a previous chapter, it was mentioned that there are biophotons at the core of the DNA of all living cells and that this is how cells communicate. Biophotons exist within the entire frequency spectrum from ultraviolet to infrared including the visible range of the rainbow, red to violet. When a plant exhibits a red flower it does so because the biophotons resonate at that particular frequency. Mandel's experiments showed that colored light restores

balance to the life force, thus directly affecting the coherence of biophotons. The color from plants can have a direct affect on the light in our cells when we immerse ourselves in their presence. In the most obvious example, the color green, which is the frequency much of the plant world displays, carries the vibration of growth, abundance, and vitality. It is in the middle of the light spectrum, at the balance point. It is the color of the heart chakra, where love and compassion reside and where the circulation of blood and oxygen through the body can be felt. When we are in the natural world surrounded by green living plants, trees, and grasses, we feel nurtured, supported, and vibrantly alive. The frequency of the green biophoton is received by our cells, which are healed by the presence of green.

Plants also inform us of their associations with other systems that incorporate color. The chakras are the energy centers in our bodies, and each is associated with a color as well as with physical correspondences and other attributes. By looking at the colors of plants, we can observe associations the plant may have with the many aspects of a particular chakra, being aware that different cultures may view the chakras differently. We will explore the chakra system in depth in chapter 11. These color associations are guidelines and are not written in stone; they are only one way of looking at the colors. You may also want to look at color correspondences with other systems such as the Five Element cycle or directions of the Medicine Wheel.

The root chakra is at the base of the spine and is red in color. It corresponds to the blood, muscular and skeletal systems, large intestines, genitals, and reproductive system. It has to do with survival and procreation, and the associated endocrine glands are the gonads. Some people place the adrenals here because the fight-or-flight mechanism is associated with survival.

The Hara or naval chakra is just below the belly button and is orange. It corresponds to the immune system, lymphatic system, kidneys, urinary tract, uterus, and sexual potency and drive. Issues of sex, money, and control are in this chakra, and the corresponding endocrine gland is the adrenal. This chakra is often associated with

reproduction, but it is really more about how one relates as a sexual being.

The third chakra is the solar plexus, which is in the middle of the belly and yellow. It corresponds to the digestive system, liver, spleen, and gallbladder and is associated with storing and releasing energy. This is the center of the will, and power issues can come up here. The associated endocrine gland is the pancreas.

The fourth chakra is the heart, located between the breasts and associated with the color green. This is the balance point between upper and lower chakras. It corresponds to the circulatory system, heart, breasts, lungs, and overall nourishment. The heart chakra has to do with adaptation and compassion. The corresponding endocrine gland is the thymus.

The fifth chakra is the throat chakra and its color is blue. It is located in the hollow of the neck and corresponds to the mouth, neck, throat, sinus, ears, and metabolic functioning. Communication and creativity are associated with this chakra. The corresponding endocrine gland is the thyroid.

The sixth chakra is the third eye located between the eyebrows with the color of indigo. It corresponds to the hormonal system, glandular system, pain relief, and eyesight. Intuition and perception are placed within this chakra. The endocrine gland associated with it is the pineal. Some people place the pituitary here, but because this chakra is associated with light and the pineal gland controls light in the body, I believe that this is its proper placement.

The seventh chakra is the crown, and it sits on the top of the head and has a purple or violet color. It corresponds with the nervous system and brain function, with integrity and wisdom as its pervading qualities. The endocrine gland associated with this chakra is the pituitary.

In giving you each of these colors and their corresponding chakras, I am hoping you will use this knowledge as a way to understand the true nature of each plant more fully. Of course it helps to know the chakras in more detail, as the correspondence oftentimes is not a physical one. Each of the colors has attributes that affect us physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually, and we

can experience them on any one or more of these levels. In working with plants, we experience color in flowers, veins, stalks, juices, and roots, so don't limit your color exploration to just the flowers. You may find that the red juice from a plant is what gives you the clearest understanding about its color association. Other observations you want to be aware of are colors that seem odd, like the purple dots you will find on the stem of poison hemlock. If a color seems out of the ordinary or unusual, it probably means to proceed with caution.

Continuing with your observation, you now want to employ the Doctrine of Signatures. This theory originated with Jakob Bohme, who had a mystical vision that God had put a sign on all things so that we could understand their meanings. In the seventeenth century, Paracelsus continued this line of thinking by asserting that plants had a likeness to a particular body part, organ, or aspect of the body, and this is where the plant would have an effect. Nicholas Culpeper later added astrology to the doctrine so that certain planets governed plants, thus asserting celestial influence on the body. In modern times, Homeopathy and Flower Essence therapy use the Doctrine of Signatures, believing that function follows form and that like cures like. An example is partridgeberry, a plant used in childbirth, whose signature is two flowers that make one berry. Another example is that of the seaweed bladder-wrack, used in hypothyroidism. The two bladders hanging down in a V shape look exactly like an enlarged thyroid gland.

TOUCH

Much of what you observe about a plant can be corroborated by touching it. You may see the hairs on a plant, but when you touch them you can tell if they are smooth and soft or sharp and scratchy. The hairs may be soft like the ones on your arm or they may scratch in an irritating way. Maybe they move in a wavelike fashion imitating the cilia that line your lungs. Perhaps the hairiness brings stimulation or cleansing. Maybe there is a sting or a prick that could be a protective quality or one that brings you to instant attention. When you touch further, you find the plant to be dry with not much liquid, so perhaps it can act as an astringent and dry excess liquids. On the

other hand, the plant may feel juicy, thus promoting fluid production or lubricating joints, or maybe even slimy with lots of mucilage, which soothes mucous membranes. As you rub the plant across your face and down your neck, the softness soothes you into sweet repose or perhaps the tickling excites you to get up and dance. You may be urged to touch certain parts of your body with the plant, leaving it there for a period of time to directly receive its resonance. As you build relationships with plants, it is important to touch them often. Like humans, plants respond to being fondled in a gentle, caring way.

SMELL

The most important aspect of the sense of smell is that it triggers memory. Not only do you recall memories of this lifetime but you also can have a memory that is carried in your ancestral line. When you smell a plant and an entire scene unfolds from another time and place, don't discount it as "only your imagination." You are remembering through your genes how your ancestors used the plant. In addition to memory, smell can have a profound effect on physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual levels as is indicated by Aromatherapy—a practice that works with the volatile oils of a plant through the olfactory system. A strong odor in plants indicates there are volatile oils, further indicating a medicinal quality. Where does the aroma lodge in your body and what is the sensation you have there? Does the smell remind you of some kind of food or place or person? What kind of a feeling sense does the plant evoke, one of pleasantness or caution? Does this plant urge you to put it in your mouth?

HEAR

Engaging your hearing sense can be very profound because this is the place where you listen with "big ears," meaning your intuition. Intuition is an inner knowing that occurs without the use of reasoning. We all have the capability of intuition but may have a difficult time quieting the internal chatter so we can actually listen to

what our intuition is telling us. Listening to intuition begins with quieting the mind and then moving into your heart. By giving the heart positive impulses of gratitude, caring, and nonjudgment, heart coherence is established, which heightens intuition. Your intuition may activate in your body, in your energy field, or awaken an insight. It is important to pay attention on all levels. You may suddenly find yourself humming a tune or toning with the plant. By listening you may receive the plant's song, which, of course, is "big medicine."

TASTE

You have learned a great deal about the plant so far, but there is one more significant arena to explore—that of tasting the plant. It is important, at this point, to only put the plant in your mouth if all indications are to proceed. If you put it in your mouth and it feels prickly and on fire, then spit it out. Use your common sense. Try not to be too heavily influenced by the myth that plants will kill you. In the Northeast, with the exception of mushrooms, there are very few plants that, by merely tasting, will harm you. Two of the exceptions are poison hemlock and water hemlock, so be sure to learn proper identification of these two plants. In this case, I am referring to wild plants not cultivated ones.

To taste a plant, put a small piece on the tip of your tongue and chew for two to three minutes. Plants have primary actions and secondary actions. By allowing time to taste the plant fully, you will receive a taste on the tip of your tongue that indicates the primary action and a taste on the back of your tongue indicating the secondary action. This ability to recognize the subtle differences in taste may take a while to develop, as our modern diets don't venture far from sweet and salty. The full range of taste also includes sour, bitter, and pungent or spicy.

The taste of sweet is an indication of carbohydrates, which include mono-, di-, and polysaccharides. Carbohydrates function through storage and transport of energy. They are important in the smooth operating of the immune system and contribute to successful fertilization, blood clotting, and development. Carbohydrates also affect the pancreas and spleen. Mucilage is considered sweet as is

inulin, which helps balance the blood-sugar level. Saponin-containing plants are considered sweet, but their taste actually has a soapy quality. Their primary medicinal effect is as an expectorant, meaning that it brings up excess mucous.

The taste of sour indicates acids like citric acid or oxalic acid and tannins, which have astringency. Astringency causes tissues to tighten and can dry up excess liquid. This is what we are experiencing when we pucker. Sour taste usually indicates some type of action on the urinary tract and kidneys but can also be effective in protecting inflamed tissue, reducing swelling, and increasing stomach acid to cause an alkalizing response by the metabolism.

A bitter taste is one that many prefer to avoid, and yet its taste indicates that the plant may have some type of tonic action. Tonic means that it brings blood to the area and that the cells expand and contract, bringing tone to the tissue. Bitters such as dandelion greens have historically been used to aid in digestion. Plants with a bitter taste are also beneficial to the liver and gallbladder. Many plant constituents have a bitter taste: alkaloids, secondary metabolites, anthraquinones, which have laxative effects; cyanogenic glycosides, which have sedative and antispasmodic properties; flavonoids, which include rutin (part of the vitamin C complex) and flavones; and isoflavones, which have estrogenic-like properties.

The pungent or spicy taste is stimulating and warming, usually having some type of effect on the circulatory system. This strong taste indicates a high content of volatile oils and highly medicinal qualities such as antiseptic, anti-inflammatory, expectorant, and carminative (antispasmodic and gas relieving in the digestive tract), to list a few.

The final taste to consider is a salty flavor, which indicates there are minerals in the plant that give it a nutritive quality. Sometimes you can actually taste the mineral. For example, high iron content makes your teeth feel funny while the taste of chalk indicates calcium.

Other things to consider when tasting a plant are the texture and sensation in your mouth. Mucilage has a very smooth and slippery

consistency with demulcent qualities. This means it soothes, protects, and heals any mucosal lining it comes in contact with in the body. Because of its sticky texture it can pick up toxins and waste material, carrying them out of the body; its bulk aids in constipation. If your mouth becomes numb while chewing, this usually indicates some type of antibacterial or antiseptic properties. If your mouth completely dries out, then the plant has astringent qualities. You also want to pay attention to what the taste reminds you of. Perhaps this plant has the same vitamins and minerals as a food you've tasted in the past.

Your sensual awareness of the plant is crucial because it is fundamental to the successful movement into a co-creative partnership. This is the level where you begin to understand the personality of the plant and can determine whether there is mutual compatibility. Does this encounter spark your interest in this plant so that your excitement motivates you to move to an even deeper level? From the plant's perspective, it is stimulated by your attention and receives your resonant energy. At this point it can decide whether to exchange energy with you, depending on how the frequency of your vibration resonates with its own. Intention is so important in working with plants, because they know how sincere you are. The biggest stumbling block for humans in their communication with plants is getting over the belief of being greater than. If you enter into a relationship thinking that it is your own superior intelligence that is going to tell you how to use a plant, you will not get very far. Plants are highly intelligent beings who can decide whether or not to share knowledge with you. Developing your relationship further into a co-creative partnership is dependent on you and the plant expressing a mutual desire to ride the same wavelength.

CO-CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP

Co-creative partnership embraces both parties in the fullness of their beings and provides an environment where they can live according to their own true nature. When we step into co-creativity with a plant, we are able to experience a partnership that strives for balanced manifestation. We work toward coherence, which generates a state

of optimal health. Developing your relationship into a co-creative partnership is based on the ability to communicate effectively with the plant. When we talk about communication with plants, we return to the original understanding of communing or communion, coming full circle to common union. Because the language is not the same as that which we use with humans, we must engage in a language that is communal with both plants and people. We must find the common union or common ground where we both stand. This place of common union can be found in light, sound, and breath, resulting in sensations and emotional feelings engendered by the vibratory frequency they carry. Even though this form of language may seem unfamiliar to you, the truth is that this is the mode of communication that is fundamental to all living organisms and is how we most accurately exchange information with our living environment.

Perhaps an understanding of coherence will further clarify how communication takes place. On a quantum-physics level, subatomic waves move into coherence when they cooperate or, in other words, when they are able to move into synchrony with each other. When waves are in sync, they begin to perform as one large wave. It is like an orchestra in which individual instruments move together in harmony, creating a beautiful symphony. Coherence establishes communication as different frequencies tune themselves to each other. Fritz Popp has shown that plants demonstrate “the highest level of quantum order or coherence possible in a living system,” which means they have a high degree of ability to fine-tune their frequencies to other waves. To effectively communicate with plants we set our intention through our hearts to move into coherence with the biophotons of the plant, allowing the interference (encountering) of the waves to resonate at a certain frequency, thus creating a vibratory sensation in our bodies. In essence, the electromagnetic field of our heart encounters that of the plant, and we entrain with the frequency of the plant. This is what is known as resonance matching. This resonance matching occurs within light, sound, and breath, creating a complex sensation that is difficult to separate into individually occurring events and are better seen as nuances of the same experience.

Each plant carries a different frequency to which we can attune. This attunement is received through the heart, which sends it to the brain that then registers it as a “felt sense” somewhere in the body. This initial feeling sensation is very important because it is what our bodies will remember on a cellular level. The light in the DNA of our cells receives this frequency in a holographic way, meaning that the entire picture of light, sound, and feeling sensation is recorded as a whole entity so that when we recall the felt sense, we actually receive the entire holographic imprint. A felt sense can come in many different forms like tightness, heat or cold, softness, expansion, contraction, itchiness, bursting, bubbling, and so on. When you receive a felt sense, spend time getting very clear about the sensation and exactly how it feels. Take a moment to step away from the sensation and then come back; is it still there? If not, tune in again to the plant and feel again. When the felt sense returns in the same way, this is a good indication that you are receiving the frequency of the plant. Now you want to give the felt sense a word or image that exactly describes how it feels. You want to “get a handle on it,” so the word or image is called the handle. Perhaps it is soft as butter or maybe a more accurate handle would be soft as silk. Go back and forth between the felt sense and the handle until it is exactly right. Once you clearly have a handle on the felt sense you can call it up at any time. It’s like dialing the phone to make a direct connection. You ask to understand the felt sense: what is the meaning inherent in this frequency that you are receiving holographically? You may begin to feel an emotion like joy or grief, or you may receive images on your inner field of vision, or a memory may suddenly come up. As these images and sensations come alive, you send them back to the plant, who confirms them in waves of “yes” vibrations, or doesn’t, helping you to discern and hone in on the impressions that are most aligned with the felt sense. Communication flows back and forth between you and the plant until you begin to ride the same wavelength, vibrate at the same frequency, and resonate in harmony. Now you are able to perceive through the plant itself because, even though you are still two beings, your electromagnetic fields have merged to the point of no separation.

This particular way of communicating was originally developed by Eugene Gendlin as a psychological tool for understanding one's true feelings. His book *Focusing* describes this process. I found this focusing technique to be an effective way to begin communication with plants. ([See color plate 6.](#))

We had the great fortune to have Nina Spiro, a musician and music therapist, in our class one year. She brought to us her healing work through sound called Pravada Sound Healing™. She instructed us to sit with a plant and begin to let a sound or tone rise up from within us as a response to the plant. I began toning back and forth with a plant, allowing the tone to shift as need be to come into resonance with the plant. Nina calls this Pravada Sound Bridging™. As I became comfortable with the toning other notes came in, and I felt in my body where these notes settled. With time an entire melody emerged and with the melody other sensations, images, and feelings became apparent. It was as if the plant responded to the sound by projecting a three-dimensional story of itself into my electromagnetic field. I was surprised at how quickly the plant responded to this form of communication, and I realized that the only thing keeping me from instant communication was my own inability to be totally present from a long-time fear of not being able to produce sound that is melodic. As Nina points out, "When we become increasingly more present in each moment through sound, we begin to notice that particular plants are already speaking to us."

The light aspect of communication can be focused through the colors of the chakras or can be a conscious intention of creating coherent light waves between our cells and the cells of the plant. This kind of communication may seem subtle and yet is something that is inherent within all biological systems. When we sit with a plant and fully bring our attention to it, the plant tunes us in to its frequency and begins an exchange of coherent light-wave patterns that carry information. The tricky part is our receiving abilities. If our energy field is scrambled, it is difficult to tune in and receive clear information. It's like tuning a radio when there is a lot of static. It's hard to hear the message.

Building relationships with plants into a co-creative partnership is rewarding beyond measure. Plants are so willing to befriend us and aid us in our spiritual evolution. They recognize our symbiotic ties and view us as little brothers and sisters that need help maturing. When we accept their help, it is like an endless fountain of love showering upon us. As our hearts open wide to these incredibly nurturing beings, we grow in creativity, understanding, and gratitude through the consistency of such a partnership. We also begin to see our place in the living environment and realize that to truly be in co-creativity, we must give back equally for this partnership to flourish. We begin to acknowledge our plant allies each and every day—singing to them, touching them, expressing gratitude to them, making offerings to them, paying attention to them, acting upon their advice, and treating them as if they were lovers to be cherished and honored always.

RECEIVING THE HEALING GIFTS

Building relationships with plants to the point of understanding their communications is valuable, but if you want to work with the plant spirits for healing purposes, you must receive their healing gifts. Traditional healers across the planet know that healing at a source level cannot take place unless the plant has become your ally by instilling in you the very thing that causes healing to take place. Guillermo Arevalo, a Shipibo-Conibo Curandero from Peru, says, “They are beings, which have their own form or they can be like human beings with faces and bodies. When the [plant] spirit accepts the person, and the person has the will, the [plant] spirit grants them energy. The path to knowledge opens, and the healing takes place.” Ross Heaven’s extensive work with shamans leads him to say of them, “They would simply say that everything is spirit and, if we are sensitive to this, it is quite possible for the spirit of a plant to enter and influence us, changing our energy and creating new possibilities for healing.” Building a relationship by understanding a plant through our senses and then communicating through felt sense and the vibrations of light and sound while consciously exchanging breath, we step into the daydream of the plant and begin to know it from its

own vantage point. We dream of the plant at night or we enter a dream journey, visiting the dimension where the plant spirit lives. We have images, sensations, and songs that are unique to the plant helping us to know its heart, soul, and spirit. We have begun to understand the physical, emotional, and spiritual healing gifts that the plant carries. The next step in the process is crucial, though it is often left out of many healing practices: with the utmost respect we approach the plant spirit and we ask to receive its healing gifts. It's as simple as asking, but it is not to be taken lightly. Receiving the healing gifts of a plant carries a big responsibility because, once you receive the gifts, it is absolutely your responsibility to use them. This is one of the codes of conduct, so to speak, among plant spirit healers across the globe. You must use the gifts once they're given to you. If you don't feel ready to use the healing gifts of a plant, don't ask for them. There is a trust that is expected from the plant once you have entered into this deep partnership. Often the plant will ask you to do specific things for a client or for ceremony or for shifts in your personal life. It is important for you to honor the requests of the plant spirit. As Stephen Buhner says, "To carry the power of plant medicine you must be trustworthy, your word to the plant relations should be inviolate. As in all relationships, trust is built on keeping one's word. The more trustworthy you are the more the plants will tell you and consequently the more power and responsibility you carry."

When the plant spirit gives you its healing gift, you may experience it in various ways. Almost always there is some type of merging between you and the plant. The plant may step inside you or perhaps the plant spirit will hand you an object. As the plant spirit and its healing gifts begin to live inside you, an internal shift is felt. The resonant signature of the plant becomes a part of your own energy field, and you have the ability to transfer this vibratory imprint to others. The plant's imprint is what carries its healing qualities. This can be done without a preparation of the plant or its physical presence, because it is the frequency of the plant, which can be experienced nonlocally (across time and space), that is the most efficient form of healing. An experiment described in *The Field* reports that "the only unusual aspect of the experiment was that the agents of change weren't actually pharmacological chemicals but

low-frequency waves of the electromagnetic signals of cells . . . the signal effectively could take the place of the chemicals, for the signal *is* the molecule's signature."

Jasmine, one of my students, tells this story: "When I first encountered the spirit of Valerian it was like something entered me. It was odd and felt almost like I was being possessed by an entity and yet I knew it was all right. The vibratory essence was that of 'ah-h-h,' a whole body relaxation. After this I felt different. I was able to look at the flip side of what drags me down, rising above it and not being negatively affected. Valerian helped me to make a breakthrough and see why certain things were happening in my life. The relaxation I encountered in the 'ah-h-h' resonance turned into the enlightenment resonance of 'aha.' I had to relax before I could have an opening. Often with plant spirits, I encounter them in my own personal life and then I know how to use them with others. Valerian was my first love and it continues to be one of my favorites."

Sometimes a gift may come in a literal way for either you or another, as evidenced in Jackie's story: "Scott and I climbed into the high desert to commune with Juniper. We sat separate from each other, for more than a half hour, stepping into the daydream of Juniper. She came to me so strongly, with her eyes shimmering of the Milky Way. I stood to go to another tree and at my feet was a knapped obsidian ax head. I was in awe and thought it must be Grandmother Juniper's gift to me. When I asked if it was for me, she said, 'No.' I could hardly believe it and asked her over and over, each time receiving the same response. Then it occurred to me that this was a gift for Scott. I asked Grandmother Juniper and she said, 'Yes.' I picked up the ax head and brought it to Scott. By the way, it was his birthday."

MAINTAINING RELATIONS WITH PLANT SPIRITS

Once you have established a co-creative partnership with a plant it is important to continue to maintain the relationship on a regular basis. Just like keeping a relationship alive with a partner or friend, the more often you spend time with them, the more familiar you become and the deeper your relationship can grow. Not only do you spend

time with them but you also maintain your relations with plant spirits by making offerings to them. They are not kept alive by ignoring them for all but the time you want to use them in your healing practice, only taking what they have to offer without ever giving back. It is essential that you keep your relationship a reciprocal one by nourishing your plant spirit allies with gifts, prayers, and eloquent recognition. Traditionally, tobacco, cornmeal, chocolate, jade, or turquoise beads and candles are used to feed the plant spirits. Ideally, the gifts you offer are ones you have made with your own hands. Mary Dean Atwood, in her book *Spirit Herbs: Native American Healing*, shares the relationship plant spirits had with traditional Native American healers: “Plants and foodstuff, considered to have spirit or soul blessed their fellow beings, the humans. The kingdom of plants vibrated and pulsated with living energy and awareness. Considered as powerful as animal and nature spirits, they were accorded respect. Humble requests and prayers given during sacred herb sacraments impressed the plant beings and assured cooperation in the future. The traditional Native American handled plants with care, cognizant of plant feelings and emotions. They believed that plant spirits reacted beneficially when pleased and refused to heal or assist when insulted.”

Mayan shaman Martín Prechtel suggests we “feed” the spirits, which offers a slightly different way of approaching them. When we feed the plant spirits, we help keep them alive and they, in turn, keep us alive. Not only is it a sign of respect to give back, it is imperative to our existence on this planet as Celtic shaman Tom Cowan reminds us: “If we lose the goodwill and help of the spirits we lose both our power as shamans [healers] and the vital life force on which human life depends.”



Nine

HEALING ONESELF, OTHERS, AND THE PLANET WITH PLANT SPIRITS

My breath becomes focused with attention on White Pine, that great one who has given me such strength this past year. As my breath deepens with its constant circular pattern I begin to experience the “greenbreath” of exchange with White Pine. A tingle runs up my spine as the oxygen-laden breath reaches each of my cells and a rainbow bridge to White Pine joins us in a bond of light. A vibration begins in my hands and slowly spreads to the rest of my body as I receive the light from the sun transferred to me from White Pine and cells breathe—my cells or White Pine’s? Suddenly I realize the tingling vibration I’m experiencing is that of photosynthesis, as White Pine and I are no longer separate. White Pine’s breath rushes up my spine in currents of ecstatic life force as I begin to move in rhythm with these waves, riding the crest and dipping into the trough. With a full heart, mind, and body I revel in the sensual experience of White Pine. As my greenbreath shifts and I return to regular breath, my tears flow as I begin to comprehend the gift of such an intimate encounter with White Pine—more than an ally, my beloved.

JOURNAL ENTRY, MAY 2007

Plant Spirit Healing is a way of life as well as a modality of healing because it helps you become fully who you are, living according to your own true nature, following the path you are meant to walk. Coming to know your own true nature and living accordingly can be a life-long journey. In a previous chapter it was shown how plants are symbiotically a part of our walk on this planet. We would not be here

if it weren't for them. They are our companions for life that guide, heal, and help us along our journey.

PLANT SPIRITS AS PERSONAL GUIDES

Most people who have any kind of a spiritual life have some form of guidance they rely on. Various religions have helping forces like saints in Catholicism, devas in Hinduism, or angels in Christianity. In the Native American tradition animal guides are present as helpers. A helping spirit guide is one who is available to you at all times to bring guidance and assistance of any nature. Plant spirits can serve as personal guides and helpers in this way. Plant spirit guides may come to you in a dream, or perhaps you are healed by a plant that then becomes your personal guide. You also may make a request for a personal plant spirit guide to come to you; pay attention to the plant that crosses your path either physically or otherwise. When you encounter the plant three times, remember, it is the one you are seeking.

It is important to pay attention to all your plant spirit allies, particularly your personal plant spirit guide. You pay close attention by bringing your guide into your prayers each day and being grateful for his or her presence in your life. This guide can instruct you about other plant allies you may engage for healing purposes, guide you in personal decisions, and help you with your own health issues. Your personal guide will also assist you with issues of intention and humility, reminding you that, ultimately, you are in service to the holy, the sacredness in all life. Your plant spirit guide can also bring clarity about the recognition and maintenance of relations with all of your plant spirit allies, including any ceremonies that may need to be performed on their behalf. These ceremonies may be a way to feed your plant spirits or they may be necessary for certain types of healing. For example, perhaps a sweat lodge is needed for a person's healing, with particular kinds of plants brought into the lodge and placed on the stones or particular plant spirits evoked while in the lodge.

You may have more than one personal guide or maybe your guides will change over time. My very first plant ally was Nettle. I

made a braided necklace of Nettle and wore it everywhere I went because I didn't want to be separated from her. I wanted her to be a part of everything I did. I remember that when faced with a difficult decision, I would put my hand on the braided necklace to give me strength and guidance with my decision. Now I often carry a medicine pouch with me, either in my pocket or around my neck, which has a piece of my personal plant spirit guide inside. I also include other items in my medicine pouch to assist me, such as representations of the elements—a feather for air, a stone for earth, a shell for water, and a piece of lightning-struck wood for fire.

When I first moved to my property in Vermont, I needed to clear a few trees in the garden area. One huge white pine towered above the upper garden, and I had intended to cut this tree down. Brian, the fellow doing the work for me, urged me not to cut this tree; he had a strong sense that it wanted to remain. This tree stands on the western border of the property and holds its branches out far, as if embracing a gateway into the directional dimension of west. As I began to settle into this land and came to know the plant beings, the water and the mountain, the presence of this white pine grew. One day in early spring, as I was preparing the garden for planting, a strong breeze stirred and I felt a soft brushing against my cheek, as if a hand was lightly caressing me. A strong smell of evergreen wafted through my nostrils, bringing the freshness that only a pine can emit. I could hear the air moving through the branches of White Pine and an ever-so-slight whisper came on the wind, "Please don't forget me." I continued to work in the garden, ignoring these words coming on the breeze. Then I heard a mournful kind of crying, as if someone were stricken with grief. This instantly brought me to attention. I stood up from my work and looked around, and, as my gaze fell upon White Pine, I was overcome with the grief that I had just heard expressed in the wailing that came on the wind. I stood before White Pine and tears began to roll down my face as I realized the source of my sadness. My heart opened to White Pine and a flood of emotion poured through me. I felt the pain that White Pine was experiencing from my lack of attention to her and from the residual of my previous intentions to cut her down. How could I have ever considered cutting down this most majestic of trees? I put my

arms around White Pine and cried for forgiveness, and the whisper on the breeze came, “please don’t forget me.” I vowed that day to never forget White Pine, to treat her as if she were one of my best friends and to pay close attention to what she had to share with me. Since that day I have received such incredible support from White Pine who has become one of my closest allies in my personal development. She is like a beacon of strength to me, constantly reminding me of my path—of being a spokesperson for the green beings. Even today, as I sit writing, White Pine gives me the strength I need to continue, when at times I feel like the task is too overwhelming. I walked out to White Pine this morning and I was reminded of others who have received blessings from her. There, on the soft bed of needles, was Charlotte’s prayer arrow from her vision journey last summer. I remember how she was held so gently by White Pine as she prayed and asked for a vision. Then there was Sara who dreamed of White Pine and, while perched like a great bird in her branches, gained a different perspective on life from that lofty place. This morning White Pine gave me a vision of peace and tranquility under her branches. I saw the area underneath White Pine cleared of the underbrush with a beautiful meditative sanctuary and lovely altar under her boughs, where anyone in need could come to sit and receive her strength and guidance. This is one of those occasions when a plant and/or a tree gave me clear instructions to take action. What is apparent is that part of White Pine’s path is to provide a place for quiet reflection as well as guidance for myself and those who come here to Sweetwater Sanctuary. It is now my responsibility to carry out what White Pine has asked me to do. When I carry out her wishes, the trust increases and our relationship deepens. I give thanks to Brian who knew not to cut White Pine, to White Pine for reaching out to me, and for the tremendous blessing of having such a great Wise One as my personal ally. ([See color plate 7.](#))

HEALING OTHERS WITH PLANT SPIRITS

We can work with plant spirits for our own personal guidance and healing, but when we call upon plant spirits to engage in the healing

of another, a particular type of dynamism is added to the healing process. Plants are community beings that are here to serve the community as a whole so that when we step beyond our own personal needs and begin to address the needs of others, we are fulfilling the primary thrust of plant spirits' path as community healers.

When I ask a plant spirit to assist in a healing situation, a three-way line of interaction is opened among me and the plant spirit, the plant spirit and the client, and the client and me. This alignment creates a triangle that is very solid in its patterning. It also incorporates a key ingredient, which is that of asking. Asking helps to clarify intention, which is another important aspect of any healing work. By engaging in this level of asking for help (me of the plant spirits and the client of me), we support one of the basic tenets of nature, which is that of interconnected and interdependent relationships. When we try to do it all ourselves, we often fall short because this is not how nature is designed. Everything in nature is interdependent; nothing stands alone.

One young woman in a class I was teaching said to me that this type of healing seemed heroic. She was referring to the heroic tradition of healing, which emphasizes that a practitioner knows how to heal a person and requires that the rules and regulations put forth by the practitioner are accepted without question. The truth is the plant spirit does the healing, not the practitioner. The practitioner is available to be the vehicle for the transference of the plant spirit's healing gifts. The plant spirit fills the person full of all that is needed to live according to their own true nature, walking the path meant for them. The practitioner may also be a director, asking the plant spirit to go to a particular place where energy may be blocked, for example, but it is the plant spirit that carries out the work. Plant Spirit Healing is not about achieving perfection or perfect health—it is about becoming fully you. All that does not serve you as you become you falls away. Many years ago, a client who was also a student would come to class and lay in a lawn chair because her Lyme disease was so devastating to her health at that time. After about a year of plant spirit healing treatments she said to me, "It's not like Lyme disease is miraculously whisked away. It's that I take up more

of the space and there's no room for Lyme disease." The plant spirits were working to bring her back into balance with herself. If we look at this in scientific terms, we might describe this as the photon emissions of the plant spirit resonating coherence to her cells, bringing them back to a state of homeostasis. This particular phenomenon is called "photon sucking" and is described in *The Field* by Lynne McTaggart: "Wave resonance wasn't simply being used to communicate inside the body, but between living things. Two healthy beings were engaged in 'photon sucking' as he [Fritz Popp] called it, by exchanging photons." Popp went on to show that people could take in the photons of other living things, including plants, and could use this light to re-form or correct their own light that had gone awry.

This brings us to the distinguishing element of Plant Spirit Healing. When we receive the healing gifts from a plant spirit, one of the things we receive is its resonance. Because plant spirits operate in a nonlocal way, we can call upon this resonance at any time and from any location and then transfer that resonance to the person needing healing. We do not need the physical presence of the plant in any way, what we need is to be engaged in a co-creative partnership in which we experience the very light of the plant itself and can give its felt sense or resonance to another.

The biggest stumbling block for my students in becoming confident about practicing Plant Spirit Healing is learning to trust their intuition. I can't tell you how many times I've heard someone say, "Maybe it's just my imagination." I say to them, "Where does imagination come from?" If we can't imagine, we can't dream, and if we can't dream, we are destined to a mere three-dimensional existence. When we speak of imagination, we are not referring to fantasy but instead to a creative ability. Our creative ability stems from letting our hearts rule instead of our minds, because it is our heart that can perceive holographically instead of in fragments. When a heart is in a coherent state, it can receive the entire picture of a plant—from its physical qualities all the way to its spiritual nature, including its light, sound, and sensation, all of which may come in the form of a pictorial scene, a story, or feelings or even all three. This is not a fantasy that we are making up but instead is the heart receiving

imprints from the plant across time and space. We are in communication (common union) with the plant; we must trust this experience and realize that it is ours and no one else's—we are the author of the experience, which makes us an authority. Trusting yourself and the plant spirit is *the* greatest gift you can give yourself as a practitioner.

There are many ways to give the healing gifts of a plant spirit to another. Perhaps you sing or tone the plant spirit's song, or transfer the light resonance through color, or allow the felt sense resonance of the plant spirit to come through your hands. This way of working with the plant spirit may come when the plant spirit has given you specific instructions on how to bring about balance in another. You also may work within other modalities of healing like Chinese Five Element healing or the Chakra system. Because plant spirits are so multidimensional they have access to several ways of bringing a person to balance. A plant spirit's healing gifts may be to bring balance to one of the five elements as well as to help clear a chakra, for example. In chapter 11, we will look more closely at a few healing modalities where you can use plant spirits. The important thing to remember about working with modalities is that the modality itself is not plant spirit healing but a framework within which to apply plant spirits. Plant Spirit Healing is primarily about the plants, your relationship with them, and your ability to transfer their healing gifts to others.

One of my students, Astaria, describes how she transfers a plant spirit and then how that plant spirit shows up for her client. "I invited Calendula spirit to help assist in opening the second chakra. The healing gift had appeared to me as the symbol of water or actually a water vessel that Calendula poured from like a waterfall. I envisioned the color of orange water being poured into the energy center of her Hara. As I was doing this, I saw ladybugs and heard a song I couldn't quite make out. I asked my client if ladybugs or a ladybug song meant anything to her. She said there was a child's song she used to sing, 'ladybug, ladybug fly away home, your house is on fire and your children all gone.' The next day she saw an orange ladybug on her window. She bought ladybug stickers and put them on her second chakra. Ladybug medicine started coming in from all over,

people just randomly started giving her ladybug things.” This story shows us how Astaria transferred Calendula, and it also reveals how the spirit of Calendula began to live in her client through the image of a ladybug. Astaria trusted the image she received from Calendula and then shared it with her client, who was able to relate to it. The spirit of Calendula continued to present itself and work with her client even after the treatment was finished.

PLANETARY HEALING

The time of the Great Healing is upon us, as is indicated in many prophecies ranging from the Book of Revelation in the Bible to the words of ancient Hopis and Mayans. All of these speak of a time of purification, after which a new world will flourish. The Hopis refer to this new world as the Fifth World, while the Navaho call it the Fifth Hoop.



Plate 1. *Orchis spectabilis*. Photo by Linda E. Law.



Plate 2. Maple Mama. Photo art by Linda E. Law.



Plate 3. Spiral pattern of a daisy. Photo by Linda E. Law.



Plate 4. Striped Maple Spirit Being. Photo art by Linda E. Law.



Plate 5. Bark Being. Photo art by Linda E. Law.



Plate 6. Debbie communing with Echinacea. Photo by Linda E. Law.



Plate 7. A quiet moment with White Pine. Photo by Pam Montgomery.



Plate 8. Preparing herbs for a spiritual plant bath. Photo by Linda E. Law.



Plate 9. Mugwort Spirit Being. Photo art by Linda E. Law.



Plate 10. Lisa receiving a spiritual plant bath. Photo by Linda E. Law.



Plate 11. Sacred Basil.



Plate 12. St. John's wort being made into a flower essence. Photo by Linda E. Law.



Plate 13. Calendula Spirit Being. Photo art by Linda E. Law.



Plate 14. Trillium. Photo by Kelly Sinclair.

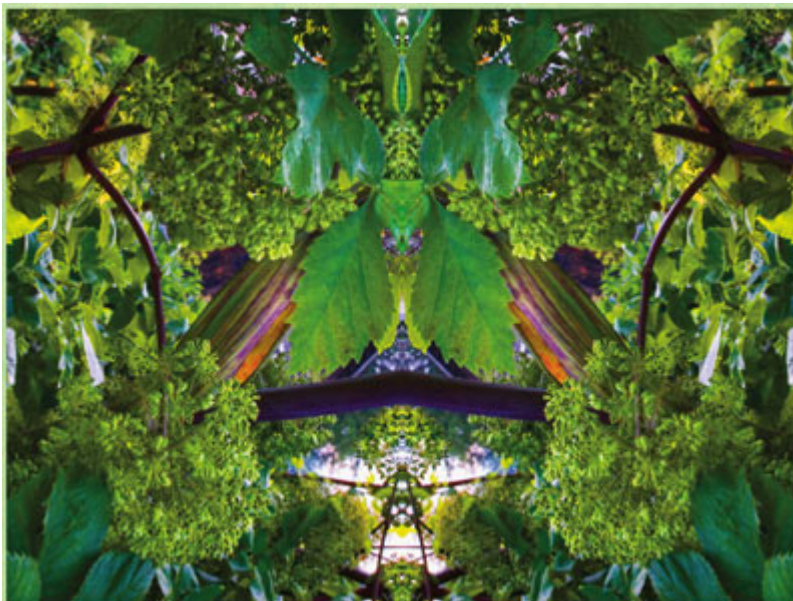


Plate 15. Angelica Spirit Being. Photo art by Linda E. Law.



Plate 16. Rose. Photo by Pam Montgomery.

The Great Healing is a time of huge paradigm shift or, as Richard Boylan reports from the Star Visions Conference held by Lakota peoples in Colorado, “Fifth World society is shaped by the feminine paths of cooperation, nonaggression, inclusiveness, noncompetitiveness, service rather than dominance, use of psychic and spiritual gifts as well as technology, and living in conscious harmony with nature’s ways.” This move into living in conscious harmony with nature’s ways is exactly what Plant Spirit Healing accomplishes. It helps people come into their own true nature, which is in alignment with the greater nature. Because of plants’ predominance on the planet, their great sensitive intelligence, and their ability to heal on all levels, they are the ones to bring about massive healing during this major shifting time. Plants are actually instigating this huge evolutionary movement that is spiritual in nature. Plants have always preceded humans in evolution, as explained in chapter 2. The Hopi Prophecy mentions this, “The emergence to the future Fifth World has begun. It is being made of the humble people of little nations, tribes and racial minorities. You can read this in the Earth itself. Plant forms from previous Worlds are beginning to spring up as seeds. The same kinds of seeds are being planted in the sky as stars. The same kinds of seeds are being planted in our hearts. All these are the same.” This is not a metaphor. The seeds referred to in this prophecy are actual spiritual

plant seeds that will grow into a new way of life on this planet—one of peace, one of harmony, one of living in accordance with the laws of nature in a sustainable way.

You may recall the story in chapter two of the Orchid that suddenly appeared in the woods by my house. This is one of the plant spirits that helps us transition into the Fifth World. It not only helps people in their spiritual evolution but it helps the earth in its transitioning as well. The fact that this little Orchid has come to me and to this piece of land gives me hope and courage for the future. I feel it came because our intentions and prayers have been so strong. We are committed to the earth, the green beings, and the water, treating them as if they were relatives, relying on them as guides, and always giving back through ceremony and loving-kindness. Our commitment carries beyond the boundaries of this property; we are spokespersons for the earth and her green beings, everywhere we go. I have made a flower essence of *Orchis spectabilis*, and I bring it with me to other places to give to the earth. I am not so presumptuous to think that I am healing the earth, but I do believe that *Orchis* has this power.

The Great Healing that is upon us is the healing of the earth and all her beings. We can assist that healing by healing ourselves and others with plant spirits. When we come into alignment with our true nature, a shift in consciousness takes place and we align with the larger nature. In this alignment there is no room for unsustainable living where the earth is regarded as a commodity to be used as we see fit. As Deep Ecologist John Seed says, “The change that is required of us is not some new resistance to radiation, but a change in consciousness.” Our healing, then, is the healing of the earth.



Ten

BUILDING PERSONAL POWER

The Wolf moon rises as the sun sets on this clear January evening. Reds and oranges streak the sky to the west as the full orb inches its way over the eastern horizon, clothed in a golden gown of reflection from the sun's fire. What a beautiful choreograph of sun and moon! One enters boldly displaying her fullness as the other slips away, relinquishing his position of prominence for the Queen of the Night to take her place as the dramatic dance through the night sky begins. As she moves higher into the sky, her costume changes into a creamy whiteness that reminds me of a cultured pearl. Basking in the glow of this moon bath, I feel the subtle rays penetrate the vital currents surrounding my body, moving deeper into flesh and tissue, then deeper still, to organs and nuclei of cells, bringing any discordant vibrations into homeostatic harmony. Some say our natural rhythms have been disrupted by the lack of direct exposure to moonbeams, causing all kinds of health problems. I rest my eyes on the radiant shimmer, letting my own rhythm come in a gentle wavelike pattern, pulling me into expansive movement, making room for creative power to fill my vessel. With outstretched arms I call out her name, Selene, Artemis, Diana, all goddesses revered in her honor. As I swirl and turn, not of my own volition but by some great magnetic force, I begin to understand the magical power she possesses to move oceans.

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Plants have a direct line to source energy, and it is this energy that causes healing to take place. This source energy is very powerful and requires a container that can handle its magnitude and dynamism. The container of our bodies needs to be free of clutter and also needs to have the capacity to hold the enormous spiritual

energy that moves through as we work with plant spirits. We strengthen the physical vessel through exercise, breathing, and bodywork while eating good organic food and drinking pure water. We also attempt to clean house, emptying closets of our psyche of wornout beliefs, old patterns, negative thought processes, and unwarranted fears so that the healing gifts of the plant spirits can live in this space instead.

Simple meditation each morning is a way to quiet your thoughts so that the voices of the plants can be heard. This requires only a brief amount of time, but at least long enough to achieve stillness. As thoughts enter in, let them be like a pebble dropped into a pond, radiating out until they disappear. Let the water on the pond become still. Once a level of stillness is obtained, you may invite in any guidance that your plant spirit allies want to share with you.

NIGHT WALKING

One of the activities I do with my students is night walking. This is a good way to face your fears, as many people are afraid of the dark. It is also a way to heighten your sensual awareness. This is best done during a dark moon when there is no light at all. As we walk through the woods we listen intently for night critters and for the breaking of twigs by the person walking in front of us. We allow our energy bodies to expand to feel trees or branches that may be in our way. We walk slowly and consciously, placing one foot in front of the other, aware of what's underfoot. As our eyes adapt to night vision, we let them soften and begin to perceive the glow coming from the trees, their auras. We smell the rich humus aroma of the forest floor with perhaps a hint of musk from the last animal that passed this way. Suddenly, there's a loud cracking, and we stop in our tracks and listen with our entire bodies. We ride the wave of fear that has risen and watch what it brings up. Wild animals surely are about to eat us! We breathe and the fear subsides when we realize the wild animal is more afraid of us than we are of it. We walk on until we come to a fallen log, and here we sit, becoming more comfortable in this dark place, this unknown place. Walking in the dark like this is a way to build personal power, as it helps you to navigate uncharted territory

or what seems that way because you can't see it. While working with Plant Spirit Healing there are many times you may feel you are in an unknown place or engaged in something quite unfamiliar. Instead of being consumed with fear about what to do, breathe deeply and listen for the sounds of this place, broaden your energy field to get a sense of all that encompasses this place and continue on, knowing that your plant spirit guides will be there to help you as soon as you ask.

Several years ago a young woman attending my class insisted on doing the night walk barefoot. At first I was reluctant, worrying that she would hurt herself, but then realized she might feel what was underfoot more acutely, aiding her in the walk. We waited until well after sunset on a night that was pitch black, as the moon had not yet risen. We started out on a wide section of the trail that helped to build people's confidence because there weren't too many obstacles in the path. The further we went the narrower the trail, and, then, I noticed movement to my left. Lilly was stealthily finding her way in the dark without following the trail or her other classmates who were cautiously moving along it. She began to blend with the forest, her bare feet not even breaking a twig. I lost my sense of her as I focused on leading the group along the trail, now barely wide enough to slip through with outstretched arms. I knew if I took one slight angle off the trail we could get turned around and be quite lost in the woods. Finally, we came to a fallen log where we stopped and sat listening to the night sounds. I looked around to make sure everyone was there and then noticed that Lilly was sitting at the base of a huge old maple tree at the edge of the fallen log. She had become like a panther, quietly slinking through the night and now silently watching and waiting. We sat for some time in the hush of the night and then slowly made our way down the mountain. Lilly scampered off, now like a woodland sprite. I was amazed at her ability to move with such ease through the darkened woods. When I asked her about this ability, she said that while in the forest she had become like an animal that knows the way. This is how she learned to negotiate in the underworld when journeying to plant spirits, becoming an animal again as that night in the forest had taught her.

FIRE VIGIL

Since the beginning, fire has been a focal point for much of people's activities. It is the center of the hearth, where food is prepared and eaten. It gives warmth to survive the cold of winter and light to see in the dark. The stories passed down from generation to generation are told around the fire. Rituals and ceremonies marking the turning of the wheel of the year are often performed with fire as a central component. The transformative quality of fire, where wood of the earth and oxygen of the air combine to produce heat and light through the force of combustion, is indeed a miracle that many of us take for granted. This ability to change one thing into another is an extremely powerful energy, and it is this quality that attracts shamans to working with this element as an ally. Even though any element can serve as an ally and a helper, traditionally fire has been used this way. Mircea Eliade, in his book *Shamanism, Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, speaks of shamans having "mastery over fire" and of how this helps them in their soul flight and work with the spirits. Eliade writes, "Such 'fire' and 'heat' are always connected with access to a certain ecstatic state—and the same connection is observed in the most archaic strata of magic and universal religion. Mastery over fire, insensibility to heat, and, hence, the 'mystical heat' . . . translates into sensible terms the fact that the shaman has passed beyond the human condition and already shares in the condition of 'spirits.'"

A fire vigil is an opportunity to sit with fire and learn from it, receive guidance, and be blessed by the spirit of the fire. Fire vigil builds personal power by activating the inherent ability we all have to transform. We begin by setting the fire at nightfall, building up the wood in a four-sided pyramid shape with an opening on each side through which to light the kindling that has been put at the base and in the middle of the pyramid. Each person in the circle then offers a pinch of tobacco and makes a prayer, setting their intentions for the fire vigil and giving thanks for the opportunity to sit with fire. Each person who is standing in one of the four directions calls in the spirit of that direction and then lights the kindling. By lighting the fire in this manner sacred space is created—the container. In the early evening of a fire vigil songs or stories may be shared, always honoring the

container that has been set. As the night lengthens and the hour of wending approaches, silence falls upon the circle and each person begins their own inner dance with the fire in hopes of meeting with the spirit of fire. The fire is kept by each person taking a turn, tending it throughout the night, with some choosing to stay awake all night. Working with fire can be elusive just as the flames can dance high and then dwindle to a flicker; one must be diligent and patient to receive the blessing of the fire spirit. An unwavering focus is required as the fire spirit may come in many different forms.

I dozed by the fire, listening to the soft murmurings of those in the circle. Suddenly I jerked awake, the fire having dwindled, the others dozing now too. I added wood and up leapt the flames. I watched as the fiery faces began to take shape in the coals, each successive one taking on a more expressive look. I sat mesmerized by the glowing transformations in front of me. Transfixed, I found myself being drawn into the dream of the fire and there, in the very middle, I began to move in a dizzying swirl. As the flames leapt so did I, in rhythm with the fire's dance. As I spiraled up I realized I was being accompanied by one flame in particular that laced itself in and around me. This flame seemed different than the others in that it was so intent on me. In a flash the flame shot through me, searing its essence into my entire being. Being touched by the flame in this way was almost like being marked so that I wouldn't forget its power. I continue to marvel at the mystery of fire, knowing that I may never know the full extent of its nature, but I do know the strength of my passion when the fire burns brightly in my heart.

One of my students says of fire, "I used to be such a fiery person but then my fire got depleted. I was cold all the time. The fire vigil for me was a remembrance of my true nature and what it feels like to have my inner fire burning again. When I'm with the fire and smoke in this way, it is my coming home. The fire vigil rekindled my fire, helping me to realign with its mysterious power. I have deep respect for fire because it is such a strong spirit, so I am careful not to play with it because it can burn you. From this humble place I am honored to have been gifted with fire's transformative quality—it is my role with people. I take a lot in from a person and then digest it into something else, helping that person to become renewed."

VISION JOURNEY

For eons people have been returning to nature to connect with spirit. Jesus spent forty days and forty nights in the desert, while Buddha sat in meditation for seven weeks under the Bodhi tree until he reached enlightenment. Removing ourselves from the distractions of modern living, we journey alone into nature for personal growth and to seek spiritual guidance. Spirit speaks through all aspects of nature, and messages can come from the animals, the plants, the trees, the water, the wind, the sun, the moon, and the earth as well as in daydream visions or through an inner awareness. A revelation is sought, one that can give meaning or direction to our life and leads to an understanding of how we can serve ourselves, our community, and the Holy Heart. This type of visioning helps our soul to evolve, because it is a direct request to be shown our true nature and the path we are to walk.

The vision journey is a mini version of the more traditional vision quest, which can last up to four days and four nights. The journey begins at sunrise with a smudging of mugwort herb and cedar needles to clear away any energy that will not serve the journeyer. A red clay stone is made into a watery paste by rubbing it with a little water against another rock. The journeyer's face is outlined with the red paste while the wrists and ankles are encircled. This helps the spirits to recognize a visioning person. The container of sacred intention for the vision journey is held by a guide who plays the drum at intervals throughout the day. The drum begins to beat as the journeyer, in this case a woman, heads to a preselected spot to spend the day seeking a vision. When she arrives, a twelve-foot-diameter circle is made with cornmeal and tobacco. As the circle is being made, prayers are offered and only that which serves her is invited into the circle. She then sets her intention for her visioning day, which could have to do with healing, renewal, or clarity. Traditionally, the questions one asks while on vision quest are, "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" The only items she brings with her are water and a stick and yarn, which will serve as a focus for her to make prayers. Throughout the day this prayer arrow is wrapped with yarn as prayers of gratitude are offered as well as those needed to

emphasize her intentions for the day. She pays close attention to any and all animals, insects, or birds that are around her. She notices the plants and trees within and near her circle. She pays attention to the patterns of light, the wind and its movement, and the sounds of nature as they flow in and around her. Her heart touches the heart of nature, and she realizes that all is part of the tapestry into which her intention is woven, and each piece adds another thread that together creates the entire picture. As the day progresses she drifts in and out of the daydream of her life, seeing which patterns fit in the design and which don't. As sunset approaches she begins to close her circle by giving prayers of thanks, and, then, when she hears the drum, she knows it is time to leave. Upon return, a ceremonial meal is offered, breaking the fast of the day. She then has time for quiet reflection, writing, or drawing her vision journey. That night she asks for any dreams that might want to come, adding one more thread to the fabric of her vision. The following morning she has time to process her vision journey with the person who served as a guide, perhaps giving assistance with interpreting it. It may take hours, days, weeks, or even months before the full understanding of her vision journey unfolds. Her vision may not be a grand plan for her life, but it is rare for nothing to be revealed as nature is constantly attempting to show us how to live according to our own true natures.

On the day of Jasmine's vision journey, there was a cold drizzle falling from the sky. I hoped that it would clear so that she would not experience too much discomfort, but I have learned over the years that the weather on a vision journey day is exactly what is needed for those visioning. "It was so cold, miserable, and rainy I could not believe that I had to be out in it all day. When I sat in my spot, I became very annoyed that the day was not beautiful and sunny. I made my circle and tried to get comfortable as best I could, given the conditions. The longer I sat, the more agitated I became. I felt myself being stretched to my limits, wondering why I was doing this. Then I looked up and saw goldenrod spread out in the field before me. It's funny I didn't notice it before. I began to use the goldenrod as a way to refocus my attention. What was so unusual was its color. It wasn't just a golden yellow—it was more like the bright shine of a highlighter pen. I've never really liked goldenrod, but I now saw it in a

different light—so straight, tall, and shiny. As I admired the goldenrod, a hummingbird came very near, hovering just above me. It came again and again, three times. Three is a magical number for me, and I always pay attention to threes. What a joyful little bird flitting about! I realized that hours had gone by while focusing on Goldenrod and Hummingbird. This day helped me understand that I can stand up and shine with joyfulness when I shift my focus instead of dwelling on dreadful circumstances. It's really about my perception. If I perceive this day to be a rainy, miserable day, then that is what my experience will be. If I refocus my attention and, with the help of Goldenrod and Hummingbird, perceive it to be a joyful shining day, this changes everything. I am so grateful to be shown how to refocus so that I can see the gifts, even in difficult times.”

The day of Jeff 's vision journey the weather was a bit different. “It was clear with lazy, cotton clouds that rode the gentle winds high in the blue sky. I had spent most of the previous afternoon looking for the right place. I wandered many paths and saw many things that gave me insights into who I am, where I was; yet none of them had invited me to sit beside them and spend a day in listening silence. My despair of ever finding the right place reminded me of how I've felt in the past, while in a forest or on a mountainside looking for where I would place myself in the earth's care, in my mother's embrace. 'That field there,' I thought, looking at an open area low on the mountain; then, I followed it with a 'No, that's not right. Too close, not high enough. I can't see around me.' This went on that whole afternoon until finally I gave up thinking about it, as I always do, and returned, knowing that I would just try listening to my heart tomorrow, going wherever it led. It is strange to look back at it now and smile at my own folly. Each time it is the same. I fret, worry, and search for just the right place, only to discover that I only need listen to the stirrings of my own longing and follow my instinct, my heart, and my gut to the perfect place. On that clear day of lazy clouds I turned to Pam, pointed to the mountain on the opposite side of the valley, and asked her how I could get to that clearing. For some reason I felt the need to look at the mountain, to have some clear view of its entirety. I would later discover why. Following Pam's directions, I walked to a dirt road, one that I could double back on. As always, while spending

time listening to the world, a light wind greeted me, carrying a gentle caress, and reminding me that I am cared for. An unaccountable joy and pleasantness filled me, and I felt as though I were stepping out on a grand adventure. I saw the dirt road double back and continue up the mountain ahead of me and decided to shorten the walk a bit by walking across a field. About halfway across the field I felt a change in the air behind me, something from spirit beginning to stir. I turned and looked up. There above and behind me was an old friend, Red-tailed Hawk. He kited briefly and hung in the air, gazing down at me and I up at him. Elation nearly burst from my chest and an overwhelming, giddy laugh escaped as he circled me once then flew to follow the dirt road. At first I didn't get the message. Later, when I encountered the barbed wire fence and the thick bramble, I laughed a second time. When I turned around and went back, I finally heard Hawk's message: 'stay on the path.' I laughed even harder as more layers of this message sank in. Yes indeed, this was going to be an interesting day! I arrived at the clearing and prepared my sacred space near the top of it, with a clear view of the mountain opposite me. I had a clear view of the sky and of most of the woods and fields on the mountain below me. Here was my home for the day. This clearing was filled with many sweet plants; field mints, wild strawberries, and honeysuckle grew along the stone wall I crossed as I entered. Lush grasses and small berry bushes dotted the clearing. It was a clear message—I was immersed in the sweetness of life. I sighed contentedly. The buzzing bees and flitting butterflies and moths darted all about me. Another old friend, Dragonfly, stopped by for a while and rested with me upon my blanket. We shared a quiet gazing at each other for a time that seemed like days. Hawk came by again to check on me, zipping by so closely I could nearly reach out and touch him. I felt held and loved by all of creation, and I will look back upon that day as one of the best days I have ever been blessed with. This was not the first time I had experienced something like this; I have often spent days at a time fasting and listening. I was to discover that the length of time spent is less important than the clarity of my heart and the purity of my love for the earth. The day lingered on and I sat listening to the earth. Where was I in my walk? What now? What was next for me, and

what was holding me back from fully expressing my soul's purpose? As the bees buzzed around me and the light breeze whispered through the trees in a language I could nearly understand, my mind drifted. My vision began melting the clouds and the mountain together as I stared transfixed by a sudden beauty. There were pictures and insights in the light and shadows that wove into the tapestry of the mountain and clouds. Some of the messages were for me to keep close to my heart, some seemed to be messages to pass on to others in my work as a healer and a guide. Then I heard in my heart the voice of the Mountain. It spoke to me of my fear and my worry. I had always been afraid of my desire to be well-known in my field and to seek fame. Yet I had to admit my longings carried a yearning that bordered on pain. My soul cried out for recognition, not just for myself, but also for the work that I so desired to do. Mountain said to me, 'Do not be afraid to be big,' but also admonished me, 'Do not attempt to be bigger than you are.' Now, as I write this, and as I experienced it then, a great well of emotion rises in me. Tears of truthful recognition spill down my cheeks, and I know I am loved for who I am. And I also know that it is okay for me to embrace however big I may be and that rather than seek to be bigger, I can simply be as big as I am. My emotions finally settled, and I offered prayers of thanks. I am humbled by the simplicity of the message, yet awed by the power of that simplicity. It wasn't long before an owl hooted to me—a farewell and message that death had come to this time. My time was up; although I had not heard Pam drum to call us back yet, I knew in my heart that the earth had told me through Owl, 'it is time to go.' I pack my things and walk trance-like, hearing the drumming calling us back as I set foot on home ground, adding further confirmation that I have been listening well this day. If only during all my days I could listen so well.

“It is nearly one year since that day on the mountain; I think about the past and how it informs the future and wraps it in a gentle cocoon for transformation. As I reflect on this past experience, memories of my time on the mountain spring forth, wrapping me in readiness for some future transformation. Like a chrysalis, I have no idea what form I will take when I emerge from this cocoon of experience, and, of course, some fear arises. I will, however, endeavor to move

forward through my fear, to find my glorious form. While I wait and transform, the memories of that time enshroud and gnaw at me as I relive them. I take them into myself to speed my transformation, making them a part of this newly arising form. And I am aware that, like a butterfly whose wings are the culmination of the essences partaken while a caterpillar, I too will display this experience as part of my transformation. Perhaps the sweetness of the parsley ingested by the caterpillar is what gives the butterfly its unique color. Perhaps the sweetness of life I partook on that lazy day, spent in silent wonder on the mountainside, will color my wings. And like the butterfly, I long to share the beauty, the sweetness.”

SWEAT LODGE

Sweating for purification has taken place in one form or another for centuries, in Finnish saunas, Turkish hammans, Roman bathhouses, Russian banias, Irish sweathouses, Mayan temescals, and Native American sweat lodges. All of our ancestors engaged in sweating for purposes of physical and spiritual purification. Who knows how the original sweathouse came about? What we do know is that humans, from the beginning of time, revered the magic of fire. In the sweathouse the mysterious power of fire is captured in the form of hot stones. Water is then poured on the stones, combining these two elements to create hot steam or vapor that fills the chamber, carrying what the Finns call “the Spirit of Life.” The heat and steam cause the body to sweat, transporting both physical and spiritual impurities out through the skin. The steam emits negative ions, which have myriad physical benefits. The sweathouse is a sacred container, not unlike a womb, with its dark, warm, and wet environment where one returns to shed that which does not serve, emerging reborn anew. Others may liken it to a temple because of the reverent nature of the prayer offerings. Being in a lodge is an opportunity to pray for oneself and others. Because of the physical limits that get pushed, one may find that praying harder can help move beyond the boundaries of the flesh and approach the realm of spirit where direct communication can occur. This stretching of our physical confines is a way to make

more room for spirit to inhabit us, enhancing our creative personal power.

During the solstices, equinoxes, and many cross-quarter days between them, we honor the turning of the wheel of the year with a sweat lodge. We don't follow any particular sweat tradition, but we keep in mind that all our ancestors before us sweat in some fashion so we remember them through our sweating. This is an opportunity for our community to come together, regardless of religious persuasion, to pray in a heartfelt and mindful way. In preparation, we select stones from the surrounding area that will hold the fire in them—granite and lava rocks are especially adapted to this. Each stone is prayed over as it is placed on the wood base. We light the fire by offering tobacco and prayers asking for the stones to heat well, that no harm come to any of the trees or plants near the fire, and that the fire be tended in a good way, with gratitude for the opportunity to participate in this sacred event. The fire slowly heats the stones over a period of about three hours while we tie prayer bundles of homegrown tobacco that will be placed inside the lodge. Once the striped maple saplings that form the lodge are covered with blankets and the stones are heated, we gather to receive a smudge of cedar before entering the lodge. We enter the lodge on our hands and knees, giving thanks to all our relations for the opportunity to enter this sacred space. Once we have all entered the lodge, we sit in silence as the first seven rocks are brought in. Each of these rocks represents one of the directions and is welcomed by placing a pinch of cedar on its surface. Once all the stones are in, a small amount of water is poured on them to create enough steam to smudge our tobacco ties, which we then hang in the bent wood over our head. We drop the blankets, covering the doorway and creating complete darkness except for the glow coming from the stones. Every lodge is a little different in nature, but usually we have four "doors," each having a particular focus. Our first round is dedicated to gratitude, and we begin by singing a song to the stones. A song honoring the fire follows, and then we sing a gratitude song, giving thanks for the beautiful day and everything in it. Sometimes, if the singing doesn't seem to be enough, we continue on with more prayers of gratitude.

As this first round comes to an end we oftentimes will go into the second round without opening the door and bringing in more rocks.

The second round is dedicated to the wider world, and, after singing a song to honor the element of water, we pray together out loud. The power of twelve people praying together is of a magnitude greater than twelve people praying individually. Together we pray for all people, animals, plants, trees—all of creation. After we end this round with a song, the door opens and more hot rocks are brought in. Throughout all of our praying and singing water is poured on the stones, creating hot steam. While the door is open there is an opportunity to go outside the lodge if necessary. Once several more rocks are piled onto the first seven, the door is again closed and darkness descends.

The third round begins with a song honoring the earth element. This round is dedicated to the time of year. For example, if it is winter solstice, we honor the longest night and the quiet inner place that the short days naturally bring us to. We also honor the return of the light as the days begin to get longer. Songs are sung honoring this time of year as each person speaks of how the solstice lives in them.

The fourth and final round opens with a song honoring the element of air and is dedicated to personal prayers. This is an opportunity to pray for whatever it is we feel we need at this time, such as healing, strength, guidance, or help of any kind. As each person offers their prayers the others serve as supporting witnesses. At the completion of personal prayers more songs may be sung if people feel the need, but it is often quite hot and everyone is ready for the door to open so all may leave the lodge and head to the stream for a cool splash of water.

The following is an experience of one of our community members who regularly attends lodges. “Entering the lodge at the turning times of the year—solstices, equinoxes, cross-quarter days, times when the great orbit of the Earth reaches its fulcrums—always feels to me like a rare and blessed opportunity to resynchronize my breath and heartbeat with the breath and heartbeat of the Mother and to offer gifts from that place of balance. Sometimes this is really hard. At times I feel so out of sync that it is an especially long and difficult

journey to arrive, really arrive, into the space of darkness inside the lodge.

“Last summer solstice I remember rushing to be able to get away from my daily life. Phone calls, reports, packing for a move—I had to tear myself away from these to get on the road. I found myself speeding for the entire half-hour it took me to get there, afraid I would be late. When I was finally sitting on the cool earth inside the lodge and the heavy blanket door was closed, enveloping us in darkness, I had the sensation of having been hurtled into a dark void. Even though I was sitting near friends and could hear their voices, I felt far away. My speeding had been suddenly halted. Where was I? Who was I? A fear began to arise in me that I would describe like this: ‘What if I can’t find a voice to pray? Worse yet, what if the voice I find is one I don’t recognize? What if I say crazy things?’ In some ways this was a more intense version of a fear that is often with me, one that sometimes I can see more clearly in the darkness of the lodge. During this particular summer solstice lodge, my private monster seemed to visit me with great suddenness and intensity just as the door of the lodge closed. What to do but sit with the fear and trust the process?

“When the first stones arrived into the darkness, there seemed then to be the beginning of an orientation. Their glow was magnetic, just as the core of this spinning globe is magnetic. I could feel my body slowly begin to settle. I began to trust again in the very age of the stone beings—Grandmothers and Grandfathers—who hold memory of a time before humans walked the Earth. Their heat began to penetrate my pores, and slowly my own salty moisture began to seep out. Some barrier was breached, and fear began to slowly melt.

“I remember that the familiar songs of the first round of the lodge helped my fearful voice to dare to let itself be heard, buoyed as it was by the voices of my friends, all of us singing together. And I remember that when it came time for me to pray, the words came from somewhere deep down. I heard myself speaking of how I had sped to that place in a car made of metal, a steel enclosure, and how, now that my feet and body were feeling the moist earth, I could ask that my prayers come not only from my head but from the soles of my feet. ‘Help me please, help me please, Grandmothers and

Grandfathers! Help me please pray from the soles of my feet!' I prayed loudly, harshly, emphatically. As I had feared, my voice was not a voice that I recognized as entirely my own. But rather than being overwhelmed by that, I felt the glimmer of a spark, a bit of new life. It was as if a tiny new star had appeared in the sky or as if a new little creature poked its bold head out from behind a tree where it had been hiding. In a paradoxical way that even now is difficult to fully understand, what I had been afraid of became what I had to offer. Inside the space of the lodge where the elements are so immediate, where we all sat together on the earth and in the presence of the ancient stone beings, I could come to trust, for those moments, that I am a part—a tiny but real part—of a great unfathomable turning. Whatever voice came, it came—from deep down.

“I don't remember all of what I prayed for and offered in that lodge during the later rounds (and wouldn't even repeat the words I do remember, as they were words not to be spoken outside the lodge). But I do remember that my heart felt slow and steady and uncommonly fierce and generous—all at once. And I remember that I drove home that night calmly and slowly. Even from inside the steel car, riding on rubber tires, I could see some sparkling stars outside, and I could feel a bit of the great turnings. And I had the sensation, as I remember it now, of small animals seeing me from inside the woods, winking at me as I drove.”



Eleven

FOUNDATIONAL HEALING MODALITIES

Zillions of snowflakes have fallen today for a late season snowstorm, accumulating at least two feet of the tiny white bits of frozen water. Every single one of them is unique, no two alike. If it had been warmer it would have been rain. Does that mean every raindrop is unique and different from the next or is that only when they crystallize? The wind has picked up now, and mini tornados of snowflakes are swirling across the field. The snowflakes kiss my cheek emphatically, leaving me breathless. Later, all has settled into a soft stillness, each sound muffled by the blanket of snow. Sun splashes across snowflake prisms as the dazzling light pours into my being, reminding my cells of their need for such radiance. With snowshoes, I am able to make my way through the fluffy layers, inspecting the tracks of tiny creatures scuttling here and there in search of food. I stop to take in the azure skies that add to the exquisite delight of a romp in sun and snow. Feeling the warm sun through clear skies, I realize how the light has shifted these last few days, growing stronger. My face turns up to the sun allowing my pineal gland to revel in such direct contact. I feel the shifting inside as if some giant wheel is turning. The quiet dreamtime energy of winter is giving way to a dynamic stirring. I face the east, the direction from which spring emerges, and give thanks for the faithful return of the sun and the healing gift of new beginnings the east offers.

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Foundational healing modalities are existing forms of healing that provide a framework within which to work with plant spirits. A plant

spirit, just like the physical aspect of the plant, has the ability to heal in many different ways and in a variety of modalities. The three that I have explored are Five Element Chinese Medicine, the Chakra system, and the Medicine Wheel. Each of these healing modalities is an entire course of study within itself, and I urge you to explore deeply the ones that speak to you. I present them here to help you understand the many layers of Plant Spirit Healing. These modalities are structures within which therapeutically use plant spirits. However, the healing comes through your co-creative partnership with the plant spirits. The most important aspect of Plant Spirit Healing is your relationship to the plants and secondly your understanding of the modality you are working in. On the other hand, you don't have to work in any of these modalities. They merely provide a framework within which you may work. It may be that your relationship with plant spirits is such that they give you clear instructions on exactly what needs to be done to bring balance for another person and that those instructions don't include any other modalities. However, I have also found that working within these modalities gives support to aspects of oneself (to elements, chakras, and directions) and that can always be helpful.

CHINESE FIVE ELEMENTS

Most of what I know about Five Element Theory was taught to me by Eliot Cowan. I'm grateful to Eliot for his deep knowledge of the five elements and his commitment to the plant spirits. Also Jason Elias, who is a fine acupuncturist, has helped me to understand the five elements in a comprehensive way. I thank them both for their descriptions of the elements, which I have paraphrased in the following discussion. The quoted phrases are attributed to Eliot.

To understand the five elements we must look to nature for the energetic essence of each as it is reflected in the natural world. J. R. Worsley, the leading proponent of the Chinese Five Element system in the United States says, "the elements describe the way in which we could function in accordance with Nature; they reveal to us the true extent of our natural powers in body, mind and spirit." Each one of us is made up of all the elements, as we are a part of nature, but

we have one element that is predominant which is referred to as the causative factor. This element is where we live from. It is where our greatest gifts lie, where we will encounter our greatest challenges, and where the most imbalances can occur. Each of the elements has correspondences of color, sound, odor, emotion, taste, climate, direction, season, sense, personality, body tissue, and so forth. The main determining factors of a person's primary element are color, sound, odor, and emotion. As we go through each one of these elements you will find parts of all of them that you can relate to, and understandably so because we are made up of all the elements, but there is one particular one that is the primary element you embody.

Each of the elements also has what are referred to as "officials," which are the energetic essence of an organ in the body. These officials are considered to be family members, and the ideal is for all the family members to communicate and get along well. Harmony in the house is the goal of the Chinese Five Element system. The chart on page 132 indicates the correspondences for each of the elements.

Wood

Wood is the element of springtime and carries regenerative energy. It is the force of growth and the kind of energy it takes to push a seedling through the earth, prompting it to reach for the sunlight, enabling it to grow strong. The wood element person is grounded in the earth with a strong sense of self and yet strives for new heights, always seeking a greater potential. This element is very creative because it has the ability to overcome obstacles. The sense associated with wood is that of seeing or vision, which includes literal eyesight and also the vision you have for your life. The emotion of anger is often seen as a negative emotion but when appropriately applied to things like injustice, it can change the energy or shift tension-filled situations. When the creative growth of wood is suppressed, stagnation can occur, which is one of the greatest challenges for wood element people because their essence is of an upward thrust with a commanding vision of their direction.

THE FIVE ELEMENTS AND THEIR CORRESPONDENCES

	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water	Wood
Season	summer	late summer	autumn	winter	spring
Color	red	yellow	white	blue/black	green
Taste	bitter	sweet	spicy/ pungent	salty	sour
Climate	hot	humid	dry	cold	windy
Sound	laughing	singing	weeping	groaning	shouting
Emotion	joy	sympathy	grief	fear	anger
Odor	scorched, burnt	fragrant	rotten	putrid	rancid
Direction	south	center	west	north	east
Tissue	veins, arteries, circulatory, heart	flesh, lymph, muscles	skin, body hair	bones, brain, teeth, glands, ears	tendons, eyes, ligaments
Organ/ Official	heart, small intestine, three heater, heart protector	stomach, spleen	colon, lungs	kidney, bladder	liver, gallbladder
Sense	touch	taste	smell	hear/listen	see
Personality	lover	peacemaker	artist	philosopher	visionary
Spiritual Quality	union, open heart	centeredness	inspiration	ability to be	creativity

The officials of the wood element are the liver and gallbladder. The liver is the “architect or strategic planner” or keeper of the vision. This is where the grand design or blueprint of your life is held. The plan the liver makes for your life needs to be flexible yet strong, with a clear vision for your future that allows the creative spirit of the liver to be open to new ideas and experiences. The gallbladder is the “decision maker,” the prudent judge, who watches over and coordinates the enacting of the plan made by the liver. The gallbladder needs to make good decisions with clarity that benefit all members of the house.

When the wood element is out of balance a person may become extremely controlling, exhibiting rigidity and aggression. A lack of motivation due to stagnation may present itself. This dulling of the creative force can lead to abusive behavior toward both oneself and others. Addictions can be an imbalance in the wood element, as there is a tendency to use recreational drugs or alcohol as a way to compensate for the lack of creative growth. Compulsive or reckless as well as workaholic behavior are all signs of an imbalance in wood. The key for this element is to be flexible and “go with the flow.” Relax, and don’t let the stress of life get to you.

Fire

The fire element carries the spark of life that embodies radiant and passionate energy, bringing warmth to all that it encounters. Others are attracted to the light and joyful energy emanating from a fire element person, whose greatest desire is to join in union and be one with everything. Fire folks particularly desire union with another as a lover or partner, to the point where they sometimes lose their sense of self in order to merge with another. The season of fire is summer, which is when the heat of the sun brings plants to maturity, and so it is with us when we mature, experiencing joy, love, and compassion in a balanced and full way.

The fire element, unlike the other elements, has four officials instead of two. The heart is considered the “supreme controller,” the emperor, the pilot, the one who reigns supreme, sitting on the throne of the kingdom and representing the consciousness of one’s being. The heart is where the spirit is stored and is the representation of the divine on earth. Because of its royal nature the heart must live in a pure environment undisturbed by the trials of daily life. All the other officials are so affected by this one that the house is filled with chaos when the emperor is ill. The organ that is paired with the heart is the small intestine, which is the “official of transformation of matter” or the separator of the pure from the impure. This is the official that helps you discriminate between what is beneficial and what is toxic, not only physically but also mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Because we live in an increasingly toxic world that pollutes our bodies, hearts, and minds, we are faced with mental confusion,

emotional dysfunction, and depression. The small intestine then works overtime to sort out what feeds and nourishes us and what doesn't.

The other two officials in the fire element are not actual organs in the body, though they serve functionally as organs. The heart protector or pericardium is the official of the “pleasures of the people” and is in charge of protecting the heart by creating an atmosphere of happiness and well-being. This official screens out thoughts or images that would be detrimental to the heart. All intimate relationships are monitored by the heart protector, making sure that the heart is fed emotionally and spiritually by these relationships. The triple heater or triple warmer is the official “controller of temperatures,” which creates an atmosphere of shared warmth among all the officials, keeping the house evenly tempered. By heating and cooling the entire system, the three heater serves the important function of maintaining overall balance among the three physical levels of the body—top, middle, and bottom—as well as the body, mind, and spirit. The three heater not only maintains balanced relations within a person but also between an individual and the outer world. When a person goes hot and cold, the three heater may be compromised.

When the fire element is out of balance, there can be insecurity in love relationships, which may be accompanied by unhealthy sexual expression. One may exhibit a manic/depressive tendency. There can be an overall lack of vitality, joy, and laughter with many mood swings, or the other extreme of hyperexcitability, leading to burnout. An imbalanced fire element has an intense need to be accepted by others as a way of connecting. There can be a tendency to become scattered and unable to focus, especially when the small intestine is imbalanced.

Earth

The earth element is our direct relationship to “the Mother,” including the earth, our biological mother, and our own mothering role. It is the element that has to do with our nourishment and how we are fed as well as how we feed others. Earth element persons are naturally caring, giving, and sympathetic with a tendency to care for others

more than themselves, which makes them good healers. They are peacemakers who can mediate in any kind of conflict, especially in a community or family setting where they are most likely at the center. Earth element folks have a strong sense of home and place and do not like being separated from what's familiar. The ability to say "No" can be quite difficult, as an earth element person is always available to whomever and whatever is needed. Naturally empathetic, an earth element can feel others' pain but can easily return to their well-grounded center. The sweetness of life is what the earth element person craves, lending a tendency toward overindulgence in the comforts of life.

The officials of the earth element are the stomach and spleen. The stomach is the official of "granaries" or of "rotting and ripening," and can also be referred to as "the sea of nutrients." The stomach receives nourishment from the outside and puts it into a form that can be assimilated. We are always digesting our experiences in life, and they won't nourish us if this official is not in a balanced state. The spleen is the "official of transport" that distributes nourishment throughout the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual levels in our beings. It officiates over the transport of all urine, lymph, blood, nerve impulses, chi, and thoughts as well as the transport of nutrients to the cells.

An earth element person who is out of balance may view the world as a place of scarcity because they are not receiving proper nourishment, which could result in being very needy and requiring exceptional sympathy. Lots of hurts or little illnesses like hypochondria may begin to show up. On the other hand, one may move into over-caring for others, wanting to solve their problems and letting the boundaries between self and others fade. An imbalance in earth can also manifest as excessive worry and fretting over just about everything. Sticky situations can arise, and it is difficult to get unstuck when earth is not balanced. It is important for an earth element to be grounded and centered; otherwise, one can feel like a top spinning out of control.

Metal

Metal is the element that carries the energy of pure essence or the ability to get to the core of an issue. It seeks to know and understand the guiding principles of life and how things fundamentally operate. The metal element person is the artist who has a great aesthetic sense and who loves philosophy and lofty discussion in search of higher truths. Metal is always striving to understand the essential nature of life and is fueled by inspiration that may come from this understanding. Concerned with ethics and high moral standards, a metal person focuses on the qualities of inner strength, stability, and true knowledge instead of outer trappings. The earth element is of the mother whereas the metal element is of the father. Inherent in one's relationship to his or her father comes an understanding of authority and respect. Metal elements need to be respected and valued while demonstrating their worthiness.

The officials of metal are the lung and colon. The lung is the official of "rhythmic order" who sets the pace of our entire system through inhalation and exhalation. This official provides exchange between inner and outer and is where the balance of giving and receiving is found. Associated with air, the lung official receives inspiration from the heavens, refreshing us on all levels and giving us a strong sense of vital essence. The colon is the official of "drainage and dregs" whose job is to clean house. The body, mind, and spirit can become cluttered with debris if this official is imbalanced, so much so that if it's left unattended our entire being can become poisoned. The elimination of toxins, including negative thoughts and emotions, is crucial to healthy functioning.

When metal hardens it can become very sharp and can cut you. Cutting and hurtful remarks indicate an imbalance in metal, as does inflexible and dogmatic behavior. A lack of self-esteem and an inability to accept any kind of criticism may be present as well. Because of a lack of inner worth, an outer hoarding of possessions can occur. Another indication of imbalance may appear as a lack of inspiration that leads to deep grief for the loss of what is held so dear; a strong negative attitude is present, turning preciousness (something of value) into baseness. Emotional numbing can result in an inability to maintain loving relationships.

Water

Water is the element of knowledge and the wisdom of the philosopher who has a strong intellect and who pursues an understanding of the workings of his or her own world and of the universe. Water rules the energies of stillness, as demonstrated by water contained, and of movement, like a flowing stream, with a balance of both required. Quiet meditation is as necessary as following a path in life, always moving forward toward a goal. Water knows where it's going and has the inner strength and will to arrive there. As Lao Tzu says, "Water resists nothing and overcomes everything." Water is the source of all life and strives to preserve life and avoid death. The free movement of spirit is of water, as is the fluid movement of chi and our thoughts.

The officials of the water element are the bladder and kidney. The bladder is the "official of reservoirs" where water is stored. The bladder is in charge of making sure the water is of good quality, that there is plenty of it, and that it is available when it is needed. Our adaptability comes from having enough free-flowing, unimpeded, and lubricating liquid so we don't seize up in our bodies or minds. The kidney is the "controller of fluids" and is in charge of regulating the water that comes out of the reservoir. It is also where our ancestral chi is stored. This is the chi that is passed on to you when you are born and which carries you through your life; when it is spent, you die. We can spend it quickly by living hard or we can help maintain the chi by engaging in spiritual practices. A balanced kidney official gives strength to our ambition, our willpower, and our instinctive survival abilities.

A water element that is not free flowing can become opinionated and intolerant of others, often blaming them for one's own problems. An imbalanced water element can appear tough on the outside but is really cringing with fear on the inside. Water elements need a cause or purpose in life, without which they suffer deeply to the point of losing their will to live.

This sketch of the five elements is a starting point for you to understand the elemental nature of your being and that of others. The elements reflect patterns in nature that we embody at our core.

J. R. Worsely says, "The spirit of the Elements, the unique character of each in the cycle of change and transformation, is what sustains life and gives the whole of Nature, ourselves included, a sense of purpose, growth and fulfillment." To live balanced within the elements brings us into harmony with nature and all our relations.

Cheryl came to me with a complaint of low energy, thyroid dysfunction, and digestive upset in the form of constipation. After hearing about her physical problems I asked her to share with me her emotional state. She then told me about her relationship with her husband and how unhappy she was. She wanted to leave him but felt she couldn't because it would break up the family. Family is an essential ingredient in Cheryl's life, and she loves being the Mother at the center of the family. She felt stuck in this relationship with no way out. As I listened to Cheryl telling her story an enormous amount of sympathy welled up in me; I felt like holding her and just letting her cry. All indications were that her predominant element was earth and that it was out of balance from being in an unhealthy marriage that she couldn't remove herself from. As we began a treatment together I called upon Evening Primrose to come to Cheryl's earth element and give her exactly what she needed to be fully herself in a healthy and balanced way.

Evening Primrose is a beautiful biennial plant with yellow flowers. I remember when I first met the spirit of Evening Primrose I was drawn down to the center of the flower and discovered a tiny being with a big smiling face. She took me around to meet all the others in this tiny world who had smiling faces. What I noticed was that they each connected with the earth through what seemed to be streams of energy. I turned to the spirit of Evening Primrose and asked if I could do that. She said to stand in the center of my being and ask to be connected. I could feel a deep pulsing inside me. As I looked around I realized that I was not only connecting to the earth but to everything and everybody that was in this tiny world. I felt so nourished by this connection as it completely filled me up. When I reflected on this encounter with the spirit of Evening Primrose, I knew that one of the healing gifts from this plant spirit was to bring balance to the earth element.

As I called upon Evening Primrose to help balance Cheryl's earth element I recalled the smiling face of the spirit; I felt again the pulse of connecting to the earth. I asked Evening Primrose to help Cheryl step into her true nature and for only that which served her on this path to present itself in her life.

Eventually Cheryl was able to divorce her husband and stand on her own. She was sad about breaking up the family but realized it was only the idea of a family she missed, not the reality of what she had. She began to see that the family she did have with her children was happier and healthier than the one she thought she couldn't live without.

THE CHAKRA SYSTEM

I am grateful to the ancient practitioners of yoga for passing on to us the wisdom of the Chakra System. Also, I want to acknowledge Anodea Judith, author, counselor, and yoga instructor, for her deep and insightful understanding of the chakras, some of which is included in this next section.

The chakras are spinning vortexes of light that are like organs of the energetic light body, the luminous egg or aura that surrounds our physical body. Anodea Judith, author of *Wheels of Life*, refers to a chakra as "an organizational center for the reception, assimilation and transmission of life energy." Chakras are the portals through which we exchange energy with the wider world. There are seven major chakras, each one carrying a different quality or essence. When these chakras are open, unobstructed, and spinning well, we are in balance with our inner and outer worlds, creating a rainbow bridge between heaven and earth. The chart on page 141 shows the chakras and their correspondences.

Root Chakra

The red root chakra is at the base of the spine and provides the solid foundation of matter. Our survival instinct stems from the first chakra. This is the chakra that connects us to the physical world and is where we find our grounded center, safe and secure in the familiar connection with home. There is a firm understanding of self as we

fully embrace the element of earth, having what we need to move solidly into life. By connecting to the earth through the first chakra we are able to interpret the force of gravity as the earth expressing her love for us, holding us close to her body, nurturing our physical existence. The root chakra helps us understand our bodies and what is necessary for their healthy functioning. When a person has a dysfunctional relationship with food, this may indicate an imbalance in the root chakra as food intake is primary to creating our physical form. We also may see issues of basic survival such as housing and jobs when we are not able to ground through the first chakra. At the root we are dealing with survival of the species as well as individual survival; procreation and reproductive issues may appear during an imbalanced state. Here in the survival center we may come up against issues of scarcity, harboring the fear that there is not enough to maintain life. This poverty consciousness may stem from different places, but it is a healthy first chakra that lets one know that the universe will provide and that there is enough for everyone. This fear of scarcity can also manifest as an excessive accumulation of material goods as a way to compensate for a first chakra that isn't deeply rooted and that operates from a surface level.

CHAKRA SYSTEM AND CORRESPONDENCES

Chakra	Color	Sense	Element	Body Parts	Gland	Identity	Instinctual Function	Operating Force
Root	red	smell	earth	large intestines, genitals, blood	gonads	physical	survival, grounding	gravity
Hara	orange	taste	water	ureters, immune, kidney, bladder	adrenals	emotional	desire, sexuality	attraction of opposites
Solar Plexus	yellow	see	fire	digestive system, liver, gallbladder	pancreas	ego	power, will	combustion
Heart	green	touch	air	lungs, heart, arms, breasts, hands	thymus	social	compassion, love, peace	equilibrium
Throat	blue	hear	sound	throat, mouth, neck, shoulders	thyroid	creative	communication, creativity	resonance
Third Eye	indigo	intuition	light	eyes, face, hormonal system	pineal	archetypal	truth, perception	biographic imprinting
Crown	purple	pure energy	thought	nervous system, cerebral cortex	pituitary	universal	understanding, integrity, wisdom	organizing principle

Hara Chakra

The second chakra, or orange Hara, is located just below the belly button and is where we acknowledge “other” and begin to experience the force of attraction in our lives. This awareness of another outside of oneself brings an understanding of the dual aspect of reality. We are not one but two. In this seeming polarity we strive to understand the “other,” awakening our desire for that which is different and thus expanding our consciousness. We experience ourselves as an emotional being, sensing the feelings of another and becoming empathetic. In the first chakra we know the solidity of matter and in the second chakra, movement occurs as the element of water brings a fluid nature. This movement allows us to let go of the form of self and to flow into the experience of another. Pleasure arises in the Hara as we discover the movement of energy with another. In the first chakra we reproduce, and in the second chakra

we discover our sexuality. Pleasure is experienced not only through our sexuality but also is a creative force that moves us along in our evolution. Anodea Judith says, "Pleasure invites us to expand while pain generally makes us contract. If we are to expand from the fixed form of the material world into limitless consciousness, pleasure may be one of the first steps along that path, inviting consciousness to travel through the entire nervous system as well as to reach out toward others." She adds, "Pleasure is essential for the health of the body, the rejuvenation of spirit, and the healing of our personal and cultural relationships." An imbalance in the Hara may be indicated by dysfunctional sexual relations and attitudes and by a suppression of pleasure. When sexual abuse has occurred the second chakra is usually closed and it is difficult to keep it open even after treatment because there is a perception that this is the way to protect oneself from any further abuse. Problems with reproductive organs can arise, as there is often a direct link with sexual dysfunction. Other issues could be painful emotional repression and a general lack of creative movement. When lack of movement occurs, a person may begin to control another as a way to compensate for their own retarded growth. This control may be through sex, money, or power-over.

Solar Plexus Chakra

The third chakra, or yellow solar plexus located in the center of the belly, lends the spark of fire that has the transformative ability to produce energy from solid matter. In the solar plexus we harness the fire and put it to work for our ego. After the birth of self in the first chakra and the experience of "other" in the second, our ego brings us into an autonomous self that chooses to be separate. This progression is necessary; it is here that we begin to define ourselves in relation to the wider world and our role in it. In the third chakra we come to understand our purpose in life and the actions we need to take to fulfill this purpose. These actions require willpower in order for us to move forward toward our future in a conscious way, and so it is the function of the third chakra to engage our willpower. The concept we have of ourselves is established in the third chakra and when it's balanced, our self-esteem is confident, bringing vitality and

healthy choice through our will. A compromised third chakra could manifest in low self-esteem that becomes a self-destructive downward spiral threatening our very spark for life. So many people suffer from low self-esteem as a result of a childhood in which they were not encouraged to be all they could be, but were given instead the message from parents, teachers, and peers that they were not good enough. Unfortunately, when “not good enough” is repeatedly reinforced, the third chakra shuts down. Even though the chakra may be opened through treatment, it seems to continually close because the internal message is still being played. Solar plexus imbalance can also present itself as being stuck in old patterns of behavior and an inability to move beyond limitations. Another imbalance may be an overly active ego that wants to control others through intimidation. A healthy ego strives to be of service in the world.

Heart Chakra

The fourth chakra, or green heart chakra located in the middle of the chest between the breasts, is the balance point between the upper and lower chakras. Here we move beyond the ego and begin to experience something greater than ourselves; we come to understand that the world is larger than we anticipated, encompassing an entire unified field of interconnected relations. Our awareness of unity blossoms into compassion, not only for other humans but in *all* of our relationships, moving us into a stream of love—the glue bonding all together. Peace emanates from the heart when equilibrium between heaven and earth is maintained by a balanced and open heart chakra. The element of air resides in the heart chakra, and it is our breath being received by the heart that sends vitality throughout our whole being. It is also our main connection to the plant world, as the plants give of their breath for us to have ours. The color green exhibited by most plants and trees is a direct connection to our heart chakra and is a display of the plants’ love for us. When we communicate with plants one of the easiest routes is through the heart chakra via the vehicle of breath. Even more than the third chakra, the heart chakra is almost always compromised in some way. Our hearts have been battered, trivialized, and abused by others and by the heart-breaking culture in

which we live. It is difficult to keep an open heart when such pain and suffering is either witnessed or inflicted upon us every day. An indication of an imbalanced heart chakra is depression, which basically comes from separation from self, others, and the earth. When separation occurs through betrayal, abandonment, or destruction of the Earth, our hearts weep for the return to union with our true self, our beloved, and our Earth Partner. Union is the home of the heart; separation is its shattering.

Throat Chakra

The fifth chakra is the blue throat chakra located in the hollow of the neck; from here communication flows. Communication is the way in which we interact with the rest of the world whether it's with humans, animals, plants, the Earth, or elements. The fundamental basis for communication is resonance matching or being on the same wavelength, also called entrainment (mentioned in chapter 4). Even though we may speak in words to another we aren't truly communicating unless our vibrations are in sync. The heart as an organ is the largest oscillator in the body, helping to initiate entrainment, but the throat chakra gives creative expression to the resonance. This chakra helps us to derive meaning from the world around us by translating what we receive through vibration, light, and positioning. By positioning I mean the inclusion of all the components that make up the picture that tells a complete story. The throat chakra is also responsible for nonlocal communication or telepathic reception across time and space, which is possible not only with people but with plants as well. Courage is a quality of the fifth chakra, because this is the energy center from which we must speak the truth. From the time we are young our authentic voices are squashed by conformity. By the time we reach adulthood our throat chakras are squeezed shut with fear—a consequence of the lack of true expression through voice, written word, or artistic form. An imbalance in the fifth chakra can manifest as excessive fear of speaking out or as excessive speech from a negative place, like gossip. Stunted creative expression and an inability to be in sync with life are possible indications of imbalance. When life has no meaning the throat chakra may need balancing.

Third-Eye Chakra

The sixth chakra, or indigo third-eye chakra, is located between the eyebrows and is where we experience inner and outer vision. In the upper chakras we move toward expansion with less boundaries and more freedom. In the sixth chakra, our expanded perception allows us to tap in to the holographic imprint of the universe. This clairvoyant ability is available to all who take the time to practice receiving images on their inner screen. This is accomplished through focused attention and intention, allowing the imagination to form a direct link across time and space. Intuition is activated in the third-eye chakra, allowing us to know at a primal level. By trusting our intuition we step into an awakened state of knowing where we don't need to rely on anyone else to inform us or instruct us. Teaching situations merely provide an opportunity for us to practice what we inherently know to be true. In the fifth chakra we interact through sound and in the sixth chakra we interact through light. In the visual frequency range we experience light through colors, which is one of the main ways we know the vibration of a particular chakra. The third-eye chakra helps us to hone our ability to interpret the effects of different color frequencies. An imbalance in the sixth chakra can manifest as an inability to clearly see how to proceed in a given situation or as losing sight of one's path. Continually making poor decisions from lack of intuitive insight or becoming delusional are indications of a compromised sixth chakra.

Crown Chakra

The seventh chakra, or purple/violet crown chakra, is located at the top of the head and is the energy center of transcendence, where we know divinity to be infused in all life, including in ourselves. The liberation that comes in this chakra is a letting go of attachment to the material world and expanding into universal consciousness. Here we can experience our connection to "All That Is," allowing this creator energy, through involution, to bring vital life force to all our chakras. Integrity and wisdom are qualities associated with the crown chakra. Integrity brings us into a sense of wholeness where we are no longer separated from our truth—we can be completely

honest. Wisdom is more than an accumulation of knowledge; it is the ability to integrate inherent knowing into a meaningful context. Through the seventh chakra the organizing principle is a recognizable force that brings order. We are able to understand that everything has its place and purpose within the vast interconnected web of life. An imbalance in the crown chakra could appear as a disconnection from life-giving energy, as a denial of anything greater than oneself or as dishonesty. It is rare that I see a closed crown chakra, and I believe this is because the manifesting current is so strong that the life force pours through our crowns, keeping our connection open to source energy.

One of my students from California describes her experience clearing one of her own chakras. “Yerba Mansa came to me as a belly dancer who dances all around with a gold-coined belt. She gave me a golden maroon crown as a representation of her healing gifts and told me to place it over the third chakra when it needed clearing. One day while at the herb school I was daydreaming with her and preparing to make a flower essence. In the daydream she told me that she could bring back all the parts I had hidden from others and that I could easily be natural and comfortable expressing myself, just being who I am. I imagined the golden maroon crown and I placed it over the flower I had put in a bowl to make the flower essence. I knew there was a connection between Yerba Mansa and the third chakra but I didn’t understand what this meant for me. It was a hot day so I went and rested in the shade. When I came back I again placed the golden maroon crown over the flower essence and the crown connected to my third chakra. A strange thing happened; light came streaming out of my third chakra, touching the crown and the flower essence. In this moment I felt my creative power, my women’s power. I now understood that my third chakra had been closed and the belly dancing spirit of Yerba Mansa, with her golden maroon crown, opened it and gave me back my self-esteem and creative power. At the time, I was beginning to write my book but I’m convinced it was this experience that helped me finish it and include personal stories about myself that I would never have been able to do before this.” Yerba Mansa has become one of Jennifer’s main plant spirit allies, bringing personal healing and

helping her work with others, particularly in opening and clearing a closed solar plexus chakra.

THE MEDICINE WHEEL

My first exposure to working with the Medicine Wheel was when I assisted Brooke Medicine Eagle with her vision quest camps in Montana. It is important to know that different native tribes may have different associations with each of the directions, but all hold the Medicine Wheel as a sacred map to help one walk the path of one's life. Over time, I have embodied each of the directions of the wheel, bringing in my own perspectives and understandings.

The Medicine Wheel is often referred to as the wheel of life and acts like a mirror reflecting back to us everything about the human condition and the many cycles in life. It reflects the cycle of night and day, the seasonal cycles, the moon cycle, the cycles and stages of our lives as well as planetary cycles and larger cycles of life, death, and rebirth. The "medicine" of the wheel is referring to spirit energy, and the physical manifestation of a medicine wheel serves as a focal point for the communing of spirit, self, and nature. As we journey through our earth-walk we must stand on each of the spokes of the wheel many times, moving through the positions and letting each serve as a guide, giving direction to our lives. The Medicine Wheel is a representation of the vast interconnected web of life containing animals, plants, stones, elements, teachings, cycles, and phases, all of which serve as a pathway to walk, leading to a deep understanding of life and its many aspects. As we move on the wheel, we see where we are in the moment and perhaps where we need to move to in order to grow and realize our full potential.



The Big Horn Medicine Wheel. Photo by Courtney Milne.

East

We begin our Medicine Wheel journey in the east, place of the early morning sunrise. With fresh perspective we start a new day with the promise that comes on the wings of new beginnings. It is the spring time energy of awakening, when the robins return and the plants begin to stir. The dawning in the east brings new ideas, fresh perspectives, and inspiration. The air element in the east brings the winds of change, shifting and swirling, creating a new position. With this momentum and the mental clarity of the east, decisions that alter the present come easily. The eagle flies high in the east bringing far-sighted vision—that wide-angle lens that broadens horizons. Here from this heightened view one can see way off in the distance and hope rises out of this future vista. The yellow of the east brings illumination, helping to light the way or shed light on a particularly difficult aspect of one's life. From this light-filled place a cheerful and bright outlook can prevail. When a person is stuck in the direction of the east, it may appear that he or she always dwells in the future, making constant changes in life, or starting many projects but never finishing them. On the other hand, when a person needs a new beginning, they may need to move on the wheel into the east. When

the vision of a person's life is blocked or there's fear of change, these could be indications of needing to move into the east.

South

We move on the Medicine Wheel to the south, place of warmth and ease that comes with the summer season. In the south the plants grow strong and come to maturity, bringing their abundance so that all are nourished. This fertile place also allows humans to grow and mature, coming into the fullness of their being. The sun burns brightly in the south bringing heat that causes passion to rise up, and with this spark of passion desires can be met. The kundalini energy moves up the spine bringing sexual aliveness and dynamic exchange. The red fire in the south burns brightly, stimulating the creative process and helping to manifest our reality. The joyful energy of the south brings lightheartedness and the playfulness of a child. It is where we dance, make merry, and abandon ourselves to pleasure, letting it fill us with bliss, the medium that infuses spirit into form. Here in the south coyote plays his tricks, making us laugh at ourselves and realize that we take life much too seriously. A person who needs to move from the south may give indications like partying all the time, obsession with sex, or burnout from over-manifestation. On the other hand, one who may need to move into the south is a person who exhibits immature behavior, stunted creativity, or lack of passion for their life, or someone who just needs to have fun.

West

Moving on the Medicine Wheel to the west we experience twilight, the place where the veil between the worlds is thin and we can see into other dimensions. Here we look closely within, going to the depths of our being to gain insight. This introspective space gives us a clear sense of self. The west is the place of emotions where we are in touch with our feelings and those of others, thus becoming empathetic. The water runs deep in the west, bringing us into the well of our being where we can find the resources to carry on against all odds. West brings us into the autumn of the year, a time to harvest the fruit of our labors and store it for the coming winter. The blue/black of the west takes us into those dark places to embrace all

that we are, helping us to face our inner demons. Here in the west our ancestors line up behind us, reminding us of where we come from. As their burdens are passed on to us, we strive to lay them down so that they may finally rest. The mouse scampers in the west with its close-sighted vision, sees clearly its immediate surroundings, and deals with what's at hand. A person who needs to move from the west could display indications of antisocial behavior from too much introspection. Their boundaries may become fuzzy from being too empathetic or they may be overly emotional. A person who needs to move into the west may need to deal with prejudices carried through the ancestral line, bring buried issues to the surface to explore them, allow oneself to feel the emotions of a situation, or establish a better sense of self.

North

Moving to the north on the Medicine Wheel we come into the winter season where a blanket of quiet brings us into sweet repose. The element of earth provides a cave for us to crawl into and, like the bear that slumbers serenely, we allow ourselves to rest. As we surrender to the night we slip into dreamtime where we visit the wise ones who share their wisdom. Here in the north, the place of the elders, we honor these old ones who have walked many roads by listening to the stories they have to tell. This direction offers space to meditate and reflect on where we have been, allowing ourselves to shed what no longer serves. The white of the north allows no distraction as we contemplate our inner truth. A person who needs to move from the north could sleep too much, dwell in philosophical realms, or wander in a dreamy state, unable to function in daily activity. A person needing to move into the north may display a disregard for their elders, be overactive and need quiet time, or may need to draw upon inner wisdom to help with a situation.

Below, Above, and Center

The next three directions of the Medicine Wheel are not cardinal ones but ones that we encounter throughout our lives and that are crucial to our overall well-being. These directions are on a vertical

plane instead of a horizontal one, and they are places we visit instead of stay in for long periods of time.

The direction of below is Mother Earth, and it encompasses all that is of the earth as well as what is below in the underground place. Here in the underworld our animal guides, plant spirit guides, and wise person live. We visit with our guides to receive direction and help with life situations. We also journey to the underworld to travel into other dimensions and, with the help of our guides, to meet spirits on their home ground.

The direction of above is that of Father Sky and it encompasses all that is of the heavens on a universal scale. Here in the above we are influenced by extraterrestrial beings as well as by stars, planets, and galaxies. The angelic realm is in this direction and these are the beings that protect us. We travel to the above when we need to understand the bigger picture. Receiving an astrology reading might be an encounter with the above direction, helping to bring clarity to our earthwalk by bringing understanding of celestial influences.

The last direction, but not the least, is the center. This is the place where we encounter the Great Mystery, All That Is, and the Holy Heart. This is where we find our true self—in the middle of all the directions. It is the one-heart space where, with our unique individual aspect, we can experience the oneness. Love permeates this center direction so that we do not step into love but we are love and in this being-ness of love, all healing can take place.

The seven directions and their energies (which can also be referred to as their spirits) are an integral part of our lives in daily, seasonal, and larger-life cycles so that it is important to acknowledge them on a regular basis. The Seven Direction Movement Meditation is a way to accomplish this. I first encountered this meditation from Cherokee elder Dhyani Ywahoo of the Sunray Meditation Society. Later, White Feather of the Wolf Clan of the Seneca Nation received the teachings of the meditation and, with the help of Seneca elder Twylah Nitsch, expanded on the teachings and brought them to a wider audience. Moving through the directions is an opportunity to receive the blessings from each direction as well as offer gratitude for their gifts. We begin by facing the east, breathing deeply, and

giving thanks for the inspiration we receive with each new dawning. Now, with arms extended to your side and palms facing down, make a twist to the left with your upper torso keeping your body stationary from the waist down. Raise your right arm and right leg making a circle, acknowledging the circle of life and all the cycles of the Medicine Wheel. Bring your right leg down in a spread stance and with your left and right arms coming down bend your legs, squatting to the earth and gathering up the earth energy with both your hands. Bring both hands up through the center of your body, rising up from the ground and allowing the earth energy to pass through each one of your chakras. Extend your arms all the way up to the heavens. Gather the energy of the heavens and bring it down through each one of your chakras. Come back to the spread stance with your arms extended to your side, palms facing down. Now, turn to the right and repeat this movement, this time making the circle with your left arm and leg. Next, extend your left leg in front of you to the east while extending both arms in front of you. Gather with your hands the energy of the east and bring it into the center point of your heart. Pivot your feet (without picking them up) to your opposite side or west; extend your arms from your heart to the west, giving from your heart to this direction while balancing the energies of east and west. With your arms extended gather the energy of the west with your hands and bring it into your heart, the center direction. Come back to center with your arms extended to your side with palms facing down in a spread stance. Now you are facing the south. Repeat these movements to the south, west, and north. This completes one cycle. Go through seven cycles, dedicating one whole cycle to each direction even though the movement brings you through all the directions. You can also dedicate a cycle to one of the chakras, being reminded that the spirit of each direction enters through the energy vortex of a chakra.

One of my students is a Qi Gong instructor and therapist, someone who is well acquainted with meditative movement. Jeff shared with me his experience of the Seven Direction Movement Meditation, "I realize as I continue to do the direction meditation, a particular awareness is evolving that I find to be quite profound. Most Qi Gong movement is about balancing chi internally without much

exchange with the external world. There may be a utilization of an external element like the sun to balance yang energy or the moon to balance yin or a tree to balance wood energy, but it is usually specific to what a person needs to bring balance. What I like about the Seven Direction Movement Meditation is that you are not only harmonizing internal energy but also are exchanging energy with your external environment, the two harmonizing together. The movement also harmonizes opposites, like sharing part of east with west and heaven with earth. I have become aware of how my internal state of energy affects my external environment and interactions with people, animals and plants in a more direct way. I knew this theoretically before but now it is more visceral. The direction meditation fosters partnering and sharing with all the directions instead of utilizing them as a commodity. The meditation is an active process that teaches me how to join with the entire universe in a co-creative partnership where I can be a part of, but not the sole focus of, bringing balance and harmony to myself and all I come in contact with. I feel more connected to life and like how I'm sharing with the directions and all they represent, as well as the earth, the sun, creator, and my own heart."

I worked with Valerie for over two years while she went through a very painful divorce with her husband. The whole time she sat in the west needing to look deeply within herself, allowing her emotions to be felt all the way to her core. This painful process was necessary in order for her to fully empty herself of a marriage that no longer served her. After a disturbing set of emotions surfaced during a treatment around the Christmas holiday time, Dandelion stepped forward and said, "It's time to go to the east." I told Valerie about this and she said she felt the holiday emotions were the last vestige of her old life and she definitely was ready for a new beginning. She then realized she had been sensing that something was just out of her grasp but that it was coming. That day she left, dedicated to honoring her new position in the east by greeting the sunrise each morning and setting her intention to fully embrace newness in her life.



Twelve

ORIGINS OF DIS-EASE AND THE THERAPEUTIC USE OF PLANT SPIRITS

The air is soft and the light is diffused with its long low rays hugging the windward side of the trees. With golden tinges of light soaking into the clouds, the last slice of sun vanishes beyond the mountain. Now the reds and oranges set the sky on fire, intent on one last burst before fading into sherbet layers of pink and purple. I love this in-between time—the twilight—when the night reaches up to kiss the light of day goodbye. To the Irish it's the Gloaming Time, when all the wee folk come out and pull the veil back for just a bit so that we humans can have a glimpse into the enchanting world of the Fairies and the beyond places. Here, where the slightest shift alters perception and reveals a simultaneous world of magic and mystery, I sit quietly, waiting and watching, as the east is wrapped in an indigo cloak. The wind dies down and an expectant hush comes over the land. It seems even the trees are poised for that moment when the first star begins to twinkle, announcing the beginning of the grand dance of the heavenly orbs through the night sky. I feel my body expand as if there is no boundary or separation between my energy field and that of this invisible place. As the two worlds mingle, I realize that this earthly world I inhabit is just as magical and full of mystery as the one that lies on the other side of the veil.

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To understand how dis-ease manifests we must first look at our energy anatomy. We have discussed how life is one big

electromagnetic field of light, sound, and vibration that interacts and is integrally connected like a huge spider web. We interact with this web through our own electromagnetic field, called the aura or energy body, which extends about an arm's length all around our physical body. This energy field holds all the information of life—all of our positive and negative experiences become like imprints or impressions in our aura. The energy body is like a template of our physical body, so all that is embedded in our energy body affects our physical health. James Oschman in his book *Energy Medicine, the Scientific Basis* reports on the research of Dr. Harold Burr, "All living things, from mice to men, from seeds to trees, are formed and controlled by fields that can be measured with standard detectors. The fields reflect physical and mental conditions, and can therefore be useful for diagnosis. Burr obtained evidence that abnormal fields show up before serious pathology sets in, and that balancing or restoring the field can reverse disease processes."

From a traditional healer's perspective there is a similar view. Alberto Villoldo in his book *Shaman, Healer, Sage* says, "The time to change the world is before form has emerged from the formless, before energy has manifested into matter. Thus many of the healing practices developed by shamans heal conditions before they manifest in the body, before old imprints in the Luminous Energy Field have organized matter into illness or misfortune."

Our energy anatomy is multidimensional and functions on many levels. There are chakras that are the vortexes whereby we exchange energy with our environment. There are the meridians, representing each of our organs, that actually extend out the top of the head like a fountain, curving to form an egg-shaped cocoon around our bodies and then re-entering through the bottoms of our feet. There are the four layers in our energy field that represent physical, mental and/or emotional, soul, and spiritual aspects. Beyond these layers are energy cords that connect us to the people we are in relationships with during our lifetime. The ideal is that the energy moves unencumbered throughout our energy body, exchanges easily with the rest of the vast electromagnetic field of life, has few negative imprints, has no attachments or extra baggage, and is lacking in holes or gaps within our field. This ideal is nearly

impossible given the fact that our energy bodies are constantly bombarded with that which does not enhance the free flow of energy. Health and well-being then become an issue of the maintenance of the energy body, because it is here that dis-ease begins.

When working with Plant Spirit Healing, we focus on the energy body and on supporting the person to be all that they can be, fulfilling their own true nature. We are always striving to address the source of disease rather than merely treating a symptom. Symptoms are signposts to be used as guidelines but they are not the disease. There may be many manifestations of illness in a person but they all come from the same source—a disruption in one's energy body. Acupuncturist and author Diane Connelly says “all sickness is home sickness,” meaning that when we are not at home with ourselves or not living according to our own true nature, the energy becomes contradictory causing misalignment or vulnerability.

“SEEING” THE ENERGY BODY

Many years ago I dreamed I was shaking a bunch of dice and had rolled them out onto the floor. The dice were letters that formed words. The words formed a sentence, but there was a key word missing. It spelled out, “Seeing is not looking with your _____.” As I awoke I felt frustrated by what seemed to be an important dream and yet the key word was missing. I got ready for work and walked to the bus stop to go into the city. Once on the bus I sat with my friend Pete. We exchanged hellos and a bit about our previous evening and then settled in to read our respective books. It was then that I noticed the back of the seat in front of me. There in graffiti style was one word: eyes. I was stunned to see this on the back of the seat, as it is not your usual graffiti. In that moment, riding a bus to downtown Baltimore, an entire download of information came to me as that blank word in my dream was filled in. I realized that most of us go through our entire lives without ever seeing the totality of what is around us because we are only looking with our physical eyes. From this very early time I knew that in order to truly see, which also includes deriving meaning, I had to use sensors in addition to my

eyes to have a depth of perception that expanded beyond this three-dimensional reality.

The ability to see that which is of an energetic nature begins with stepping outside of what author Gregg Braden refers to as consensus reality. "As we take information into our eyes and pass the signals to our brains, culturally, we are taught to 'look' for familiar patterns of information. We seek something that makes sense in terms of previous experience. The practice of 'seeing' what is actually present has been conditioned out of our experience through locking onto the accepted behavior patterns of a reality that is expected." In other words, because it is culturally unacceptable to see auras, most of us won't see them even when we try.

The Columbian Kogi Indian medicine people spend the first nine years of life inside dark caves to learn the ways of the spirit world and to hone their seeing abilities. This is one method of sensitizing oneself to see energy fields, but obviously it's not practical for those who do not have a cave nearby. There are other ways to "see" energy around people and plants. The best place to start is with your heart, because it is the largest organ of perception that can receive impressions from the unified energy field. The heart can easily provide a feeling sense of energy, but the trick for us is to be able to focus in our hearts instead of our heads to allow the natural tendency of the heart to move into depth perception. Along with the heart we engage our third eye, the chakra of insight that can "see" intuitively with primal knowing. Alberto Villoldo suggests we combine the efforts of our heart and third eye by creating extracerebral pathways of light and connecting them to our visual cortex in the back of our head. We create these pathways by tapping from our heart to the back of our head and then from the back of our head around to our third eye then up and over the top of our head to the visual cortex again. Visualizing light pathways pulsing with energy as we tap allows the heart and third eye to become the sensors that can "see" our energy body. As Villoldo says, "These extra-cerebral pathways convey emotional and spiritual insight. The third eye registers facts while the heart registers feelings. Working together, the two become the healer's most powerful sources of knowledge." It helps to have a good imagination when developing one's seeing

abilities, as the visual cortex is where images are generated and displayed.

Another way of seeing is with your hands. The hands are very sensitive to energy, as many massage therapists can tell you, and each has a minor chakra in its center. When scanning a person's energy field, place your left hand approximately four inches above their body and slowly move your hand from their head to their toes. You will find that you feel heat, cold, or a sensation of density, indicating an interruption in the energy flow.

You may also use a pendulum as an extension of your "seeing." A pendulum is a weighted object on a length of string that is long enough to swing in different directions. This is a quick and easy way to find blocked, stagnant, or intrusive energy. It also can be a way to get indications of where to begin to "see" with your heart and third eye. The use of a pendulum is called dowsing or divining. The art of divining has been in practice for eons and is a way of combining intuitive ability with connection to the unified field where all information is held. When I work with my pendulum I hold it over the top of a person's body and pass it slowly from head to foot, or I place it directly over a chakra. Free-flowing energy makes the pendulum swing in a clockwise circle while compromised energy spots make the pendulum swing back and forth or not swing at all.

"Seeing" the energy body helps you direct plant spirits to a particular place to aid in the healing process by clearing, moving, mending, and repairing the energy. Sometimes plant spirits know where to go without your telling them but being specific may add effectiveness and efficiency.

One of my students describes her experience of "seeing" this way, "When I first started to practice 'seeing' I felt like I would never be able to do what was suggested since I'm not a very visual person. Then, as I practiced on friends, I began to realize that it wasn't really about seeing anything necessarily. It was more about sensing. I began to scan a person's energy body and could actually get a sense of where something was going on. I started to use my hands once I got a sense of the location and I could feel a difference from the rest of their body. It was like there was a rigidity or hard place in

the area where their energy was blocked or where there was an intrusive energy. Then I went back to sensing and I actually could get an image of what the blockage looked like. I never thought I could do this but now it is often easy.”

CHAKRA CLEARING

We have already discussed the specifics of chakras in a previous chapter, and now I will describe how to keep them clear, open, and spinning in a healthy manner. Chakras can become blocked for various reasons including trauma, stress, emotional holding, negative habits, avoiding pain, and holding on to limiting belief patterns to name just a few. Just living in this modern world can regularly cause chakras to block. The chakra that repeatedly becomes blocked is continually exposed to an environment, situation, thought, or pattern of behavior that keeps it compromised. In this case, the contributing factor to its blockage must be removed for it to stay healthy. It is extremely important to keep chakras clear and spinning freely, as the entire life process can become restricted when even one chakra is blocked.

There are many ways to clear chakras. The clearing process I use has been adapted for Plant Spirit Healing from Alberto Villoldo's Illumination Process described in his book *Shaman, Healer, Sage*. To begin, use a pendulum or your hand to determine if a chakra is blocked, sluggish, or compromised in some way. All healing sessions begin by holding the deepening points that lie to either side of the spine on the occipital ridge at the base of the skull (acupuncture points Bladder 9). This sets the tone for the entire session and also gives the practitioner an opportunity to call in any helpers or guides they may want to work with. The deepening points help relax the client and put them in a receptive mode. Hold the deepening points for at least five minutes, releasing slowly and then gently sliding your hands from their head. Now place your hand over the compromised chakra and spin it counterclockwise. This helps to loosen the dense energy causing the blockage. Return to their head and place your fingers on the release points that are halfway between the ear and spine along the occipital ridge at the base of the skull (acupuncture

points Gall Bladder 19). This supports the previous counterclockwise spinning and loosens the stuck energy. This is the point at which you call in a plant spirit to help you heal this particular chakra. If you need help removing the dense energy or object that you find in the chakra, you may call in a different plant spirit for this type of help. You go back to the chakra and with the use of your hand and the help of your plant spirit you remove what is blocking the chakra. This energy can appear gooey, almost like soft tar, or it can be rigid. You then ask your plant spirit or an animal guide to transmute the energy or, in other words, eat, digest, and pass it on transformed. Now you call upon the plant spirit that is to help heal this chakra and place it in the chakra. Do not leave the chakra until you know the plant spirit has settled into it. Return to the head and hold the deepening points one more time to help the healing powers of the plant spirit to solidly take hold. Go to the chakra one more time and, again with the help of your plant spirit, spin the chakra clockwise. The chakra clearing is now complete and you can check with your pendulum to see that it is spinning freely.

The following is a chakra healing story. Julia came to me for a rash that had broken out on her leg. She said she felt it was stress related and asked if I could give her a salve to relieve the itching and hopefully make it go away. I explained to her that I could give her a salve for symptomatic relief but that the rash would not go away until we had gotten to the source of why it was manifesting and then healed it at this source level. She continued to give me the history of her rash reiterating that she really wanted to get rid of it. After listening to her I asked her what she thought was at the source of the rash. Big tears welled up in her eyes and she said, "I think it's sexual." Julia related to me experiences from her childhood where she felt she had been violated sexually, and she explained to me that she carried enormous shame about this. She thought that this shame was creeping into her sexual relationship with her husband and that when issues came up between them, the rash would break out. I then checked her chakras and found that the second chakra, the Hara, and the fourth chakra, the Heart, were blocked. (Often these two are blocked at the same time.) I called on Calendula to help clear the second chakra. Julia's homework for this session was

to wear orange as much as possible, to allow herself to have sexual fantasies, and to set an intention for a loving relationship with her husband that included intimacy that wasn't necessarily all sexual. I also gave her Calendula cream to rub on her lower belly. The following week Julia reported that she had begun to teach her body to trust again and that the rash was subsiding. I checked her chakras and the second was clear but the Heart chakra was still blocked. I called on Rose to help clear Julia's Heart chakra and sent her home with rosewater to splash on her heart. Her homework was to begin to take the shame and turn it into loving-kindness for both herself and her husband. Julia now had both energy centers available to her for letting in sexual and loving energy—the combination of which was desperately needed in her marriage. This was the beginning of a long healing process that Julia has become fully engaged in. This process is much like peeling layers of an onion, and each time a new layer is reached another level of growth takes place. Interestingly, the rash has returned a few more times, always when Julia is on the verge of another level of growth and a step closer to her soul's path.

ENVIDIA OR INTENTIONAL BAD VIBES

Another form of energy that can disrupt the energy body is envy or jealousy or general bad vibes directed with intent. Within the cultural milieu of North America envy is not considered an origin of disease, but in other cultures it may be seen as one of the main causes. Curandera Elena Avila, in her book *Woman Who Glows in the Dark*, says, "In Mexico, envy is one of the most commonly recognized diseases. In the mercados, one can buy a variety of oils, potions, amulets, soaps, or herbs to prevent or offset the effects of envy. If a person falls victim to envidia, curanderos perform a variety of rituals to cure the patient. This is not to say that Mexico suffers more envy than any other country, but that this disease has been assimilated into the cultural beliefs as a disharmony that affects mind, body and spirit." Of course, jealousy is a common enough event and people with relatively healthy auras are able to deflect most jealousy. However, when intent is involved, it is a bit more difficult to avoid the harmful effects of negative energy directed at you. Oftentimes this

appears in the energy field as a sharp object embedded in the energy body, or it can also manifest as an attachment of some sort. A person may complain of pain that has no apparent reason for being there or, if the sharp object has been there for a long time, there may be chronic pain that never goes away, no matter what the person does. Clichés may make you roll your eyes but there is a reason they have become commonplace in our language. Have you ever felt like you were “stabbed in the back” by a close friend? The saying originates from the fact that a dagger of sorts has been directed with negative intent. Attachments can come in many forms but may feel like a “monkey on your back” or the “weight of the world on your shoulders.” Along with pain or weightiness there is usually some sort of disruption in the person’s life, something that’s not going well. Another possible indication of envidia is listlessness or lack of passion or spark in one’s life.

Amy was a student of mine who came for a healing session because she was feeling disoriented. During the session she indicated that the passion in her relationship was dwindling, and when she looked in the mirror she saw an ugly person looking back at her and felt like tearing her face off. I cleared a blockage in her second chakra thinking this would help rekindle passion in her relationship. A couple of weeks later Amy returned, and this time she had a painful rash on her face. I asked her when it started and she said just after a visit with her parents. As I began to scan Amy’s energy body I saw metal objects coming out of her face. I mentioned this to her and she said she had seen them too and that they seemed like hooks to her. She then told me how her mother had been jealous of her as a child because of the attention she received from her father. Her mother would tell her that she was ugly. I then knew that Amy was experiencing envidia from her mother. I called upon Mugwort to help remove the hooks. Once the hooks were removed Amy’s healing could begin. Amy’s personal plant spirit ally was Violet, and she worked with Violet to help heal the wounds on her face and to heal her heart from the damage done by her mother. After several treatments she was able to visit her mother without any negative repercussions. She also became well versed in techniques for protection.

I know that intentional bad vibes are quite common, having seen them in my clients, but I never thought I could be susceptible. Once I experienced excruciating pain in my neck and at the same time I was having difficulties with a conference I was organizing. I wondered what the “real” problem was. Then I had an opportunity to spend time with some herbal friends. I mentioned to them what had been happening and told them about the pain in my neck. One of these women is Rosita Arvigo, who is well versed in this type of healing, and after checking my pulse, she confirmed that I had envidia or bad vibes directed at me. She proceeded to pick certain herbs, place them on my wrist and pray. She also brushed me with herbs especially in my neck area. After this I felt total relief and the conference I was organizing began to run more smoothly. The following week I received an e-mail from a client I had decided not to continue working with, because I felt I could no longer help her. In a flash I realized this was where the negative energy was coming from! I had felt drained every time I saw her and had begun to feel like she was a “pain in the neck.” I had carelessly allowed myself to become vulnerable to her predatory energy. I have only had to discontinue work with a client twice in my life, but this was a time when I felt it was detrimental to my health to continue. Sure enough, it was as if the pain in my neck became literal. The negative energy she directed at me for letting her go was lodged in my neck, and it didn’t improve until the intrusive energy was removed and I became aware of the need to protect myself from her.

WHO’S IN RESIDENCE?

Words are so limiting in describing the multitude of energetic compromises that one can experience. When it comes to disembodied souls I find myself struggling for the term that best fits. Traditionally, a physically deceased person that takes up residence in a living person would be called a possession. For me, this conjures up the movie *The Exorcist*, which is a misrepresentation of the large majority of cases of possession. The term *intrusive entity* is a little better, although the word *entity* sounds like some type of creature from another world. I continue to struggle to find the term

that really describes the circumstance of a person who has died and whose soul has become confused, keeping them from crossing over to the other side. Perhaps we could use the term *squatter*, which eliminates frightening images and, instead, gives the sense of one who takes up residence in a place that doesn't belong to him or her, out of a need for someplace to exist. This less threatening image of a squatter also adds a touch of reality to a topic that many may relegate to the realm of sorcery or Hollywood. The truth is that disembodied souls taking up residence in folks is more common than you would think. Accidental, traumatic, sudden, and ungrieved death seems to cause a soul to become destabilized on its journey to the afterlife. Unfortunately, hospital deaths can be very traumatizing as they are often very unnatural in the way they take place. A squatter can reside with a family member they feel aligned to or with any person who is vulnerable and easily entered. Some squatters are so confused they don't even know they are dead, and they attach solidly to a person's central nervous system so that the person actually takes on the traits, personality, and even health problems of the squatter.

Removing a squatter can be done in various ways. Many traditional shamans journey to the squatter's soul and negotiate with it, helping it to understand its true path, and then escorting it to the other side. This requires the ability to go to the other side and then return. Others use clear quartz crystals to extract the squatter while others may perform a particular ritual. In Chinese medicine there are seven acupuncture points on the front of the body and seven on the back of the body that are the release points for a disembodied soul who has attached to a person's central nervous system. When these points are opened they become a gateway through which the squatter can leave. In Plant Spirit Healing these points are stimulated with the help of Mugwort. You can blow smoke on the points, rub oil on them, or place your hand over the points while transferring Mugwort's resonance. For a long time I worked only with Mugwort to extract disembodied souls until I realized that the squatters may still be confused and proceed to take up residence someplace else. I knew I needed a plant spirit to help escort them to the other side. I asked that a plant spirit with this type of gifted ability

make itself known to me. Within a couple of days I stepped into the woods a very short distance from the back door of my house and found, to my surprise, Indian Pipe, a plant that normally grows much higher up the mountain. I immediately took notice because Indian Pipe is completely white and saprophytic, meaning it feeds on decay. This is a plant I have known for some time and have always marveled at how it grows. I allowed myself to drift into the daydream of Indian Pipe, wondering if this was the plant I had asked for. I found myself watching as a white-robed old man with a staff led a young woman through a doorway, smiling and nodding his head to her as he closed the door behind her. His demeanor was one of complete calm and benevolent grace. I approached the old man and asked if he was the spirit of Indian Pipe. He nodded and I asked if he was the one to escort folks to the other side and he nodded again, pointing to the doorway where the young woman had just passed through. I asked if I could call upon him to help me with this. He smiled broadly and touched my shoulder with his staff, filling me with the same serenity that he himself radiated. A quiet reverence came over me as I bowed my head, feeling as if I had been bestowed with an enormous gift.

Vickie came to me for help with her thyroid. As she described a disorienting experience that ended with her in the emergency room of the hospital just the week prior, I knew there was more we were to work on. She described the experience as a panic attack and said she had started to shake all over and felt like she was going to die. This, of course, sounds symptomatic of a thyroid storm, but as I observed the glazed look in her eye and how she spoke of “just not being myself,” I knew there was more. While gathering Vickie’s story I learned of her brother who had died only a few months before from a drug-induced heart attack. He had once tried to commit suicide with a gun and she had prevented it. Ever since her brother’s death, she felt as if she was having a spiritual crisis and needed to call her spirit back.

During this first session I cleared her blocked throat chakra, which would certainly give immediate relief to her thyroid. The following session Vickie said she had heard a song on the radio that was played at her brother’s funeral. She also described stopping at a

“biker bar” and drinking beer, which was very unusual behavior for her. All indications were that Vickie’s brother, who had died in a confused state, had latched on to her; all of the unusual happenings were because he was influencing her. I called on Mugwort to help open the gateways as I touched the seven release points. I also asked the spirit of Indian Pipe to be available to help escort Vickie’s brother to the other side. As he left her body there was a visible release of tension as her color changed and her eyes softened. When I looked in her eyes after the session I could see that it was Vickie residing there, not her brother. I suggested Vickie do a seven-day-passing ritual, which is normally done just after a person dies, but in this case would be done now as this is when her brother was actually crossing over. A few weeks later Vickie reported that the ritual allowed her to grieve fully while causing her to feel “worlds better.” She said something had shifted to the point where she felt, “I am so happy I want to cry.”

CUTTING ENERGY CORDS

An energy cord is an energetic tie with a person we are close to that allows us to exchange and feed energy to each other. When we are born we automatically have energy cords tying us to our parents and immediate family. These cords are part of our soul contract with these primary relations and must be maintained throughout our lifetime. As we grow and begin to have other relationships outside the family, more energy cords are established, especially with those we are involved with on an intimate level. Cords also develop with close friends and people with whom we have dealings of a personal nature that require a giving of ourselves. When these cords are appropriate and there is an unrestricted flow of energy that is mutual, all is well. However, for example, when a marriage or lover relationship ends and the energetic cord is not cut, a slow but steady leakage of energy drains one of his or her vital life force and possibly personal power. When this happens over a long period of time it can weaken one’s auric field, leaving a person vulnerable to compromise in their energy body, which can then lead to physical illness. Energy cords can come in all shapes and sizes and are often attached to

one or more chakras. Perhaps a past lover is now a good friend so it is appropriate to have a cord connected to the heart chakra but not appropriate to be connected to the second chakra, where the sexual tie resides. Sometimes it is not necessary to actually cut a cord because it only needs to be cleaned up by removing blockages or straightening out a tangle so the flow of energy is unencumbered. When parental relations are difficult, this is a time to clean up the cords between you rather than cutting them, which is not a good idea. By cutting a cord with a primary family member you nullify your soul contract with them, which means you create karma and will just have to experience it again in another lifetime.

Usually I like to have folks cut the cords themselves, as it seems to be more effective than my doing it for them. When I suggest to people that there are cords to cut, nine times out of ten they know what I'm talking about and almost immediately have a visual image of what the cords look like. In this case, the help of a plant spirit is a little different. I call upon the spirit of Yarrow to come and help the person with the "cutting," utilizing whatever form it is they need—knife, scissors, or chainsaw. After the "cutting" takes place there may be an energetic "open wound," and Yarrow then helps with the healing of this wound.

In one instance the cord with Nancy's former husband was like a sewer pipe filled with sludge and she used a welding torch to cut it. In another case the cord was a gnarled rosebush that needed to be pruned. Mary shared an experience of helping one of her friends to cut cords: "Richard had been in a bit of a slump since I met him, feeling drained of his energy. He was unable to figure out the direction he was to take next in his life, feeling financial pressure to get something going. He also was having difficulty with his former wife. I imagined that the drain was a result of not having cut the cords with his former wife. I advised Richard to scan his body, checking all his chakras for cords connecting him to his former wife. He did this but found even more cords that were connected to his past work situation. He successfully cut the cords and I called on Calendula to help heal the wounds left from this. Very shortly after this everything changed in his life. His relationship shifted with his former wife, but more importantly, the relations with his past work

situation totally resolved to the point that money was actually going to come his way. Many new opportunities opened up and the part-time job he had taken on to make ends meet was no longer necessary.” Richard’s energy was so hooked in to his past work situation that he couldn’t manifest anything else until this tie was severed.

SPIRITUAL PLANT BATHING

The life-giving element of water has held divine status and has been revered for centuries for its calming, purifying, and healing properties. A warm bath can settle jangled nerves while baptism is said to purify one of sin. Holy wells were claimed to heal any number of ailments. Rosita Arvigo, in her book *Spiritual Bathing*, says of water: “Until recently, water was one of the most universal spiritual concepts on our planet. Buried somewhere in the genesis of every culture is the idea that water is divine, life-giving, healing, cleansing and renewing. Some people even considered water to be a living being.” Scientifically, water is known to conduct electricity and to be a carrier of single coherent energy wavelengths that can receive imprints or be “informed” by other molecules. As Lynne McTaggart, in her book *The Field*, says, “water is like a tape recorder, imprinting and carrying information.” It is no wonder that plants and water make for a fine marriage, as water easily records the healing vibration of plants and together they can bring about physical, emotional, and spiritual healing as well as clear the auric field.

A spiritual plant bath can be performed in various ways, but the main ingredients are water, plants, and prayers or healing intent. A spiritual plant bath can, simply, help one connect with the divine and bring about calmness. As Rosita Arvigo says, “Spiritual bathing strengthens our tenuous connection with the natural world and its reflection of the divine. It separates us from the mundane, transporting us to a holier place; it eases our passage through the stresses of daily life, opening the door to our soul’s inner guidance; it marks rites of passage; and it uplifts the soul, fostering a reverent, peaceful state of mind.” This alone is reason enough to engage in spiritual plant baths on a regular basis but, even more so, spiritual

plant baths have an amazing ability to clear and mend the auric field as well as remove intrusive energies. In my own practice, I have found that the energy body can become full of holes and, when this condition persists for a period of time, a leakage of vital force occurs leading to any number of physical compromises. Spiritual plant bathing is one of the best ways to mend these holes.

The way to perform a spiritual plant bath has mostly to do with the circumstances and what is most suitable for the situation you are in. The ideal is to have fresh plants available that you and your client can pick together. As you pick plants choose ones that you have an intimate relationship with, asking that they help to bring healing to the person who will receive the bath. Ask your client to pick plants they are attracted to while praying to them for healing. It is always good to engage the client in his or her own healing process. Then, in a tub of water, mix the plants, crushing them between your fingers while you continue to pray for healing to take place. When the plants have been sufficiently crushed, splash the water all around the client and allow it to drench their entire auric field. You can also pour water over their body while emptying the tub entirely, using all the water. If this sort of bath is not possible you may gather a bundle of fresh plants, praying as you pick them, and then dip the bundle in water which you then sprinkle throughout the client's auric field. Continue by brushing the person's entire body with the bundle of herbs, which you dip constantly in water while praying for the person's healing. You will find that after a spiritual plant bath there is a glow that comes over a person unlike any you may have seen before. (See color plates [8](#) and [10](#).)

The third way to take a spiritual plant bath is when there are no fresh plants available but you have water that has had fresh plants soaked in it. Because of water's unique quality it is able to retain the original frequencies of the plants that were soaked in it and can be used with the same effectiveness as a fresh plant bath.

A young student, Kelly, came to me after an incident at her college that left her completely shaken and reluctant to return to her school. She had been out with friends and they all piled into a taxi when it was time to go home. These friends didn't live on campus so were left off at their home in a part of town that was unfamiliar to Kelly.

Once her friends were out of the taxi the driver began pulling Kelly to him. She shoved him away but he continued to grab at her, bruising and wrenching her arm. She kept looking to see if she could recognize where she was. When she finally saw something familiar, she jumped out of the cab at the next light and ran all the way back to her dorm. The experience had filled Kelly with an enormous amount of fear to the point where she didn't want to return to school. When I scanned her energy body I saw that she had many holes in her aura. It was as if the fear was battery acid burning right through her aura, allowing her vital life force to leak out. I knew she would struggle to transform the energy of fear if her vital life force continued to drain away. It was late in the autumn, but we were having such mild weather that many plants were still growing. The plants available were Calendula, Sacred Basil, Rue, Rosemary, and Mugwort—good ones to accomplish the healing needed. As I made a bundle of these plants I prayed for Kelly to be restored to health and well-being, for the holes to be mended and for protection as she went back out into the world. I then brushed her body with the herbs after dipping them in spring water, calling upon the plant spirits to attend to the healing that was necessary. When I finished I told Kelly that she need not be afraid because she had the help and protection of these plants with her, and whenever fear came up she could simply call upon them to help her. Kelly went home with the plants and sewed them into a scarf that she wore around her neck.

HEALING THE PAST TO AFFECT THE FUTURE

We now have an understanding that we are made up of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects with an energy body that maintains the template of the whole. Also engraved in this template are our ancestral lineages and our past lives—part of what makes up the totality of our being. Each is a track that is well trodden, leaving impressions all along the way. In our ancestral lineage these impressions are recorded in our DNA, and our past-life experiences are threaded into the tapestry of our soul.

In our modern-day culture, especially in America, our ancestry is all but forgotten or denied. As Martín Prechtel says, “We are a

culture of orphans.” This denial may come from not wanting to know of an oppressed ancestor or an ancestor as the oppressor, not wanting to know the suffering of being a woman or black or poor. Yet we are inexorably tied to our past through the very blood that courses through our veins each day. Sometimes you may feel like you carry an enormous burden but don’t know exactly where it comes from. The weight is so heavy and yet it seems impossible to lay down, this ancestral burden that has been passed to you. The chains of ancestral prejudice, ancestral suffering, and ancestral longing keep you bound to a particular view of who you are in this world. This burden is held in your energy body, keeping you from fully expressing yourself.

When an excessive ancestral burden has been passed along, it shows up on the left side of the body either in the form of a marked difference on the left side or recurring injuries or compromises on the left side. Lila, a student of mine, is a lovely woman full of expression with a keen understanding of the workings of plant spirits. I very much enjoyed her in my classes, yet I was aware of an extreme compromise she was carrying that might be inhibiting her ability to embrace her healing path. Her posture was such that her left shoulder would slump so that she always seemed lopsided—her right shoulder up and left one down. During a class with a visiting teacher she was used as an example in a depth perception exercise. After the class scanned her, the teacher suggested that she looked like a man by the way she carried herself. Lila is a very attractive woman and does not have the features of a man but the way in which she held her body gave the sense of a man. Normally I do not offer healing sessions unless a person asks for one but after class I told her I might be able to help her if she was interested. Of course she was and we set a time to meet. During our session I used my pendulum all along her left side, which indicated that there was locked-up energy. I began to suspect that there was something in her ancestry that was causing the imbalance on her left side. I asked her what she might tell me about her childhood and stories she had of her ancestors. She proceeded to tell me that, as a child, she was called by a boy’s name until she was about five and that her mother had wished for her to be a boy. She said that women were not highly

regarded in her family and that she felt this was passed on to her. The left side also represents the feminine receptive aspect of ourselves, so in this case there was the double effect on Lila's left side of carrying an ancestral burden of hatred toward women along with a general weakness in her feminine side. I called on the plant spirit of Cedar to come and help heal Lila's ancestral prejudice of perceiving women to be weak. I burned Cedar all along her left side, asking the spirit of Cedar to be carried through the smoke as far back in her ancestry as was needed to heal this wound. Lila says of the treatment, "At first I felt very tired and almost sick after the treatment, like I was recovering from an operation. At the same time I felt this whole new side opening up to me. I felt for the first time how I have been living almost fully from my right side. When I would talk I would turn to the right, my left eye hardly saw anything. I realized that all these years I have been operating entirely from my masculine side, thinking this is how to keep it all together and be in control. I can't believe I never saw it before. My posture is changing and my feminine self is waking up. I feel like this has completely changed my life because not only have I come into balance with my feminine and masculine aspects, but I also have discovered the incredible creative power of being a woman. In this huge expansion I have more self-knowledge, self-love, confidence, intuition, concentration, new ideas, and courage to follow through and my path has become crystal clear."

Ancestral work is so important because, until we lay down the ancestral burden and refuse to carry it forward anymore, there can never be peace on this planet. Until we heal our ancestral line we will always be tormented by the longing of our ancestors and imprisoned by their grief. When they heal we can stand on their proud backs, giving our children courage to be happy descendants. To begin to know your ancestors is to begin the journey of healing their wounds. Because many of us have no idea who our ancestors were beyond our great grandparents, we must enter into an altered dimension to meet them. Frank MacEowen's book *The Spiral of Memory and Belonging* has a great exercise to help you begin to know your ancestors called "Stepping Back into the Body of the Ancestors." He suggests entering into the dream-time by engaging in "activated

breathing”—five long, slow breaths and five deep but rapid breaths. After each series of breaths you take a step backwards into the body of an ancestor beginning with your parent, then grandparent, great-grandparent, great-great grandparent, and then a primal ancestor. Each time you feel what it is like to be in the body of that ancestor and you get a sense of that ancestor by looking at these questions: “What is it like to stand in this ancestor’s body? Does it feel good, or is it uncomfortable? Whether this person is alive or has passed on, allow yourself to really feel what it is like to stand in his body by imitating his posture. How does this grandparent (or other ancestor) stand in the world? Allow yourself to become aware of any images, sensations, or impressions as you connect and commune with the energy of your grandparent (or other ancestor). What does she think of you? What does he feel about the earth? How does she experience the land? What are his joys and dreams? What are her struggles? What qualities has he passed on to you? What gifts or abilities can she offer you today? It is possible that this grandparent (or other ancestor) is from a different landscape than the one you live in now. What impressions do you have of where he lives? For a moment, return your awareness to the posture of this grandparent (or other ancestor). Allow your hands to form naturally a gesture that expresses the energy and presence of this person. Just note this. Take a few more moments to note any final impressions, sensations, feelings or images.” Beyond these questions that Frank suggests I add, “What are his prejudices? What are the burdens that she carries?” You also may add any other questions that you feel will help you to know and understand your ancestor. This exercise can stand on its own as a helpful tool to know your ancestors or it can be combined with the “burden basket” exercise that I do with folks. I ask people to return to their last happy ancestor and from this point begin to step forward, picking up any burdens that their ancestors have been carrying, placing them in the basket as they move through their lineage to their own life. Here they place the burden basket down, letting all the suffering, prejudice, oppression, and grief be absorbed into the earth. As the burdens are laid to rest, the students can now stand on the backs of a long line of happy ancestors with the

knowledge that they are an ancestor of tomorrow and that what they do today will have an effect on those to come.

In looking at the right side of the body, we find the impressions left by our past lives that still need healing. Sometimes I may suggest that a person go into the part of their body that is compromised to see if they can find an imprint from a previous life. I may also lead them into a dream journey to find a previous life that needs healing, or I may track the previous life myself. I consider past-life work to go hand in hand with soul work, as it is our soul that continues from one life to the next. You may recall the story of Laura who received soul retrieval from a past life. Sometimes this is what is necessary to heal that past life but not always. Often something is left unresolved in the previous life so that it lingers in this life in the form of stuck or solidified energy. When you constantly try to remove this energy and it doesn't budge or it seems removed, only to find in the next session it is still there, this is a good indication of an unresolved past life. Once the past life is identified I ask the spirit of Sacred Basil to heal whatever is necessary in this past life. Then the stuck or solidified energy can be removed with ease.

Becky came to me with various aches and pains, especially in her neck and shoulders on the right side. When I scanned her body I found that her entire right side had no energy. It was like she was blocked by heavy armor. Becky is a nurse and a fairly good healer in her own right but was looking for guidance to resolve her issues which she felt quite confident to work on herself. I suggested that she look into her past lives to see if that was the source of her neck pain and lack of moving energy on her right side. The following week she reported that she had been hung in a previous life as a man and that the noose was still around her neck. This sounded fairly traumatic so I asked Sacred Basil to retrieve that part of her soul. The next time she came she had discovered the armoring I had mentioned and felt that this was what kept her from opening up to others. She kept herself blocked off from others because she was afraid of exposure. I asked her what it was that would be exposed and she wasn't quite sure. The next time we met her neck was bothering her again. I was beginning to get stumped, feeling certain that this was a past-life issue. While in session I called upon Striped

Maple to help me track Becky's lives, looking for the one that was causing her pain this time around. As I followed the light path that Striped Maple laid for me I found that Becky had been hung in more than one life. She had been tried and hung as a witch for her abilities to see and heal illness in others. Now I understood her "calling" as a nurse, her heightened intuitive abilities, her fear of exposure, and the continued pain in her neck. I called on Mugwort to help me remove the solidified energy from her neck and shoulders. We talked at length about her abilities as a medical intuitive and how she no longer needed to fear stepping into this healing path now that the noose was gone from her neck and the wounds of her past lives were beginning to heal. I sent her home that day with Sacred Basil flower essence to ensure that the healing would continue.

A WORD ABOUT PROTECTION

One of the biggest concerns I hear from people beginning to work with diseases of the spirit is "What about protection from 'evil spirits?'" I personally don't believe in such things so it is difficult to get too worried about them. However, there are negative intentions that can come your way and, if in a vulnerable state, energies that can attach to you. There is also a level of possessing entity that is more predatory than parasitic and could possibly be a mal-spirit. With this in mind, I encourage students and clients to protect themselves with a particular plant spirit. For students I suggest the plant spirit that has given them the gift of protection so, for example, Jennifer may use Sacred Basil for protection while Jasmine uses Yarrow. For clients, I may give them a fresh plant bundle of Rosemary and Rue or a pouch of the dried plants to carry with them. The hollow at the base of the skull on the back of the neck is a spot where intrusive energy can enter, so for a person who seems in a particularly vulnerable state, I will give them Sacred Basil oil to rub on this spot. During sessions I may smudge the client and myself with White Sage or Mugwort or Western Artemisia.

The important thing to remember about protection is that nothing can harm you unless you allow it. Granted, this allowance may be unconscious, but if you are standing in your creative power being

true to yourself, there is no room for any energy other than that which serves you. When walking a healing path for yourself or another, your intention is always “for the highest good of all.” If you do encounter a situation or energy that does not seem to serve this highest good, you firmly announce, “you have no authority over me.” Then ask your protecting plant spirit to be an escort to the light where any conflicting energy can be transmuted.



Part 3

The Healing Gifts of Plants

If we could see the miracle of a single flower clearly our whole life would change.

BUDDHA



Thirteen

PLANT ALLIES

Finally we have come to the section of this book that tells the stories of the plants and their most amazing qualities. Each plant has so many healing aspects, and how those manifest for one person may not be the same as for another. This is a co-creative partnership between you and the plant—a mingling of energy fields. My energy with a plant will be different, perhaps, from yours. So the way in which I experience a plant and how I use it for healing purposes may not be the same as yours. Remember, you are the author of your own experience, making you an authority. The other thing to keep in mind is that plants continue to evolve just as we do and, as mentioned, plants have always preceded animals and humans in their evolution. This means new uses for plants are appearing as humans develop new needs. What I am discovering is that our evolution is primarily a spiritual one at this point, thus the strong emergence of plant spirits to work with. However, the heart and soul of plants is also evolving so that new uses for plants on physical and structural levels are emerging as well.

In the beginning of this book we explored the heart, soul, and spirit of humans and, even though we spoke about each separately, it is not possible for them to stand alone as they are integrally connected. It is the same with plants. They too have heart, soul, and spirit that are integrally connected. If we use the analogy of a plant being like a house, we would say that the soul of a plant is the structure of a

house. It has a particular design that manifests in a solid way that is long-lasting and archetypal. The heart of the plant is like the decoration inside the house. It is what gives the house a particular personality. The physical aspects of the plant, including its chemical constituents, are all part of the trappings of the house. The spirit of the plant is who lives in the house, filling all the rooms with its undeniable presence. The spirit of the plant, being the inhabitant of the house, is also the one that supervises the building of the house and its decoration so that the spirit of the plant knows its heart and soul intimately. The plant spirit has the full understanding of the true nature of the entirety of its being, so that when a person works with the spirit of the plant, one has an opportunity to know its heart and soul as well, whereas the reverse is not necessarily true. Working with only the heart (physical nature) of a plant without accessing its spirit and receiving its blessing through the sharing of its healing gifts means you will only be affecting the physical aspect of a person. This can bring about only partial and usually temporary healing. True healing takes place when the source of the disease is addressed on all levels including the physical. Ideally, one has become so intimately involved with the heart, soul, and spirit of the plant—becoming a true ally—that applications in all of these aspects are used to heal the heart, soul, and spirit of a person.

The question often arises about the difference between knowing a plant and knowing a plant spirit. I can have a casual understanding of a plant that I may have learned from a book or even from its occasional use, but the spirit of the plant doesn't live within me. When one comes to know the spirit of a plant, a merging with the plant takes place and communication freely flows from the plant in the form of insights. As Jasmine, one of my students says, "Before the plant was on the outside, but now the plant is inside. It's a whole different level of knowing." Another question that comes up is about the use of plant preparations such as tinctures, oils, incenses, teas, flower essences, and so forth. While it is true that once a plant spirit lives inside me I know its vibratory essence and can call upon that essence for healing purposes, it is also true that I love to have the plant around in an embodied form. It's like my sweetie lives in my heart and I can call up his essence at any time, feeling what it is like

to know his vibration, but I sure like having him around in the flesh. It is the same with your plant allies. When your relationship has reached an intimate level, you want them around in all types of manifestations because your love is so strong.

Following is a sampling of some of my favorite plant allies. There are so many more than this listing, but these are the ones that called to be here. Words can be so limiting when it comes to describing the magnanimous beings that these plants are and, hopefully, this will give you a small glimpse into their lives.

MUGWORT—*ARTEMISIA VULGARIS*, *DOUGLASIANA*, AND *TRIDENTATA*

Soft silver lady dancing in spirals under the full moon light. Green fingers caressing my body, moving me to the rhythm of the ages. Old face, young face, mother-with-babe face—you are the one flowing from phase to phase, healing as you go. Your silver mantle spreads over my shoulders, keeping me in your fold. And now the ecstatic dance moves inside, swirling through veins, meridians, nerve channels, spinal column—flowing free. Then, streaming out through my fingertips, toes, and the top of my head, the river of energy flowing clearer and brighter with each wave. The waves of silver light rock me back and forth, lulling me deeper and deeper into the dream of the silver lady. As her dream becomes my dream we walk hand in hand through field and forest visiting with green ones, furry ones, watery ones, solid ones, all her friends. She invites me to join in circle with all of nature, lending my voice to the co-creative collaboration.

Mugwort's varied countenance begins with her namesake, Artemis, a Greek goddess who was the daughter of Zeus and a sister to Apollo. She is a maiden who is at home in the wildness of nature, often roaming with wild animals at her side while befriending the wild plants as well. Mugwort's spirit mirrors this quality by helping one to access the spirit of nature and her green beings. Artemis is never to be domesticated, always free from spousal ties. She is also a moon goddess and, as such, is an ally to women, helping to influence fertility, childbirth, and menstruation. This aspect is reflected in the use of mugwort as a tonic to the reproductive organs affecting mother, maiden, and crone. As the moon goddess she embodies the magic of the dreamtime and imparts to mugwort the ability to easily

enter daydreams, night dreams, and journey dreams, returning just as easily with insight, clarity, and deep knowing. When you engage Mugwort's Artemis essence she becomes your protectress against negative energies and "evil spirits," as the old time herbalists say.

Mugwort has also been called St. John's Girdle, and it is said that John the Baptist wore a girdle of mugwort while in the wilderness. Was this because he knew mugwort would protect him or was it to help him open his third eye and intuition, to bring him close to spirit through his visions, another way of entering the dreamtime?

One of the nine sacred herbs given to the world by the god Woden, mugwort was called Una or the first and oldest of herbs, the mother of all herbs. And so it is in Plant Spirit Healing. If you were to pick one plant to work with and have as your ally, let it be Mugwort.

The heart of Mugwort has many healing attributes and some directly relate to how the plant spirit heals. Mugwort is known for its qualities as a nervine, and the spirit of Mugwort helps smooth jagged and static energy. Often I will use Mugwort to "run the energy," which is a way to smooth and even out the energy of the auric field. Mugwort is also known for its warming and stimulating properties with the added ability to move out toxins and accumulated waste. This physical ability is reflected in the spirit of Mugwort and is one of the main ways I use it in Plant Spirit Healing. The spirit of Mugwort can remove blocked energy, move energy from one place to the next, clear stuck and stagnant energy, and open gates to remove intrusive energy.

There is a very effective alignment treatment using the spirit of Mugwort that Eliot Cowan taught me. Eliot calls this treatment the "Hole in One," but this sounds like I should be out on the golf course so I renamed this treatment "All in One," which seems to be a more appropriate title. The spine is like the mast on a ship, that which gives integrity and balance to the entire structure. It is what holds our body in its upright position and energetically is the axis of our intention. Various forms of trauma can affect the integrity of the spinal energy pillar, causing compromise in its alignment. The life force enters the spine through the foramen magnum, the opening between the skull and the first vertebra in the spinal column, and

then passes through the atlas (cervical one) and the axis (cervical two) before it gushes down the rest of the spine. When one's inner integrity is compromised by trauma or one's intention is misaligned, the foramen magnum, atlas, and axis can become a bottleneck where the life force gets pinched, blocking the free flow of energy and potentially causing misalignment further down the spine.

The integrity of the spinal column can be judged by leg length, foot turnout, and range of motion of the neck. Once it has been determined that an All in One treatment is needed, the practitioner sits holding the client's head and calls upon Mugwort to come and clear the channel of the foramen magnum, atlas, and axis. The intention is to create a clear, unobstructed passageway for the life force to move freely through. It may be that Mugwort comes as a dancing silver spiral clearing the way, or maybe it is like a corkscrew brush scrubbing away congestion. Regardless of the image Mugwort provides, you will usually feel the movement through your hands in the form of heat or tingling. When the heat or tingling subsides, instruct the client to lie perfectly still while the life force brings the spinal column back into alignment. This takes about fifteen minutes at which time you can check leg length, turnout, and range of motion again to see the shift that has occurred.

Jennifer, a student of mine, describes Mugwort as "one of my most powerful allies that I use every time I work on someone. I see her as a black-haired moon lady who gave me a moonstone ring to wear. I know she is there because I feel her dancing around me and my hands. There's coolness like being in the moonlight when she is around. She's so easy to work with because she makes herself so available. I use her often to remove sharp objects from people's energy field and chakras."

Jasmine also calls on Mugwort in almost all of the treatments she performs. She says, "I am steered in my sessions by Mugwort. It's like she lights the way, showing me what it is I'm to do in my treatment, actually showing me where the blocks are. Sometimes she goes directly and clears them or maybe she will tell me a crystal to use to help clear the energy. She uses me like a channel and guides me like the other day when I was told to get the heat out of a

client's face that was so swollen. She told me where to hold my hands, and then we moved the heat out together.”

I particularly like Mugwort in the form of smoke. As a smudge her burning leaves are good at shifting and clearing static energy. I also like to smoke her as she imparts a mildly altered state of calm clarity. Of course, moxibustion has been used in Chinese medicine for centuries. This is the fuzzy part of the leaves rolled into cones that are burned on acupuncture points to help stimulate them. Mugwort is by far my most favorite herbal beer. There is debate about whether her common name is associated with her being a main ingredient in alcoholic brews, and it is quite likely given the great taste and pleasant shift that occurs when we partake of her as a drink. I also have her hanging in my house, my car, next to my bed, and in a pouch I wear around my neck, as ways to always be reminded of her protective presence, helping me to keep my energy flowing.

Even though Artemisia has many gifts that are used in various ways, it is clear that one of her main messages for us is to keep our energy moving. She's here to help us do that. ([See color plate 9.](#))

SACRED BASIL—*OCIMUM SANCTUM*

In the early morning newness your dew-laden leaves sparkle as the sun reaches out for your symbiotic embrace. As your rich oils begin to stir with the warmth of the sun I relax into the heady aroma of your sweet fragrance. I feel myself being lifted on wings of desire to touch that place where the Gods roam. Here in this expansive state you come to me with your honeyed breath whispering of lofty truths. You, dressed in royal purple robes—a panacea for all who yield to your embrace—are the one who has blessed me with your divine grace. Floating in this sea of bliss I feel a tug and dive to the depths of my soul only to find you here, too, waiting to bathe me in your perfumed essence. Oh, holy one, redeemer of my soul, you bring me home to myself. Here in this sanctuary I surrender my resistance and give myself in service to you.

Tulsi is the name for Sacred or Holy Basil in India and translates to “incomparable one.” Native to India, Tulsi has been revered for over 5,000 years, and as Yash Rai in his book *Tulsi* says, “The Hindu scriptures enjoin us to look upon Tulsi not as a mere plant, but as the divine representative of the God Vishnu or of Lord Krishna.” In other

texts Tulsi is described as a consort of Krishna, leading to the name “Mother of the Universe.” Because of the divine nature of Sacred Basil, the plant itself is worshipped both in the morning and at night by leaving a lamp burning at its base. Almost all households in India have Sacred Basil at their doorstep to keep any misfortune from entering the home and as Yash Rai says, “It is even believed that the messengers of the God of Death (diseases) cannot approach a home where there is a Tulsi plant.” Sacred Basil then is a great protector, not only on the physical level but spiritually as well. A dab of Sacred Basil oil rubbed on the back of the neck protects one from unwanted energies.

The heart of Sacred Basil is considered the “elixir of life.” As Yash Rai says, “From the point of view of therapeutic effect, Tulsi is not merely a healing agent, not merely a medicine, but it is a medicine par excellence, the veritable elixir of life, because all the diseases that afflict mankind can be cured by Tulsi.” This plant is known to heal anything from cancer to respiratory ailments to digestive disorders to skin problems as well as reproductive problems. It is one of the best adaptagens there is, protecting the immune system from environmental stress. It is no wonder that Sacred Basil as a plant spirit steps up to the soul level to bring balance and well-being. It is a plant that is well versed in the spiritual realm and can help the soul translate the language of spirit. This quality is well known in India as Yash Rai tells us, “Wherever the wind that has touched Tulsi plants blows, sacred thoughts arise, spiritual upliftment prevails, and godliness fills the mind.”

In my Plant Spirit Healing practice I use Sacred Basil in almost all my treatments. Besides being a great protector plant it helps in soul retrieval, as it is able to locate exiled souls and bring them home. It also helps connect directly to a person’s soul. One day I was working with a young woman who was suffering from chronic fatigue. She had no *joie de vivre* and was having difficulty with her direction in life. Sandra wasn’t able to get any insight or even a sense of what she might want to do. I checked all the possible energy blockages that I thought could be creating this situation, but nothing seemed to be compromised. I wasn’t sure what to do so I sat back and asked for help. A very distinct sweet smell began to waft through the air. I

recognized the smell as that of Sacred Basil. Because Sacred Basil is one of my personal allies, I thought perhaps she was here to help instruct me since I had asked for help. But instead, she started weaving columns of light at the corners of the table I was working on. These columns went high into the sky and down into the earth. Then she began to fill in between them, and a transparent chamber of light was created that went both up and down—with the table, myself, and Sandra in the middle of the chamber. Sacred Basil then began to spiral upward into the heavens and down into the earth with Sandra's heart at the point where the spiraling began. Then it was as if Sacred Basil opened portals in both the earth and the heavens and light began to flood the chamber with a particular bright beam focused on Sandra's heart. I was stunned by what was taking place but just sat back and watched it unfold. Finally the light subsided and Sacred Basil stood in front of me and said, "Is that the kind of help you wanted?" I asked what she had done and she said she had opened the doors to Sandra's soul—both the aspect that is of the earth and the aspect that is of the heavens (I never knew there were two)—so that her heart would know the essence of her true nature and its manifestation process. This was an amazing experience on many levels. Usually I call upon plant spirits to come and do specific types of work depending on what I know them to be able to do. I had carried the belief that the treatment would be more effective if I directed where the plant spirit was to go and what it was to do. Here, I was clearly shown that plant spirits know exactly what to do without any guidance from me. I also discovered one more of Sacred Basil's healing gifts and was given a deeper understanding of the soul. I realized that the earth soul is what grounds us here and helps in the manifestation process of actualizing our soul's path. Sandra went on to find meaningful work that she felt was her "calling."

Being in the presence of Sacred Basil is like being showered with divine grace as her scent alone can send one into a blissfully altered state. It is thought that merely sitting in the vicinity of Sacred Basil can bring healing, as it is highly oxygenating and holds a strong electrical charge. Sacred Basil brings radiant beauty wherever it dwells. Yash Rai tells us, "Early in the morning, after your bath, spread a mat in the proximity of a Tulsi plant, and sit in such a

position as to allow the fragrance emanating from its leaves, inflorescences and stem to mix with the air you inhale and to fill your entire being with ecstasy. Inhale deeply, and hold your breath. Let the maximum amount of fragrance enter your lungs with the air inhaled through the nostrils. . . . This fragrance is very effective in increasing the beauty, health and radiance of the body. It has a great capacity of purifying the blood and correcting any unfavorable alteration in it. Your body will acquire glow and your face will become radiant. Your beauty will thus be greatly enhanced.” The fragrance being Sacred Basil’s strongest signature, I put the flowers and leaves in oil and let it sit for six weeks after which time the oil has been infused with its sweet essence. This oil can be rubbed on the body anywhere to impart the vibration of Sacred Basil. ([See color plate 11.](#))

ST. JOHN’S WORT—*HYPERICUM PERFORATUM*

The warmth of summer washes over me as I head out to harvest the flowering ones. I come upon an open field and delight in the smells of sun-soaked clover, yarrow, and bergamot. I let my eyes soften as I drop into my heart where perception can deepen. Then I see them dotting the field here and there, bursts of yellow as if the sun had scattered bits of light all around. The elder St. John’s of the field waves in the breeze, and I bow in humble honor offering my prayer of gratitude as I kindle a small flame, acknowledging the fire essence of this most luminous plant. As the fire jumps to life, flashes and sparks of light explode in my heart then radiate out illuminating those shadowy recesses like lightning, brightening the night. I feel flush with my spirit fire rising as St. John’s Wort blazes the way, leaving no place to hide. Glowing with our mingling flames, I proceed to pick the yellow flowers as my fingers become marked with the blood red of remembrance.

St. John’s wort is a beautiful yellow-flowered plant that begins to bloom around summer solstice, the third week in June. It was often associated with this festival and was used for divination, especially concerning matters of the heart. It was also used for protection against witches and was hung over doorways or worn upon the body during the solstice time. Once Christianity became entrenched, the solstice as a celebratory day became St. John’s Day, and the plant associated with this pagan holiday became St. John’s wort. Its Latin

genus name *Hypericum* most likely came from the Greek *hyper eikon* meaning “over an image, icon, or apparition,” depending on how you look at it. This implies it held some type of power over demons, and points to its protective quality. If we look at its earliest usage as a plant honoring the longest day of the year when there is the most amount of sun, St. John’s wort and its abundant light quality could be seen as a plant that dispels darkness and the “evils” that were perceived to go along with the dark, thus, the origin of its use for protection.

St. John’s wort is a plant of the sun, carrying this fiery element within it, holding an enormous amount of light—the essence of St. John’s wort and the source of its many gifts. The heart of St. John’s wort is known to relieve depression and so it is with the spirit of the plant as well. Depression is such a vague term and can manifest in various ways, but what it looks like energetically in a person is a lifeless quality; the internal flame is burning low or the spirit of the person is draining away. In this first degree of depression when the inner flame is burning low, there is a particular vulnerability that arises, which is like opening the doorway for physical, emotional, and spiritual illness to enter in. There is an acupuncture point, Kidney 24, called Spirit Burial Ground that is a gateway for St. John’s Wort to enter and add its spark to strengthen the internal flame. This point is located on the top of the fourth rib down from the clavicle, which is the long bone that crosses from your shoulder to your throat. From the center-line of your body it is about an inch to either side.

The second degree of depression can occur when there has been extreme shock, accumulated trauma, or fear. Here there is spirit weariness that might flirt with suicide. The acupuncture point Kidney 25, called Spirit Storehouse, is where St. John’s Wort can be directed to rekindle the flame and invite spirit back. This point is located just above Kidney 24 on the third rib. Both of these degrees are levels of spirit loss and can be the beginning of much greater compromise.

The plant spirit of St. John’s Wort presents itself to me in the form of a radiant oval of light, and I feel it in my body as a pulsing light that enters through my heart and permeates my whole being, lighting

up my entire energy field and all the inner recesses. I transfer this vibratory essence to my client by placing my fingers on Kidney 24 or 25 and asking St. John's Wort to kindle the inner flame of spirit or to add spirit, like adding wood to a fire. The first thing I notice in my clients is the light coming back into their eyes, then their energy comes back and then their *joie de vivre*. Once their spirit is restored they have more ability to resist illness, cope with stress, and are less vulnerable to unwanted energies. Thanks to acupuncturist Megan Godfrey for showing me these points to work with.

Jennifer, one of my students, uses St. John's Wort in a similar way, but her experience of the plant spirit is a little different. She says, "I went to a big wooden house where there were low flames flickering everywhere but they weren't burning anything. I sank into a big overstuffed armchair, as my chest grew warmer and warmer. I lay back further in the chair and began to sink into a wave vibration. It was waves of inner flames I was receiving through my heart chakra. Here in this deep space was the spirit of St. John's Wort. He was keeping the home fires burning, the home fires of my spirit."

Like all plants, St. John's Wort has so many healing gifts to offer. The heart of St. John's Wort heals nervous conditions and is anti-viral, for which I like to make an alcohol tincture to ingest. The soul of St. John's Wort can protect one from psychic attack or envidia. Because flower essences can often carry the soul imprint of a plant, a flower essence would be useful in this case. As a wound herb St. John's wort is excellent both for physical wounds and ones in the energetic body. A strong signature of St. John's wort is perforations on the leaves and the bloodlike color exuded from the plant. This indicates it would be useful for perforations of the skin from which blood flows and for holes in our energy body from where life force drains. The flowers make beautiful rich red oil when soaked in olive or almond oil and can be used to transfer the wound-healing gifts of this powerful plant. ([See color plate 12.](#))

CALENDULA—CALENDULA OFFICINALIS

Orange and yellow discs dance on my inner field of vision as if the sun were raining individual bits of itself. I rouse from my reverie slowly,

opening my eyes to bright blossoms displayed along the path I have lain down in. I remember now that I was dancing the jitterbug with this wild woman with an orange skirt on that when she spun around the skirt stood out straight. Her name was Mary Gold, and she liked nothing more than to dance all day long, twirling and spinning. She had so much energy I could barely keep up with her. And then as the sun began to set she stopped her twirling, her petaled skirt closed, and she fell into a quiet slumber. As I look around, I see hundreds of orange and yellow flowers opened wide appearing just like her skirt. I pick a blossom and hold it just below my belly button, letting the resonance of Mary Gold tune my vibration to hers. My energy pulses in rhythmic harmony as we dance in synchronicity.

Calendula is the first plant I dreamed about in a nighttime dream. It was so many years ago, and yet I can still see in my mind's eye the bright orange color of her flowers and smell the strong resinous fragrance. I remember in the dream there was an intense glow as if the sun was burning so brightly that I was almost blinded. I could feel the warmth of Calendula and saw it in wave-like patterns, the way heat rises from pavement. At the time I was suffering from a wound that had become infected. Nothing I tried was healing it. After the dream I soaked in an infusion of calendula blossoms and the infection healed immediately. From that time on Calendula has lived inside me and over the years our relationship has deepened. I now know the spirit of Calendula can heal wounds in the energy body as well.

I have grown calendula in my garden every year and it is one of the most generous of all the flowers, blooming and blooming throughout the season and this year even into November. As a matter of fact, its name was derived from the Latin "calends" meaning the first day of the month because, in the warmer climate where it originates, it blooms every calendar month of the year. It is also called Pot Marigold (not to be confused with French Marigold grown in gardens to deter insects), because it was one of the flowers dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

The heart of Calendula has many healing gifts. It is effective in stimulating and supporting the immune system while relieving swollen glands by reducing lymphatic congestion. It is also known to improve circulation, aiding varicose veins, and is useful in any number of infections whether they be bacterial, viral, or fungal.

Calendula has a particular attraction to the female reproductive system and can regulate menstruation, relieve menopausal symptoms, relieve uterine congestion, and reduce cysts and fibroid tumors as well as relieve menstrual cramps.

In this way, the heart and spirit of Calendula complement each other. I work with the spirit of Calendula to clear any blockage or congestion in the second chakra, which is where sexual issues present themselves. Oftentimes, there is a direct connection between sexual issues and reproductive challenges. In a case where the second chakra is compromised I will ask Calendula to come and help clear the chakra. She comes in with her orange skirt and spins in circles so that her skirt stands out. This rapid movement clears the congestion from the chakra and then she can heal any wounding that has occurred in the energy field of this chakra. If my client has reproductive issues corresponding with the compromised chakra then I may send her home with a tincture (alcohol preparation) of Calendula. If there is a present or even old sexual issue I may send her home with a salve of Calendula to rub on her lower belly.

One of my students, Jessica, who is also a massage therapist, describes her personal and professional relationship with Calendula. "When I was interning with you I was trying to figure out my next step in life, and Calendula was the plant spirit who gave me guidance to go to massage school. I resisted at first because I didn't want to go back to school, but then Calendula laid me on a table and put her leaf hands on my body and did a ceremony with me. She sent an orange orb of light into my hands and told me I would have the 'healing touch.' When I do massage with people I can permeate through their body armor and their guarding so that they receive more fully the 'healing touch' that Calendula has given me. Calendula is a strong ally for me and is like my grounding board. I can be grounded in pure love with her warm gentle pulse that lives in me and passes through my hands. I also work with her in the second chakra and healing in the auric field. She fills holes in the auric field with her orange light and they heal quickly. She's like my all-encompassing advisor and helps me to see how I can be of service. She surprises me how she shows up, like one time I was living in a house that had a ghost. There was a toaster in the house that would

beep at all kinds of odd hours of the night. It wasn't like it was the same hour on a particular evening, it was random. After the toaster would beep I would feel this odd presence in the house and it frightened me. Calendula would come in and let me know everything was all right. One night when the toaster started beeping Calendula immediately appeared and encouraged me to see what the ghost needed. Calendula facilitated the communication between the ghost and me, and I discovered that the ghost wanted me to put a penny in the basement for his grandmother. I didn't ask why and just did what I was instructed to do. After the penny went in the basement the toaster stopped beeping. Then about two months later it beeped, and again Calendula assisted with communication with the ghost. He said he was lonely and stuck and didn't know how to move on. I asked if Calendula could help and she, along with Mugwort and Panther, my animal guide, escorted the ghost to the other side. That was the last of the beeping toaster. It never ceases to amaze me how versatile and helpful the plant spirits are and on so many levels."

The soul imprint of Calendula expressed through the flower essence carries a sunny countenance, lending a warm resonance to its signature and bringing warmth in communication with others. For those who are in professions like healing, teaching, and counseling, Calendula can greatly assist with compassionate care. ([See color plate 13.](#))

TRILLIUM—*TRILLIUM ERECTUM*

The dappled light spreads across the leaf-littered forest floor as I wander up the stream. The spring runoff dashes down the mountain, oozing from every crevice. The rich moist smell of the warming earth fills me with the promise of the life that is to come. I slide down the bank to get closer to the tumbling water, and then I see them scattered along the slope with their wine-red triplets. What a blessed sight when the trillium return, gracing this masterful canvas with their exquisite beauty! I ease myself down, laying my head within inches of her outstretched petals. As I lay on the earth I become aware of my pulse pounding in my lower belly like a drum while I continue to gaze upon the triple Goddess before me. Stepping into her daydream I realize she is the drumbeat, the beat of my

heart, the pulse of my blood, and the resonant rhythm creating harmony between my heart and womb.

While strolling through the woods on a fine spring day you may have the good fortune to come across trillium as it stops you in your tracks and takes your breath away. This exquisitely beautiful native plant is commonly called Bethroot or Birthroot, giving some indication of how the native women used it for easing childbirth. The name Trillium originates from the Swedish word “trilling,” which means triplet, as there are three leaves, three green sepals, and three flower petals. Trillium is one of those special plants that carries the trinity as one of its signatures. It helps one move through the big transitions in life from birth, death, and rebirth to maiden, mother, and crone. Likewise, it is helpful in three chakras, the first or root, the second or Hara, and the fourth or heart. Working in concert, Trillium grounds one in a sexuality that is tempered and given substance by the heart. This particular Trillium is dark blood red and, as the color may indicate, is useful to arrest excessive blood flow from all parts of the body.

Cynthia, one of my students, experiences Trillium in a very intimate way. She says, “When I first met Trillium it was like a recognition. I knew this plant was a key that would open up doors in my body and heart, helping me to make sense of why I’m here. Three, of course, is a big number for me and red is my favorite color so right away I was in love with this plant but I could never have imagined how this love would grow. Trillium is very rooted and helps me come into my body through the first chakra. When I went into the dreamtime of Trillium I was stunned at the intimacy I felt. Trillium entered through my vagina and went through my whole body and became my blood so that I was filled up, and then Trillium went further and went deeply into past lives and my ancestry as if she wanted to know me completely because I am a result of who I was in the past. I found that I started to remember who I was because my blood, which was Trillium, held the memory. I felt my feet and legs getting heavier, grounding me down, taking me out of my head and into my body as I enjoyed what seemed like my animal instinct that was bridging my headiness with the sexual essence of my body. Trillium has helped me to feel complete.”

Another student says of Trillium, “Ever since my mom died I have had difficulty with my heart in that it will close down unexpectedly. Then I met Trillium and found that I could keep my heart open if I called on Trillium. She comes and stands behind me and places her hands over my heart and then draws her hands across my chest, opening my heart. I use Trillium with my clients, too, when there is heart constriction or hardened heart. Trillium softens and opens the heart.”

Because Trillium combines sexual energy with heart energy and grounds it into one’s body, it is an excellent love remedy. Platonic love based in the heart brings compassion and sexual love brings passion. When the two are combined the ultimate union can exist. Trillium can resolve any differences between the two, eliminating separation and allowing a union of these very powerful energies, creating one dynamic force. ([See color plate 14.](#))

HAWTHORN—*CRATAEGUS* SPP.

It’s autumn in Vermont and the hillsides are splashed with color as the trees display their finery, dressing as if they are going to a festive ball. This last splurge before taking their long winter rest fills me with deep gratitude and awe for the magnificent beings they are. Walking with appreciation I comb the woodland edges in search of the elusive red berries. As the twilight descends I come upon the Thorn Apple covered with pomes and I notice a flickering of light beneath the tree. I look to see what could be reflecting light but find nothing. As I get closer the light disappears but around the base of the tree is a circle beaten down as if someone were dancing under the tree. The old lore says that fairies meet under Hawthorn trees. Could it be? I look at all the red berries covering the tree and contemplate, what an abundance and yet . . . if this is a fairy tree? I pull the pouch from my pocket and retrieve a handmade bead. Blowing my breath on it I make a prayer to the fairy beings and the spirit of Hawthorn. Placing the bead at the base of the tree, I leave without a harvest but my heart is filled with the magic that’s afoot.

One November I had the good fortune to be traveling in Ireland with my daughter. As we were driving along I kept seeing these hedgerows with prolific red berries and I could hardly imagine what they could be. Finally, we stopped the car and got out to discover hawthorn berries in such amazing abundance. Where I live in

Vermont I have to hunt far and wide to get even a small quantity of berries, but in Ireland it was hawthorn heaven. I knew I wouldn't be able to bring the fresh berries into the United States, so we made a brandy tincture there and brought it home. What a treat to sip hawthorn brandy on cold winter nights!

Hawthorn is a member of the Rose family that blooms in May, thus one of its names: Mayblossom. It has long been associated with the festivities of May Day, when the Queen of the May presides wearing a wreath of hawthorn blossoms. The ancient ceremony this time of year is Beltane, which is the cross-quarter day between spring equinox and summer solstice. Beltane is a celebration of spring and is strongly associated with fertility and renewal. Hawthorn heralds the springtime renewal with its sweet-scented blossoms.

Hawthorn is also called Thorn Apple, as it loves to grow along the borders of old apple orchards and is readily identifiable by its two-inchlong thorns. It is said that it was a crown of hawthorn that was placed on Christ's head, giving it the status of being the tree closest to God and thus unable to be corrupted.

Hawthorn's greatest and most renowned gift is its healing relationship to the heart. On a physical level hawthorn improves circulation, lowers blood pressure, and reduces palpitations and arrhythmia as well as serving as a remedy for degenerative heart disease and heart failure. As a heart tonic hawthorn is preventive for all manner of heart conditions. As a flower essence Hawthorn relieves a heart saddened by separation or love loss. It also opens the heart, helping one to give and receive love. The spirit of Hawthorn can bring balance to the heart organ, the official of the fire element within the Five Element modality, and can also clear the heart chakra. But the most important use of Hawthorn in Plant Spirit Healing is the ability to put the heart back in its rightful place as the pilot, allowing the mind to serve as the copilot. The heart has been displaced since Descartes said, "I think therefore I am." As the heart gets more and more displaced, less and less coherence is possible. This causes separation from our primary perception, which informs our senses, guides our intuition, and instills our life with meaning.

A student's client came to her for a massage and in the course of the massage he mentioned suffering from chest pains. Jill placed her hand on his heart and immediately the spirit of Hawthorn appeared in her energy field. She knew that his heart had been displaced. Previously, Hawthorn had shown Jill how to place her hands in order to bring the heart back to its rightful place. She put one hand on his heart and one on his head. In her inner vision she could see the heart sitting to the left. In place of the heart was a litany of "shoulds" that had to do with his work, finances, and home life. All of the decisions he was making were based on the "shoulds" and not on his heart's desire. Jill asked Hawthorn to move through her hands and place the heart back in the center of his being. Hawthorn told Jill to relay the message, "Follow your heart's desire and you will be in service to yourself, your wife, and all life." Jill told her client this, and he cried with the knowing of this truth. He then told Jill how his wife had been pressuring him for so long to have a career that would earn him more money. He felt the pressure was killing him and he was afraid of having a heart attack, especially since he was having chest pains. A month later he returned for another massage and his chest pain was gone; he was following his heart's desire, and his wife had become content being in the presence of his joy.

When Jane came to me she was experiencing depression that she could not shake. She was unhappy in her marriage because there was no intimacy, and her husband treated her more as a friend to have intellectual exchange with. Her heart chakra was blocked, which I assumed was because of her unhappy marriage. I cleared her heart chakra with a plant spirit I use for love loss. The next time she came her heart chakra was closed again. I realized perhaps more was going on so I asked about her work and the rest of her life. She was very unhappy in her job, had few friends, and felt there was nothing to get excited about in her life. Even though Jane is intellectually very bright and capable of much accomplishment, her life was falling apart. In taking her pulses I found that her heart/small intestine pulse was barely discernable. It seemed her heart was nowhere to be found. I asked her about this and she replied that she couldn't feel much of anything in her heart. In a flash, I saw the extreme compromise in her heart. In her fire element the heart

official was imbalanced and her heart chakra kept closing, both as a result of her heart being displaced by her mind. She spent much of her time trying to figure out her life without ever checking in with her heart. I then called upon Hawthorn to come and put her heart back in its rightful place on the throne. I sent her home with Hawthorn flower essence and instructions to give positive impulses of gratitude, forgiveness, and innocent perception to her heart to help keep it in the primary position. I also suggested she read the *HeartMath Solution* so her mind would not feel left out and could see how best to serve the heart. Several months later, she had divorced her husband, found a job she liked, started doing artwork, and reported she was “feeling happier.”

DANDELION—*TARAXACUM OFFICINALE*

With baskets on our arms we head to the big field where the dandelions are overwhelmingly in full bloom. The sheer number of flowers attests to the success of this ordinary one. We set about picking with baskets strung around our necks so both our hands are free. The hum of bees and insects busying themselves with nectar gathering lulls me into a trancelike state while my hands, on automatic pilot, fill my basket with blossoms. I sense an urgency in the air, as if I'm being pulled along at breakneck speed. Then I see Dandelion leading the way, moving through lifetimes with all the humans following, evolving at a rapid pace. My vision fades as I look across the field at this most common of weeds, smiling to myself with the task at hand, blossoms for wine and an evolutionary leap—all in a day's work.

Dandelion is probably the most well-known plant in the world, even to people who are not familiar with plants, due to its pervasiveness and tenacity. Unfortunately, this abundant plant has been misunderstood, and has been considered by many a pesky weed to pull and discard. The truth of dandelion is that it is one of the best plants there is for tonifying and supporting the liver. With our livers working overtime to filter from the blood chemicals and toxins whose names we can't even pronounce, a plant like dandelion growing in great profusion right outside our doorstep seems crucial. As a matter of fact, maybe dandelion's strong survival tendencies, as evidenced

by its growth through the cracks in city sidewalks, are a response to our desperate need of its healing qualities.

Dandelion's name derives from the French *dent de lion*, meaning tooth of the lion. It is said that this may be because the toothed leaves resemble that of a lion's teeth. I wonder if this name was given more because of Dandelion's ferocious nature in dealing with indigestion, elimination of waste through the liver and urinary tract, and its tremendous preventive abilities due to high nutritive value. Dandelion has a go-getter personality like one who is not afraid to work hard to do what needs to be done and is not going to give up easily.

I ask my students to paint a picture of Dandelion through what they know of its medicinal and edible qualities, its personality, its dreamtime, and its vibratory essence. It is the entire picture of a plant that helps you determine how to use it. It is not just a dreamtime journey or what you observe about the plant, or only its medicinal qualities that give you the full understanding of a plant's true nature. It is all of these, combined with your communications, which lead you into intimate knowing and sharing. One might begin to get a picture of Dandelion by observing that the flower is yellow, the color of the solar plexus chakra and the direction of east on the Medicine Wheel. Its taste is bitter, which indicates effect on the liver and gallbladder as well as an ability to tonify. Dandelion comes early in the spring with abundant growth, both of which are qualities of the wood element in the Five Element modality. Its nutritious quality lets you know it can nourish you and work preventively to keep you healthy. Dandelion is a survivor helping you to persevere against all odds. A kick-butt dude in combat boots may have come to you in a dream, or maybe a chatty high-powered workaholic executive, both of whom exude strength and self-confidence. You may feel the vibration of Dandelion in the gut as an intense throb or perhaps a high C quiver, depending on the resonance you create together as your fields merge. The portrait of Dandelion continues to emerge as you have your own unique experiences receiving the gifts Dandelion has to offer you. It may be that you use it to clear the third chakra, bring balance to a person's wood element, or move into new beginnings in the east.

Nancy came to me with low thyroid and digestive upset with associated constipation. She was a stay-at-home mom who felt she had no skills, and now that the children were grown she had nothing to occupy her time. Her marriage was failing and her self-esteem was at an all-time low. She spent hours sleeping, not having much desire to participate in life. Everything was sluggish including her digestion and elimination. She was unable to make any changes, feeling stuck in her situation. Our work together was multilayered, but the main thing to begin the shift was working to rebuild self-esteem and get Nancy's energy moving. This was accomplished by working with the heart, soul, and spirit of Dandelion. I worked with the spirit of Dandelion to clear her third chakra, she took Dandelion flower essence to give her self-confidence to overcome any obstacles, and she took Dandelion tincture to help her digest her life (and her food) so that she could eliminate regularly, letting movement flow. Nancy eventually divorced her husband and lives independently. She no longer has thyroid problems, her energy is good, and her digestion is normal. During the summer she is able to work on an organic farm, her lifelong dream. She is living according to her own true nature, walking the path that is uniquely hers.

ANGELICA—ANGELICA ARCHANGELICA

I stand before you as you tower above me with your outstretched arms raised to the sky, inviting the heavens to fill every crevice of your being. Sliding my fingers along your strong but hollow purple-tinged stalks, I feel the outline of your smooth grooved supports. Finding my way to your globed flower head, I caress each individual bud sensing the potency of the seed to follow. I slip a tiny bit of you into my mouth letting the fresh celery scent mingle with the pungent sweetness of your flesh. As you open to my gentle touch I feel enchanted by your beautiful countenance. Light-headed and giddy I recognize the beginning of a love affair.

I am only in the beginning stages of my courtship with Angelica, but I am so attracted to this amazing plant, I wanted to include it here as a way of honoring what I believe will become a very intimate relationship. Angelica has always been associated with heavenly realms. It is said that an angel revealed the use of angelica to act upon the plague, leading to angelica's well-known use for all kinds of

contagious disease. Another angelic reference, illustrated in the species name, is to the Archangel Michael who is considered to be God's physician. Michael serves as an angelic healer especially presiding over springs, rivers, and pools that he has imbued with medicinal healing properties. Archangel Michael also stands at the gates of paradise "to keep the way of the tree of life" (Genesis 3:24). Angelica was so highly regarded it was called the "root of the Holy Ghost." My personal interpretation of this reference is that Angelica can serve as a spiritual guide in one's life. This indicates that people other than shamans have known for centuries that plants, at least this one, have a spiritual aspect that can be understood and worked with.

Angelica is equally majestic in its ability to heal the physical body. Maude Grieve, who wrote *A Modern Herbal*, says that since ancient times there was "a belief in its merits as a protection against contagion, for purifying the blood, and for curing every conceivable malady." It is warming and stimulating, improving digestion, circulation, and stagnation in the uterus. Its tonic effects relieve nervous exhaustion as well as bring rejuvenation to the whole system. Being highly medicinal is not the only virtue of Angelica, as its most well-known use is as a confection, decorating cakes, while its seeds are used to make the liqueur Chartreuse and to flavor gin.

As my relationship with Angelica builds into a co-creative partnership, her healing gifts are revealed little by little. She seems to help me connect with and receive guidance from my higher self, the aspect that is a piece of the divine, or in other words, my wise woman within. I have found that Angelica has the lovely ability to bring spirit into form through involution—the manifesting current—by moving through the seventh chakra. For those people who always have their head in the clouds, Angelica can help them move into their body and vice versa; Angelica can help those who are stuck to the earth access loftier realms.

Another aspect of Angelica revealed itself to Lisa, one of my students. Lisa is color-blind and has particular difficulty seeing the color purple. However, after her encounter with Angelica she could see purple. This shocking occurrence has far-reaching implications. Could it be that Angelica can help one (or maybe just Lisa) see what

couldn't be seen before or see the "true colors" of a person or situation? ([See color plate 15.](#))

AGRIMONY—*AGRIMONIA EUPATORIA* AND *GRYPOSEPALA*

I bend over the tall yellow spires picking the sharply serrated browned leaves from the stalk, humming as I work. Squatting down I pull weeds, allowing the quiet activity to serve as a meditation. From this deeply serene place I slip into the daydream of Agrimony. There's a little elf-like man sitting at a table writing out prescriptions. Many people are coming to him and he is handing them out left and right. Then he notices me and asks what it is I need help with. I say that I'm here to meet him and get acquainted. He says he has no time for chit-chat because there are too many people who are sick and need his help. I say I will be happy to help him in his work if he will teach me. He agrees and I begin my apprenticeship with Agrimony.

Up until now, we have explored the heart, soul, and spirit of plants and how they affect us physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. As plants become your allies you will find that they can also help you with very mundane things like making decisions, manifesting what you want, and helping in conflict situations. Agrimony is one such plant particularly in regard to altering the circumstances or outcome of a potential conflict. Herbalist Matthew Wood says of Agrimony, "It will change the environment around the person using it."

Carol relates this experience with Agrimony: "My divorce was turning into a rather nasty affair. I had worked so hard all my life to get where I was and now, in an instant, all of it could be taken away. I told my lawyer what I expected in the divorce and she told me it would never happen even though I deserved it. It was then I started to carry Agrimony with me. Every time I went to the lawyer I had some in my pocket. Then one day we had all the papers and documents laid out on the table, and I told my lawyer that before we started to work with them and before I signed anything I needed to sprinkle Agrimony over them. Of course, my lawyer looked at me like I was a madwoman. Now she wants to know all about Agrimony,

because I got everything I asked for in my divorce even though she said it was impossible.”

In another instance, Chris was building a new house and the Town Supervisor had to approve her driveway, which was considered a private road, and its name. She says, “I have heard stories of the Town Supervisor from my neighbors, that he was so hard to deal with and he wouldn’t let them name their driveways what they wanted. Finally he came out and I couldn’t believe it. He was like out of a Dickens novel. He was short, had a gloomy countenance, and was very angry, obviously wielding what power he had to the max. He said my driveway was too steep and no 911 vehicles could get up it and that I couldn’t name it what I had hoped for. I knew then that I would need the help of Agrimony. The next time he came I put a piece of Agrimony in my mouth and chewed on it, asking the spirit of Agrimony to come and soften him. My friend Karen was with me that time and she said a shiver went through her when she met him. I didn’t give up, even though it appeared the odds were against me and he wasn’t going to back down. I continued to call upon the spirit of Agrimony to help this seemingly hopeless situation. He came again and, again, I put Agrimony in my mouth calling on her spirit to please help me. This time we walked up the driveway together (the same one he had walked several times before), and he said the driveway was just fine and please call it whatever I like. We chatted and laughed our way up the drive. I can only attribute this reversal in behavior to Agrimony.”

Just like the little man in my daydream indicated, Agrimony is used to heal many conditions including inflammatory eye problems and liver conditions such as cirrhosis, gallstones, gout, arthritis, ulcers, colitis, and diarrhea. It serves as a digestive tonic as well as an astringent, which stems all manner of excessive bleeding and aids in the healing of wounds. It makes an excellent gargle for sore throat and inflamed gums. One of the reasons Agrimony is such a wonderful healing herb is its unique ability to relieve tension in all of its many guises whether it be in the gut, reproductive organs, during respiration, in a constricted liver or kidney, or the nervous system. A person who is uptight but hides behind a cheerful façade could benefit from Agrimony.

ROSE—ROSA SPP.

The rose garden is in full bloom with white, red, pink, and yellow ones all contributing to the delightful aroma permeating the air. I stroll along lightly touching the petals, letting my fingers caress the velvety folds while my heart's rough edges soften in the embrace of Venus's flower. It is here in this tender and unguarded place the poet in me stirs. Like so many before me, as I surrender to the undeniable spell that Rose engenders, inspiration rises up, kissing my heart and unleashing a pure love—the unconditional kind—so rare among humans and yet with a rose, so easy.

Since time immemorial Rose has been the flower symbolizing love, beauty, and joy. Cultivated roses are thought to have originated in Persia where nightingales would sing when they first bloomed. However, in Greece, legend tells that the rose sprang from the combined effort of the Three Graces, Aphrodite, and Dionysus who bestowed joy, beauty, and perfumed scent to make it the “Queen of Flowers,” as the Greek poetess Sappho writes. The Romans used roses profusely at every occasion, strewing the petals on banquet floors, floating petals in their baths and wine, and wearing the blooms as garlands at feasts and as crowns for newlyweds. Shakespeare says, “Of all the flowers methinks the Rose is best.” So the poets and artists continue through the ages to praise the virtues of roses. Roses have also been used to symbolize that which was held to be sacred. The Rosicrucians or Brotherhood of the Rose Cross was originally a secret society that held their alchemical and spiritual truths in a sacred trust among themselves. Likewise, the Jacobites of the Scottish rebellion against the British had a white rose as their emblem, symbolizing the sacred oath they had taken with each other. In more recent times, a bouquet of roses is given as an expression of love and is received with a fullness of heart.

Rose petals and leaves are known to heal any number of ailments, especially those of excess heat as they have a very cooling, calming, and soothing nature. Roses can reduce fevers, inflammations, and eye irritations. Culpepper says, “syrup of roses cooleth an overheated liver and the blood agues . . . rose water is cooling, cordial and refreshing . . . ointment of rose is used against heat and inflammation of the head . . . oil of roses is used to cool hot inflammation or swellings and is also put into ointments and plasters

that are cooling and binding . . . applied as a fomentation to the region of the liver and heart, [it will] greatly cool and temper them, quiet the over-heated spirits and cause rest and sleep.” In addition, roses can deter infection in the digestive tract and lungs as well as the cold and flu virus with aggravating symptoms of runny nose, sore throat, and lung congestion. Rose’s decongesting quality carries into the reproductive system, relieving painful, heavy menstruation, irregularity, and infertility. Rose is also used for impotence in both men and women, not only on the physical level, but aiding in the emotional component of sexual insecurity. Its calming nature soothes the nervous system, relieves insomnia, calms the heart, and generally lifts the spirits, relieving depression and anxiety. Rose’s astringent qualities help dry up excessive bleeding, phlegm, and diarrhea. Rose also has a positive effect on the urinary system by relieving fluid retention and eliminating stones in the kidney and bladder. The hips from the wild or dog rose contain the highest amount of vitamin C found in any plant, making it useful as a preventive for any type of infection. As a beauty aid, rose tones and cleanses the skin while smoothing wrinkles and clearing blemishes and acne.

In Plant Spirit Healing Rose heals the heart when it has been battered, repeatedly hurt, and there is an enormous amount of grief that one has a hard time moving through. The heart chakra appears torn and tattered along the edges when at this level of compromise. Rachael told me the story of her experience with Rose. “During my unsure times with my husband my heart hurt so much. It wasn’t just an emotional hurt but a physical hurt, too. Then I had a dream and I was in a light airy room with a big beautiful bed and the whole room was filled with roses. The roses really spoke to me so I started to use the essential oil, rubbing it on my heart. Then I got a treatment from you. You worked with the spirit of Rose even though I hadn’t told you about my dream or that I had started to use it. Before the treatment I could hardly deal with anything; my marriage was falling apart and my heart was unable to bear it. I had been hurt so many times my heart literally felt beat up. After the treatment I drove home singing the whole way. I felt so good, could feel the change in the energy, and began to see love in a bigger picture instead of just from my

narrow perspective. I used Rose a lot during those times and I feel it was a major help to me during my divorce. Now Rose is one of my favorite allies not only for myself but for my clients as well. If everyone could have Rose in their hearts we'd all be in paradise.” ([See color plate 16.](#))

The great poet, Mary Oliver, shares the joy she experiences in the presence of roses through this poem:

All afternoon I have been walking over the dunes,
hurrying from one thick raft of the wrinkled,
salt roses to another, leaning down close to their
dark or pale petals, red as blood or white as
snow. And now I am beginning to breathe slowly
and evenly—the way a hunted animal breathes,
finally, when it has galloped, and galloped—when
it is wrung dry, but, at last, is far away, so the
panic begins to drain from the chest, from the
wonderful legs, and the exhausted mind.

Oh sweetness pure and simple, may I join you?

I lie down next to them, on the sand. But to tell
about what happens next, truly I need help.

Will somebody or something please start singing?



EPILOGUE

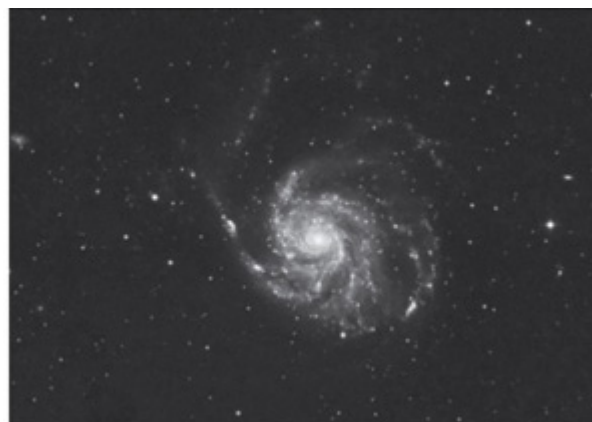
The full-moon lunar eclipse fueled my vision as I sat by the fire where all the plant spirits came and began dancing around while the people stood in an outer circle. The rhythm of their songs quickened as their dancing reached a feverish pace. Then the plant spirits turned to the people and invited them to join in the singing and dancing, taking them by the hand and pulling them into the inner circle. With the plant spirits guiding them, the people soon became ecstatic in their own song and dance. When the dancing finally stopped they sat around the fire and the plant spirits began to tell them stories of the ways of a new time. In this new time the people's hearts were open, their intuition was honored, they recognized the divine in all living things, they lived in a sustainable way without greed, they no longer oppressed others, and there was no war. The people heard these stories and they were pleased. One small boy looked to the elder plant spirit and said, "But how do we do this?" Then all the plant spirits began to teach the people how to live co-creatively so that a new paradigm could emerge. The people took the teachings of the plant spirits and they went home and began to practice them. As they began to heal they told their children new stories, replacing the old worn-out ones. They began to recognize the sacredness of the earth and the earth began to heal. The people then entered the time that had been prophesied and peace prevailed on earth.

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This vision sustains me; without it, I may succumb to the deep despair of present-day living where people suffer from the ravages of war, the social injustices of oppression, the tyranny of economic slavery, when the earth is repeatedly exploited for profit, pushing it to the brink of destruction. I am fortunate because I have plant allies to help support me and give me hope. Even though these may be very challenging times, they are also very exciting times because we are

on the verge of a massive evolutionary leap. Perhaps you have noticed that there has been, in the past few years, an enormous surge of interest in plants and their sacred, spiritual, or divine nature including the discovery of their spirits through psychotropic plants like ayahuasca. This tells me that, one more time, plants are paving the way for our evolution, exactly as they have always done in the past. This time our evolution is a spiritual one where consciousness is raised to a level that acknowledges the divine in all of life. Plants are setting the precedent with their own conscious development, guiding us in our evolving spiritual awakening. As we wake up more and more, we realize our place in the interconnected web of life, and the laws of nature that govern this web become our beacons. We realize our essential nature is intrinsic to the greater nature. We understand that when we damage the earth and its atmosphere, we do direct harm to ourselves. Co-creative partnering with plants becomes an evolutionary imperative both for us and the Earth.

When true healing takes place consciousness is raised to a point where a shift occurs and dis-ease no longer serves us. We all have the capacity to make this shift and choose health, choose peace, choose freedom, saying “yes” to life. Plants are not the only, but are definitely the most accessible, route to a higher level of consciousness where the spirit in all life is recognized. It is from this place that we can see the problems we have created on our planet and can begin to remedy them. As Einstein said, “You cannot solve a problem at the level which originated it.”



The Pinwheel Galaxy

The perception of evolution as linear no longer holds true in the dawn of a spiritual awakening where evidence of the spiral in nature informs our pattern of growth. We are revisiting our birthright of cocreative partnership with plants and the earth, only now at a different place on the spiral. Just as we spiral through heart, soul, and spirit during the plant spirit healing journey, we spiral through this evolutionary shift, remembering our connection to all of life.

This story is like a seed. Plant this story in your hearts, nourish this story in the hearts of your children, and maybe it will grow into a beautiful flowering tree: a tree of life.

FOOTNOTES

- [*1](#) Vaclav Havel, *The Art of the Impossible* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 166–67.
- [*2](#) Robert Bly, ed., *The Darkness Around Us Is Deep: Selected Poems of William Stafford* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 136.
- [*3](#) From “The Disobedience of the Daughter of the Sun” by Martín Prechtel.
- [*4](#) Martín Prechtel



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[Pam Montgomery](#) has been investigating plants and their intelligent spiritual nature since 1986. She is a founding member of the Northeast Herbal Association and is on the Advisory Board of United Plant Savers, a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting native medicinal plants. She is the author of *Partner Earth: A Spiritual Ecology* and a contributing author in *Planting the Future: Saving Our Medicinal Herbs*.



Pam is a practicing herbalist and plant spirit healer who teaches herbal medicine, Plant Spirit Healing, and spiritual ecology internationally and from her Partner Earth Education Center at Sweetwater Sanctuary in Danby, Vermont. The center is surrounded by thousands of acres of protected woodlands and meadows and offers workshops and apprenticeship programs in Plant Spirit Healing. Pam also sees clients for consultations and treatments at her home at Sweetwater Sanctuary and is available for phone consultations.

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