



TINDERBOX

SPIRITUAL BEINGS BEING HUMAN

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*All plants are our brothers and sisters.
They talk to us and if we listen, we can hear them.*

- Arapaho proverb



The silent language of plants

Every blade of grass has its angel that bends over it and whispers: 'grow, grow'.

The Talmud

AN INTRINSIC connection has always existed between plants and humans that is encoded in our DNA, yet occluded in modern life.

The natural world is an endless net of particular lessons, each made of the same compelling thread that is always hiding in the open, simply waiting for our complete attention to reveal itself.

The wisdom behind ancient herbal folklore was acquired by this act of sensing, not thinking: experiential use of the whole panoply of sensory perceptions to acquire intimate plant knowledge.

This meant picking parts of plants, nibbling on grasses, sniffing at flowers, chewing roots, rubbing leaves, rubbing their textures between fingers, tasting the bitterness or sweet; random and purposeful tossing of plants onto the fire to imbibe their fumes; steeping plants in water to explore different effects and

SPECIAL FEATURE DEMYSTIFYING NATURE

adding others to food to enhance flavour.

The sacred meanings given to plants have been handed down from generation to generation, through religions and nations and one plant may have acquired many names or a single name may have been adopted for many plants.

In the middle ages they even considered a far grander picture of the plant as part of the cosmic map of consciousness, taking into account astrology by correlating a plant's signatures with the archetypal qualities of planets.

The theory of astrological botany was founded in the belief that the stars influenced the ways of humans and plants. Paracelsus held that each star was a spiritualised plant and each plant a spiritualised star.

Picking medicinal herbs must be done when the moon is in the sign of the virgin and not when Jupiter is in the ascendant, for then the herb loses its virtue.

Anthony Askham, 16th Century

Native American culture saw the intrinsic connection of plants with the animal world and assigned each plant the archetypal healing powers of certain animals.

Many of the folkloric names of plants carry encoded in them, thousands of years of wisdom with this unbroken stream of oral transmission.

The very names of lungwort, bone set, horny goat's weed, heartsease, gravel-root, and eyebright all tell us much of the plants healing abilities.

I was just sittin' here enjoyin' the company. Plants got a lot to say, if you take the time to listen.

Eeyore, Winnie the Pooh

Doctrine a great leap forward

By the late middle ages, all of these ancient folkloric principles of human direct experience with plants were organised into a major record of plant therapeutic properties called the *Doctrine of Signatures*.

The Doctrine was based on the ancient idea that a plant resembles the disease, organ or person for which it is remedial; this is the "law of correspondence."

Signatures in plants represent patterns of energy or archetypes and these correspond to similar patterns in people.

The value of many medicinal plants administered in Europe was determined

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The Visionary Hildegard

IN THE middle ages lived a singular woman called Hildegard Von Bingen. She was a wonderful example of a visionary human being, having direct experience of Nature and the Divine.

Hildegard was born around 1098 and, despite the limitations of being a woman in dark, violent times, she became revered and influential for her mystical visions whereby she gained intimate knowledge of Nature.

Dangerous times for the anomaly of a Christian Mystic who has Shamanic experiences; yet she succeeds as a seer and a healer, who literally 'downloaded' two volumes of astonishingly accurate material on plants, natural medicine and healing that is still relevant to this day.

She amassed an amazing amount of innovative philo-

sophical and theological writings, including plays, poetry and music, that are still recorded today.

Here was a spiritually disciplined woman who entered into Mystical Nature from which she perceived vast amounts of information that would not have been available until many centuries later.

We can only imagine the magnificence of the uncorrupted wilderness around her at this time in history and be inspired by how she so faithfully surrendered to its Divinity to receive its Gifts.

Her life story reveals how the Divine light of God shines through her great creative impulses: "There is wisdom in all creative works," she says, validating creativity as the most powerful and enduring expression of Spirituality.



Everything that is in the heavens, on the earth and under the earth, is penetrated with connectedness, penetrated with relatedness. God has arranged everything in the Universe in consideration of everything else.
Hildegard Von Bingen

Discovering unity with plants

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by this categorisation, which taught that the healing herbs were sign-posted by God in some way for human's guidance.

In the West, the concept behind the doctrine was first mentioned in the writings of Pliny the Elder, the brilliant Roman naturalist.

The concept was later developed by Paracelsus (1490-1541), the Swiss alchemist who built on the widespread folk wisdom.

This approach, though confronting to logical science, proved to be surprisingly apt; science itself later validated that the actives present in these plants were medically appropriate for different ailments.

This was herbal wisdom based on the direct experience of Nature, which at the time did not need science for proof of its value.

Every herb has been brought into shape (by God) that is akin to its inner nature.

Paracelsus

Reading the Signs

Signatures provide the backbone of an intuitive approach to knowledge, a philosophy that goes back to Plato and was later advocated by Aristotle, who taught that thinking ('formal logic') came from the eidos which translates as essence, primal form, archetype.

The signatures of plants were characteristics that were detected by one of the senses in concert with the mind, giving it meaning.

Some amusing examples are:

- Scophularia roots look like swollen glands; hence it was used for swollen glands and haemorrhoids.

- The orange sap of Chelidonium not only resembles bile but also indicates that it will encourage its flow.

- Agrimonia bristles with tension and was an important medicine for nervous tension.

- Lungwort was fleshy and looked similar to the lungs and was highly suitable for pulmonary diseases.

- The peony bud resembles a cranium and has been used since Galen's time for the brain and epilepsy.

- Alkanet's viper-shaped seeds help treat venomous bites.

In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, first published in 1667, the Archangel Michael uses the eyebright flower to cure Adam's eye infection.

The Cherokee's worm-like purslane was indeed effective in controlling intestinal parasites with gastro-protective activity.

The soul does not perceive the external or internal physical construction of herbs and roots, but it intuitively perceives at once their Signatum . . . Thou shalt know all the internal, by looking at the outside.

Paracelsus

Skilful and Unbiased Observation of Nature

The concept behind the Doctrine of Signatures teaches us to look for a sign in a plant that describes its medicinal properties in a very unscientific way.

This process by no means diminishes its value, but helps us to see plants more deeply in their entirety to hear their message.

We learn how two different objects or life forms resonate with each other if they share the same intrinsic character or essence.

Paracelsus claimed that the plant would 'look like what it cures', whereas Samuel Hahnemann developed the science of homeopathy where 'like cures like'; he also interpreted the law of similar to mean, 'it causes what it cures'.

Plants help us discover unity as a dynamic quality revealing itself in the diversity of phenomena.

We learn to see connections that at first may appear to be separate from each other.

What the eyes perceive in herbs, stones or trees is not yet a remedy, the eyes only see dross.

Paracelsus

Rudolf Steiner developed an entire system of holistic medicine based on the laws of correspondence and the Doctrine of Signatures.

Steiner adopted Goethe's approach of analysing the plant or organism through its stages of development, this included its affinities to the old gods or planetary emblems, which were used, age after age, not only to express belief in the gods necessarily but as symbols or archetypes of different powers.

The expert must know how to recognise the virtue of all things by the signs; be it a herb, a tree, a living being or an inanimate object.

Paracelsus

Inseparable from Nature

INDIGENOUS peoples said that they were taught healing by the plants themselves.

Among the Iroquois Indians, it was taught that if a person becomes ill and needs a plant for healing, the right plant would stand up and call the attention of the person to find it.

The idea that the human body is a representation of the world around it - a microcosm of the macrocosm - is of an ancient tradition that is as old as humankind itself.

The art of knowing how to use a plant for healing by perceiving its outer appearance in its relationship to the environment was developed by primitive cultures from all parts of the world.

Immersed in living nature under open skies, observing a plant's unique adaptation and learning how it survived different conditions, the earliest herbalists could decipher the hidden language of plant life.

Every tradition added another cultural layer to this ancient art, so that a rich body of knowledge based on a deep communion with nature developed.

Some of the greatest healers and philosophers, to name a few such as Galen, Aristotle, Avicenna, Paracelsus, William Coles, Goethe and more recently Rupert Sheldrake, Rudolf Steiner (the father of the spiritual science - anthroposophy) and Samuel Hahnemann (the father of homeopathy) all offered extra weight and significance to an immense universal body of plant wisdom.