



**Plants and Healers**  
INTERNATIONAL

[www.plantsandhealers.org](http://www.plantsandhealers.org)

## Chrysalis One Essay

Edited and Published by Plants and Healers International 2014

Written by Frank Cook  
October 9, 2007

### INTUITIVE

Building inner images to the point they come alive in my imagination is essential to my work and links me to the unfolding Collective (un)Conscious (Akashic Records). Within me mysteries and realizations dance about that have not been received through the tangible senses. Through practicing Goethean Techniques I am opening to the living expressions of a

### Leaf

At one level it is wholeness unto itself,  
at another it is part of a

greater whole

There are the crude (and at the same moment wonder-filled) aspects of the leaf blowing in the breeze, each unique, yet, staying within the parameters of all the leaves that make up the character of the plant. Leaves are

Transformers  
of light  
into sugars.

Before me

I  
T S  
C O  
M P  
O U  
N D  
L E  
A F

...is made up of leaflets, each coming off a central stem

climbing  
ladder  
a

Botanists have made a whole new language to describe the leaf—its  
shape

its texture  
its means of attachment.

These terms are the bane of most students having to memorize them.  
They are also beautiful eulogies,

poetic attempts  
to tell us who we are meeting.

My  
leaf is  
Pinnately  
compound  
w/ eleven  
glabrous,  
lanceolate,  
serrated  
leaf-  
let  
s.

Organ-izing seems a lot like Goethe's view that we need to build  
an organ of perception.

A leaf is a finger.

We are young trees.

Anthropomorphism or Anthropodenial?

They (we) are intimately connected through a  
**fat, bud-studded**

# Stem

to the whole plant. Leaves grew from the stems.

There is a bone-like quality to this branch I have found on the ground. I thought I would need to look up to see a branch and now I see I only need to look down. That seems to be at the core of what I am being taught here. We can make plans but they must be adaptable to the process that unfolds as the journey is undertaken. I am being taught the dance of thinking/experiencing. Thinking is balanced by other modes of perception. For instance, acknowledging the scientific validity of feeling the bone-like qualities of this branch.

I take time to observe (simply that). I see knobby leaf scars opposite each other at the leaf node. The branch terminates with a meristematic bud filled with potential to express itself as petiole, leaflet, branch, pedicel, or flower depending on the needs of the moment. I notice there are different lengths of stem between nodes. "Why?" I wonder. Each length tells a story about the year it lived. I know the age of this fallen branch if I know it only puts out one set of leaves a year. Does it? I leave the answer to another day. Perhaps this, too, will be revealed to me with enough reflection.

The stems channel together into bigger branched energetic streams to be

# Tree

The first plants of my inner garden were trees. They are so clearly our elders. With this tree I sit in a good spot for observation and reflection. My brain downloads what it knows about this genus from previous experiences, stories and book knowledge. The knowledge that was so intensely pursued categorizing the world is now available almost instantaneously via computer. Now what? What does that accumulation of observation and categorization mean to us? What were the visions of those who came before us? Perhaps the tree can tell me if I slowdown enough to listen. And along with these thoughts I notice beautiful reflections of the late day sunlight filtering through.

These words, formed with care and love for the tree being, do not fully capture its wholeness, nor its place in the larger whole of Gaia. For this we need symbol and allusion, prompting the mind to release its grip on stable thought and to jump off the cliff into

# Poetry...

☞☞☞ ◆□ Ode to Ash Trees ☞☞☞ ◆□

Waving in wind  
or still beneath sky  
Firmly rooted in myco-earth  
Yes, firm yet, feminine  
Keeping my faith  
in dappled lichen dress,  
sensuous reaching limbs

The forest loves you so much  
Animals come and  
play with you.

Matronly pigeon landing, not gracefully,  
on you.  
Fly boldly through your  
outer compounds.

Scurrying squirrels  
Running between you  
and masculine oak neighbors

Who are you, Fraxinus,  
cousin to the olive tree?  
Who are you through/to us?

Your oneness clearly unfolding  
We come for insights  
sitting below  
Wondering/Knowing  
Content with these words.

Above all, feeling

Awe



# REFLECTIVE

Stephan Harding formed our chrysalis by defining holistic science with Jung's four ways humans relate to the world: Thinking/Feeling and Sensing/Intuiting. He defined these and compared practitioners of western science with those of holistic science in terms of those four ways. He encouraged us to pursue a balance to these areas and that the zone within the whole of them was "real grace" and a "revelation".

Brian Goodwin introduced a number of concepts to us. He described Chaos Theory as a form of magic, wonderfully illustrated in the example of weather patterns. He encouraged us to maintain a respect for western science and to learn its lexicon. Their tools give us a limited meaning and are part of a greater whole. There is a dance of the ethos and logos going on best represented in storytelling. We reviewed the hermeneutic approach to understanding. Brian shared how Hermes is the god of interpretation. Through hermeneutics we can learn the languages of Nature.

Our second chrysalis will focus on the wisdom and knowledge of the Living Earth through the stories of Brian and Stephan.

Henri Bortoft, historian, physicist and philosopher was our teacher the rest of the week. His main focus was to massage our brains and present another perspective on some of the foundation figures in western science. The first area of focus was on part/whole relations. We have been lulled into relying on our physical senses to identify "reality" for us. This form of habitual thinking is actually downstream of the dynamic living beingness of life. He illustrated this well with a story of sitting along a river and seeing the water flow by. With his inner eye he could imagine the source of the river flowing out and along its course eventually getting to him and then flowing on. Applying this to living organisms we see there is a dynamic state of unfolding that precedes our awareness of it.

People have been taught to believe that the whole comes from assembling the parts. This normal way (the *counterfeit whole*) of thinking cheats us from truly feeling the presence of an *authentic whole*. The authentic whole has a *presence*. I am reminded of a passage out of Robert Pirsig's classic "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" in which he describes the dismantling of a motorcycle into its separate parts and then reassembling it again. He explores how a running motorcycle is more than the sum of its parts; there is a synergy from these combined parts that allows the motorcycle to run and maneuver about. This is even more apparent in living beings.

Henri described how Goethe provided a way through *gentle empiricism* to participate in the wisdom of Nature. This is achieved by developing a receptive mode of observation that is "non-verbal, holistic, non-linear, and intuitive." (pg 291) Henri writes that this approach "emphasizes the sensory and perceptual instead of the rational...it is based on taking in rather than manipulating, the environment." (pg 291) Within life the part carries with it the whole. The more parts present, the more the presence of the whole can be felt

Through Henri's telling of history, I developed a deeper understanding as to why Goethe was so discouraged to read Newton's description of color. Newton's approach was to convert the unique qualities of each color into uniform mathematical "equivalents" and then to leave color behind and go on to manipulate these quantities into his theory. As Henri writes, "something that can be measured

replaced the phenomenon of color, and in this way color as color was eliminated from the scientific account of the world.” (pg 293 )

The introduction of logic to scientific inquiry in the 1700's created a distinction between qualities that can be quantified and those that cannot. This led to the exclusion of these latter qualities and a deadening of dynamic being into lifeless objects described by abstract concepts.

Henri helped us to see that the scientific history we have been told is very skewed and limited. He recommended whenever possible returning to the primary texts of the scientists and trying to get a sense of the work in its historical context. He credited Goethe as being the first historian of western science.

Henri noted that understanding cannot be reduced to logic. Meaning cannot be grasped like an object. Marshall McLuhan also came to these realizations in his studies of communication introducing phrases such as “I seem to be a Verb” and “The meaning is the message.” After further inquiry, he came to see “The meaning is the message.”

When something comes into manifestation its form is just one out of many possibilities. If we can train ourselves to look into that realm of potentiality, we can gain insights beyond what can be ascertained from only considering the manifested aspects. Goethe encourages us to  *dwell in the phenomenon*. The distinctions between the different forms manifested point back to the unity from which they came. When Henri spoke of shifting our focus from outcomes to the act of distinguishing I felt a volcano erupting in my psyche!

It seems to me that one of the big stumbling blocks to embracing this way of being is our attempts to live in the construct of linear time which creates a past and future as distinct from the now. This is an illusion through limited perception and though useful can be unhealthy if taken as absolute.

An example came to me in a lecture by Jon Rae the other evening where he spoke about greenhouse gases (a complex array of different kinds of gases that come from many natural processes in Gaia and trap heat from the sun inside her body, giving her a fever). The percentages of these gases are reduced to a common denominator of CO<sub>2</sub> which is then calculated and used as a measuring stick over time. By doing this we have been cut off from the unique qualities of these gases and there is a narrowing of focus as to how to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This creates a tendency to try and solve the “problem” by looking at sources of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions rather than a deeper approach of seeing the many facets of the atmosphere and our connection to it. Thus we see people embracing carbon neutrality as a way to solve our environmental problems. Satish Kumar wrote recently, “Focusing only on carbon emissions without protecting ecosystems is simply treating the symptoms rather than the causes of global warming.”

We were encouraged to think how a plant lives. Goethe's approach was to observe the subtle details of a plant (the organizing ideas), then to go upstream from those physical senses into the imagination and meld with the plant. By repeating this over and over he was able to gain insights not immediately apparent. My work with this has me confronting the laziness of my brain/mind in noting detail. Henri encouraged us to not be onlookers but to place ourselves into the distinguishing mode of the plant. That is, the point of potentiality where the plant has yet to distinguish into parts within the meristematic tissue. He worded beautifully the sense of wholeness at the family level of plants by imploring us to note the *family resemblance* of plants that permeates through the distinctions.

Our language needs a re-awakened lexicon from both the past (such as: ether, aura, empathy, dis-ease, and co-incidence) as well as emerging terms from our unique era (such as grok, vibe, I and I and google).

When we first delve into the phenomenon we bring with us prejudices and limited observation. Henri implored us to not be discouraged by this. It is expected and not a problem. It is a beginning, but we should not stop there. With each round of observation we are able to dispel or at least suspend more of our biases and limited habitual thinking. Eventually we step through our limitations into holism, into the dynamic-ness of the being presencing itself.

In our last couple of days Henri introduced Hermeneutics explaining that this came out of the monks' reflections on the meanings of the bible as words from God. Henri encouraged us to "let the book you are reading teach you how to read it." We could see how reading is a dynamic unfolding of meaning/understanding like a plant growing in its environment. As in a paragraph, the more sentences one reads the more the presence of the paragraph can be felt. When something you read affects you that is writing living through you.

The author writing the work creates the *urtext* which expresses the multiplicities out of its unity each time it is read. This is not something one needs to rush through or become quick to label or understand. A book expresses itself from the text as it is read; hence, the con-text. How do you feel when something is expressed out of context? Henri implored us to "read between the lines" for full understanding. I was reminded of a good lesson I learned at a conference many years ago. Our teacher asked us to look at the intention behind the words and tone when a person speaks to us, to go upstream and understand from where a person was speaking.

A warning from Henri stays with me in which he spoke about how scientists have intuitive flashes (epiphanies) that spark them towards great contributions to science. But after these great insights the attempts to convey them to others make them vulnerable to co-optation and in some cases flip them to their opposite meaning. This is memorably expressed in Orwell's "1984". In this way I am confronted with the fading memories of Henri's inspired lectures and have only my notes to recount the aha's of our time together.

From that week with Henri most of us were quite shifted, it seemed, in the world we were viewing. Thus it was perfect for Craig Holdrege to appear with his bag of exercises and deepen our awareness of Nature. He grounded our shifted awareness in practical experience as we learned the techniques of Goethean Science. We were asked to *think like a plant grows*.

Though seemingly straightforward I found the experiences of visualizing a leaf, then a branch to be very helpful in understanding Goethe's delicate empiricism. In the afternoon exercises, I felt myself actually able to swim upstream some, letting the images in my mind come alive. Further, Craig's writings have proven to be very accessible and revealing. His description of encountering skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus*) was helpful for me to see how he went about going deeper.

In the commentary that followed his narrative I gained another important understanding of why Goethe encourages us to go back and forth between encounter with the plant and then integration time. Stephen Buhner also shares this view, "Your relationship with plants deepens through the years... taking a walk, as you pass the plant in a field, a deeper knowledge of the plant and its purposes, its uses in medicine, will flash into your mind." (pg 166)

Craig puts it well, "When you go back to characteristics you have studied before, they may suddenly express the unity you have discovered through another part. You have an 'aha' experience in which you recognize connections between what previously appeared to be separate facts." (pg 45)

From Craig I relearned a lesson I know from cooking and medicine making that **simple is not easy**. He recounted the lessons from his teacher, Jochen Bockemehl's, after their long walks together in which Bockemehl would spend hours



drawing out the details from his memory. I found this humbling for it showed the importance of showing up to do the work of, as Goethe says, *building the organ of perception*. I am grateful for Craig taking the time to cross the ocean and coming to share these approaches of melding with the wisdom of Nature.

After these two very focused weeks with individual teachers, our third week represented a big change in that we had three different teachers during the week. We also flipped from all male teachers to all female teachers.

Francoise Wemelsfelder, animal behaviorist, came to teach for two days. I was impressed with her as a human being but felt concerned about the sacrifices she's made to make changes within the system. Her focus as a scientist is on animal welfare taking a unique approach of trying to understand the animal's point of view. Current animal behavior research is dominated by the systems approach reducing animals to biochemical reactions firing off synapses.

She has done a wonderful job shifting consciousness from animals viewed as objects to the more compassionate level of acknowledging their being-ness. Her emphasis on not "fragmenting animals" allows us to engage them and accept the mystery. She quoted the philosopher Martin Buber about the importance of seeing beings in a subjective "I and thou" approach rather than "I and it".

As a scientist within the dominant paradigm, Francoise has to be very careful with her use of words. I had a discussion with her about this and cautioned about allowing powerful terms that describe the reality to be co-opted or made extinct, terms that western science has discredited such as: ether, spirit, astrology, feelings, placebo, anecdotal evidence, intuition, doctrine of signatures and subjectivity among many others.

She spoke of how she redirected critiques that her form of science is wrought with anthropomorphism. Her answers have been that what has been called anthropomorphism are just mistakes in recognition due to a lack of skill in communicating with animals. She felt this can be overcome by better training. She emphasized that "fallibility in the skills doesn't justify the status quo of invisibility" around the issue of animals having feelings. I pointed out that my research had turned up the term anthropodenial: the tendency of humans to deny common traits with other species. Another point she made is that if all that was going on in observing animals was anthropomorphism then the studies would turn up with random results, which they do not.

Francoise has modified a statistical package called *Free Choice Profiling*, a scientifically validated approach, in which groups of observers can watch the body language of animals and write their reactions to them. Through extensive studies she has shown high statistical correlation around the reactions to the animals observed. We spent time practicing this method by observing animals she has filmed.

We discussed research she is doing in collaboration with Stephan about the quality of landscapes. I mentioned that this may be a good approach to finally having scientific support for the efficacies of organic food and herbal medicine.

In the middle of the week we had the day with astrologer Carmen Maraschin. She calculated each of our birth charts and took us through an informative slide show relating astrology to post-Newtonian physics and opened us up to its symbolism and archetypes.

Prior to 1700, astrology was valued along side astronomy. On a recent trip to Chelsea Physic Gardens in London one sign noted that the "fanciful theory" the Doctrine of Signatures had been "denounced in 1650". This view that the form of plants can indicate its influences in the human body aligns well with Goethe's views.



Efforts need to be made to reinstate the Doctrine of Signatures as a valid means of assessing potential food and medicine.

Carmen described the basics of how the charts work and set up times with each of us to discuss our personal charts. My current impression of astrology is that I feel a lot of mystery and questions around it. I look forward to exploring this path more deeply.

In the last part of the week, mythologist Jules Cashford came to share images and interpretations of ancient artifacts. Her presence was magical and her teachings came from a place of deep knowing. She shared with us stories of Gaia, “the last goddess of the west.”

We learned that we are collectively between myths and Jules posed the question, “The old gods are dead or dying, who will be the new?” She encouraged us to “make room for imagination to grow within us.” She warned us not to “take myth only literally, for then we lose its symbol and it can become dangerous.” Through her eloquent speaking I could see that dualism is life in time. I felt more courage to develop my imagination and open to Goethe’s delicate empiricism to where “empirical observation finally ceases, inner beholdings of what develops begins” (Craig pg 50).

Jules extolled that “imagination will bring us back into life.” Her teachings were transmitted to us at many levels and I am thankful for the work she does.

## INTEGRATIVE

All these teachers shared alternative ways of looking at the world that reach beyond the limitations of western science. This holistic science of qualities rests on the many facets of Goethe’s delicate empiricism. Learning to recognize Henri’s authentic wholes within living processes, we can avoid the pitfalls of objectifying the world. Craig gave us tools and practice in immersing ourselves in Nature. Francoise showed us ways to make bridges with western science. Jules and Carmen encouraged us to embrace archetypal symbols and open up to the intuitive and imaginative aspects of ourselves.

A general theme I am beginning to understand is the tension that comes from trying to prove to be right. We can open to a more holistic vision by lifting from a linear spectrum to a 3-dimensional space where there is room to explore everyone’s stories and perspectives. In this way we can encounter mystery with wonder and awe, and avoid the clashing of ideologies and political agendas.

Upon reflection of the holistic methodology I have learned so far, I realize in one of those aha’s that this approach has been hinted to me all along. I recall in the stories of some of the great western scientists such as Albert Einstein’s and Linus Pauling’s inner experiments; Washington Carver’s listening to Nature; Luther Burbank’s talking with plants...and more. May the rebirthing of holistic science into human culture flow well.

## References

### Articles

- Bortoft, Henri "Counterfeit and Authentic Wholes: Finding a means for dwelling in Nature." Marinus Nighoff Publishers 1985  
Holdrege, Craig "Doing Goethean Science" Janus Head 8(1) 2005  
Kumar, Satish "Cutting Carbon is a rich fool's Errand" The Guardian August 29, 2007

### Books

These are the authors mentioned in the text with their primary work noted.

- Bortoft, Henri *The Wholeness of Nature* D. Reidal Publishing, 1996  
Buber, Martin *I and Thou* Wiley Publishing, 1971  
Buhner, Stephen *The Secret Teachings of Plants: The intelligence of the heart in the direct perception of Nature* Bear and Company, 2004  
Cashford, Jules *The Homeric Hymns* Penguin Books, 1992  
Goethe, Wolfgang von "Goethe's Botanical Writings" edited by Bertha Mueller Ox Bow Press, 1989  
Goodwin, Brian "Nature's Due" Floris Books, 2007  
Harding, Stephan *Animate Earth* Chelsea Green, 2006  
Heinlein, Robert *Stranger in a Strange Land* Avon, 1961  
Jung, Carl *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* Pantheon Books, 1959  
McLuhan, Marshall *The Medium is the Massage* Bantam 1967  
Pirsig, Robert *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: an inquiry into values* William Morrow and Company, 1974