Look up to the Universe!
Into the highest heights
the sun is rising.

Glowing summer warmth,
blessing the lands,
streams down upon us.

Awaken to the life of the earth!
Feel how in the nightly depths
the longing for the heights is living.

Beings strive to meet with other beings
high in the air, up in the light,
want to wander with the planets
in the halls of golden stars.

Feel yourself a part of the weaving:
Feel the breath of earth,
feel the blessings of the light!

We spirits of elements, we are weaving the summer,
as they have ordained it, they, the ones we pursue,
the creator spirits of the heights, the great and wise ones,
those full of kindness, who lead us and guide us
with their protection.

Excerpted from Uriel: St. John's Hymn for Speech Chorus and Eurythmy
by Wilfried Hammacher, translated from the German by Truus Geraets
published by Verlag am Goetheanum.
CAELUNDULA, WHO ART THOU?
Discovering the Secrets of Nature Through Artistic Plant Studies

Twice a year, a plant studies course takes place at Camphill Communities California, a community near Santa Cruz, California that includes adults with developmental disabilities. The workshops were first introduced to the community in 2000 by Michael Evans, M.D., an anthroposophical medical doctor and his wife Marah, a Haushcka Art therapist in charge of training at the Hibernia School of Artistic Therapy in England. The process involves intense observation of a specific plant species, artwork, and reflection of one's own thoughts and feelings in association with the plant. To do it in a group, where people's gifts come together in all their wide-ranging diversity, is an enriching experience; a full picture of the plant emerges. Self-knowledge is gained by the participants as each one places their observation or drawing alongside each other's. One person concentrates on the overall form in light quick sketchy strokes while another might dwell on concrete details in all exactness.

Over a number of sessions a conversation becomes discernible in which the plant itself is the one speaking and we become intensely active in listening and occasionally, we may be able to ask a humble question. The experience becomes deeper when our thoughts, feelings and images are taken into sleep and brought back to consciousness when we meet the next day. This process has been used to heighten our experience of a festival at Easter or Michaelmas, or to lift our spirits during a low time of the year, say, February.

What follows is a description of one such process undertaken in Spring. As the Course Leader I decided which plant species we would study by walking out into the surrounding area and seeing what was thriving and bountiful. This time I chose calendula. —Elizabeth Howe

Step One
We all assembled indoors in high anticipation, and I asked everyone to be quiet and still. We were going to meet our plant and first impressions were important. In silence we moved outside to encounter the big healthy specimen I had chosen. As we stood around it, I asked for impressions. This is what came: Warm, raggedy, dense, friendly, colorful, rising sun, bright, cheerful.

Step Two
We gently dug up one or two plants of calendula at various stages, kept them moist, and took them inside. The next step was a very dry, physical, almost clinical description documenting number, shape, size: five ridges around the stem, milk inside the stem, dense, heavy, hollow stem, four-five leaf repeat (five leaves spiralling round the stem before a leaf is directly above the first leaf), spinning-top-shaped flower bud, leaves and flower bud form a ragged five-pointed star, looking from above, sticky.

Step Three
This was a black and white drawing with charcoal. In our group there was a great range of skill and confidence in drawing. The endeavor was to achieve a physical
likeness, going into detail but no color at this time. Some young co-workers who were rightly proud of their artistic gift did not work alone because someone less confident had asked for their help. Together they produced one drawing, sometimes two, as they worked side by side. It was not the art product that was important here but the process and experience of connecting with the plant. At the end we stood back and observed the drawings together and spoke of how it had felt for each one or what they saw in the drawings.

Step Four
Returning the next day we each did a free-rendering of our plant from memory. Ideally the picture would be done (with charcoal) with the eyes closed. Not everyone was willing to do this, but those who did experienced that something different was at work.

Step Five
This was a color pastel drawing of a detail. The group now broke up and instead of sitting around the table with our sketchpads, each pair decided where to work and what to look at. One pair took the root system, another a small young plant, another the bud, or leafy stems, another the seed head. It was great that all these different stages were available at one time. (It derives its name from the Latin because it is in bloom on the calendula of every month). For me, conducting the workshop, I found it heartwarming to watch how much devotion and joy accompanied this stage. Holding back from going into color too quickly enhanced the experience of now being allowed to dive into the richness of detailed and manifold sense impressions. Afterwards, as before, we looked at the drawings, side by side and shared our impressions of this part of the process.

Step Six
A week elapsed and we had to recreate our experiences to date before continuing. Always there are different thoughts that emerge, after a few days "sleeping" on the events, that are not consciously available at the time. Now our next exercise was "Exact Sensorial Observations," including as many different senses as possible: touch and texture, smell, taste (only for those who can be responsible for their own judgement of safety) and yes, why not hearing? This is what people observed: sticky, aromatic, sweetish, pungent, bitter root, leaf tastes like dirt, bitter aftertaste, flower bud has intense perfume, leaf fuzzy, leaves flexible, flabby, soft stem makes a crunchy noise like rhubarb.

When everyone had spoken and we had all shared in and explored the individual contributions we went on to the next step.

Step Seven
This was an attempt at observing ourselves in relation to the plant. Each person was asked to capture the feeling that the plant aroused in them as they beheld it.

This is quite a challenge, especially if you have been trained that only objective things count and personal feelings are better left out of any serious undertaking. I have a particular friendship with Carrie; she has short term memory loss, but makes up for it in the most abundant vocabulary and expressions for feelings. With her love of art and nature her presence is a real asset to these studies. I am aware that she has an intuitive understanding of the plant world, albeit unconscious and untrained. Remarkable though it may seem there is often one person in the group, sometimes a newcomer, who comes up with a startling unique expression at this stage that proves to be spot on, down to the exact wording. We all have intuitions that have never been noticed. Now is the time to start accessing them. It is scary, but with the support of the group where every contribution is part of building up the whole picture, each one finds validation as together we fumble to express semi-conscious experiences.

This is what was said: hope, warm heart, sensitive, plant asks to reflect whole, penetrating glowing coal, lion, mother, full fleshy, satisfying, erotic, leaves tongue-like, strong overgrowth, abundance, open, full, watery.

Step Eight
We returned to our drawing boards. This time we were indoors together again, and the plants were left outside to grow peacefully. Each person was asked to try and express the essential being and gesture of the plant as they felt it. Where people were working in pairs they decided for themselves whether to do two separate pictures or a combined one. When we came to put them together no two were alike and yet placing them side by side a quality emerged which we all experienced. There was an over-arching principle that linked them all into a totality, which was beyond words.

Step Nine
This involved taking the various herbals and healing plant manuals off the shelf and sharing from them the entries on our calendula plant. After our long struggle and involvement with calendula this easy-access info seemed trite, simplistic, a cheating way to know something. Yet it was a great revelation that we, in our humble collective endeavor, could come...
the enchanted earth

so close to the accredited properties: Mrs. Grieve in her Modern Herbal quotes from Fuller, "The dried flowers are still used among the peasantry to strengthen and comfort the heart." (1699)

"It hath pleasant, bright and shining yellow flowers the which do close with the setting downe of the sunne and do spread and open again at sunrising." (A Niewe Herball 1578)

Culpepper says it is an "herb of the Sun and under Leo. They strengthen the heart exceedingly and are very expulsive ... A plaster made from dried flowers ... applied to the breast strengthens the heart infinitely in fevers.”

“The flowers are in demand for children’s ailments.”

"An infusion of the flowers promotes perspiration and throws out any eruption.”

“To look on it will draw evil humours out of the head and strengthen the eyesight.”

Maybe it does not emerge through this report, or maybe we deluded ourselves, but this was (and is repeatedly so) a very empowering experience, individually, for everyone involved. We sat back in our seats, looked at each other, and felt “Wow, we did that.” This sort of experience is available to anyone willing to look closely at any plant in their back yard. It was this type of experience that Goethe spoke about in his writings on Plant Metamorphosis, calling it “The Open Secret.”

I conclude by saying that working in groups allows qualities other than the intellect and memory to shine through. The wider the spectrum of gifts among the participants the greater the potential for the whole picture to be experienced collectively that goes beyond what the individual can find on his or her own. It is very liberating, while also strengthening the bonds between people and building a stronger sense of community.

The Living Earth
LILPOH's Recommended Reading


Seven lectures by Steiner are brought together in this new collection. Four center on developing a spiritual perception of nature, and three are from his Agriculture Course. A 43-page introduction by biodynamic visionary Hugh Courtney, the director of the Josephine Porter Institute for Applied Biodynamics, the center for the making of biodynamic preparations in North America, introduces us to the nine biodynamic preparations and the cosmology out of which they come. More than just substances for healing the earth, these unique soil and plant foods create a vibratory environment for humans to have a new experience of Christ consciousness that is available to us.

**Turned Upside Down: A Workbook on Earth Changes and Personal Transformation,**
by Marko Pogacnik (Lindisfarne Books, 2004)

As an lithopuncturist, a person who heals the earth through a kind of planetary acupuncture, Marko Pogacnik has a special way of communicating with spiritual beings who inhabit the earth. Different elemental beings communicate with him through his dreams. From them he has learned that our planet is changing, not only physically, but energetically. Pogacnik perceives that human beings are changing too, and that to a certain extent, we are already existing on a new spiritual plane if we are awake to it. He outlines several exercises that strengthen our heart region, the new center of our thoughts, and align our ethereal body (life force) with this new earth vibration. Spiritual beings are also evolving and Pogacnik shares his insights into how they are changing as a result of the evolution of the earth and earth changes.

**Stars of the Meadow, Medicinal Herbs as Flower Essences,** by David Dalton (Lindisfarne Books, 2006)

A new book by David Dalton represents almost 20 years of research into the liquid energetic remedies derived from living flowers commonly known as flower essences. He introduces an original repertory of 40 medicinal herbs as flower essences. He speaks of "the power and potential of these simple remedies - a power and potential to heal a sick and wounded world." The chakra system, the shapes and colors of the flowers and the observations of the effects of the essences are the context in which the flower essences can be understood, particularly to help balance the human emotions.
Copyright of LILIPOH is the property of LILIPOH and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.