

USING DIRECT PERCEPTION TO COMMUNICATE TO PLANTS

The intention of the cacao ceremony preceding this will be to open up heart-centred perception for the purposes of developing our communication with plants.

INTRODUCTION

This is an exercise developed by Stephen Harrod Buhner who was a herbalist and Earth poet. He spent time with various Indigenous tribes around the world and when he asked them how they knew which specific plant out of the millions of plants in the forest treated which specific ailment, he was intrigued to find each of these geographically unrelated tribes all said the same thing, 'The plants told us.'

He began to investigate how this could be and found out that essentially plants emit electromagnetic fields and embedded within this field is all sorts of information in various forms. Likewise the human heart also emits an electromagnetic field that can similarly receive and transmit these kinds of information. He postulated that Indigenous tribes still practised the ability of heart centred perception, something that western culture had lost, which is largely based in mind-based thinking perception. So he developed a meditation exercise to facilitate this process and found that he and many other people he shared this with found tangible results in the field.

Of course this exercise is about locating medicinal properties of plants, but for this exercise, establishing communication and relationship with the plants is more than enough.

WHAT TO BRING

Each person will need to bring with them:

- Notebook
- Pen
- Water
- (optional) An intentional question you wish to ask the plants. This could be about a personal life problem you are going through, or even about a wider social/community question.

WHAT TO NOT BRING

Each person will need to leave behind:

- Mind based perceptions
- Expectations

EXERCISE

This is an exercise that is about going from looking with the mind and going into feeling with the heart and realising that feeling is a sense too.

Try to do the best you can with this exercise, for some people it will be easier than for others. Trying to shift from mind-based perception to heart-based perception is often hard to do for people in one session but even if you do get a one second glimmer of what it feels like to perceive from the heart this is to be counted as a success.

Everything has a hidden face, in that it can only be seen with different eyes than the physical. The hidden face of nature can only be seen with the heart.

Step 1

Go into the wilderness and let yourself be drawn to a plant. Not with your mind but with your body if you can tune into this. Your mind may think about heading towards the biggest most beautiful plant you can see, but in reality your heart may be drawn to the tiniest most overlooked plant in the area so be aware of this. You may even trip over a plant while looking for what you believe is going to be 'your' plant for this exercise. Pay attention to these subtle indirect cues from nature. You are going with your instincts here. Notice what plants almost physically draw you towards them no matter what their appearance may look like or what your mind-based preconceptions are.

Plants are like musical songs. Some plants will make you feel happy and give you a lightness of mood, others may make you feel sombre, while others may repel you. Many plants you will not respond to you at all. That's ok.

Plants are like people; some you will not like, some you will be ambivalent about, some are boring, some are shy, some very open, some are nice acquaintances that you get to know slowly over the years, others are shy, but some... some you fall in love with immediately and deeply and want to know intimately.

But finding a plant that attracts you as these ones are going to be easier to communicate with.

Step 2

As you sit with the plant, slow down. Slow your breath down. And breathe through your heart. You are going into a receptive mode of consciousness. You are not trying to impose any pre-concieved mental notions onto the plant. You must become aware of the feelings that arise in you. How do you feel?

Because we have been taught for so long to disregard these feelings it may be hard to let yourself notice them. Begin by allowing yourself to describe these plant-generated feelings in any way they come to you. Let them come into consciousness and emerge into words. Do not control them and make them big and analytical. Let them emerge of themselves in their own form. Give yourself permission to say out loud what they are, no matter how foolish they might seem to your linear mind.

Your mind may wander or interject, comment on or criticise this process while it's happening. Try not to get caught up in this and return your attention back to your body and sensations. Slow your breathing down when this happens.

Because of our long habituation to the linear mind (which presumes the unreality of the living soulfulness of the world around us). The hardest thing for us to do is to give reality to the feelings that flow into us from the outside world as it breaks this conditioned mindset.

Embracing the reality of the feelings that come to us from the world is the first step in the decolonisation of the soul. In this moment, the linear mind is truly left behind and you begin to use a different mode of cognition – thinking with your heart.

Step 3

If you wish, write it down in your notebook. There will be one or more primary feelings: mad, sad, glad or scared. Then a number of secondary feelings: a unique blendings of colours from an artists palette. These secondary feelings are the encodes of more complex communications of the plant.

As its feeling the impacts of these feeling complexes, your body will respond at a level deeper than your conscious awareness. There will be an immediate physical articulation in response to what you are sensing.

Because it is out of your conscious awareness, you must notice everything that your body does during this process, everything you feel, every stray thought, no matter how insignificant or ridiculous it seems. You are learning a new language. In this process your body is your best friend and most important teacher. You must learn to honour it not to denigrate or distrust it as you have been taught in school. It knows and will teach you if you let it and respect it.

Step 4

Give up your preconceptions. For if you have an assumption about the form in which the knowledge will appear, you will overlook much that is important.

Just keep tuning in. This is like shaking hands with the plants.

If you are still feeling nothing, move onto another plant that you are drawn towards and try again. Some plants are more responsive than others.

Step 5

If you feel inclined to go further you can ask it for it's permission to touch the plant, smell it, and see what other impressions come in from appraising it with all your other senses.

You can do this out aloud or in your thoughts.

You may feel foolish doing this, but again this is because you are directly questioning a deeply ingrained conditioning of the western linear mind that nature does not have an intelligence.

It's important to be in a non-extractive mode with this being. You are not wanting anything from them. Often if we approach them with this wanting energy they do not respond. It's a passive receiving and giving mode and almost a mode of play. You are doing this for the sake of the exercise not a specific end.

If you wish you can state your intention to the plant which may be simply to 'Learn to connect and communicate with you.'

Step 6

If you wish you may begin to attempt to communicate with it. Be polite, as if it were an equal, because it is.

Have a conversation with it. If it feels responsive you may ask it if it has any messages it wishes to share with you. These messages may be profound, mundane or absurd and comical. Don't discount anything which appears in your mind or body.

Different plants have different modes of communication so while one may make pictures appear in your mind, others may give you sensations in the body.

Step 7

If you wish and feel the meeting is going good (it's almost like a date) and the communication is reasonably tangible, you can ask it how to use it as medicine.

If you are genuinely in need and humble they will often respond but sometimes in ways that you do not expect. Sometimes the medicine is not directly as a physical preparation of it's parts, but in the communication itself.

It may communicate in feelings, pictures or a direct message.

Sometimes it's the feelings it arouses in you that are the medicine.

Another interesting exercise is to talk about a problem you may have that is burdening your heart and see if it has a perspective it wishes to share with you.

Talking the problem out aloud is often easier to do at the beginning of working in this way.

You may feel embarrassed or even ridiculous but again, this is again because you are violating a deeply held conditioned western belief about the non-sentience of nature.

Pay attention to what you receive from the plant and note down what you receive.

Sometimes you will receive something quite insightful, other times it won't be as helpful.

If you don't get much, you can try another plant or a tree.

STEP 8

At the end of the communication, no matter how 'successful' it was, thank it and give it some water or a stick of incense or an offering of some kind, a song, a poem, even a loving hug. This is as a gift of reciprocity, not as a transaction.

Because we only have an hour or so to do this exercise, it's best to focus on 1 -3 plants. If you're getting a lot out of working with one plant, just stick with it for as long as you can. We are going for quality over quantity.

This is a skill that really needs repetition and practise. This exercise for those who have never done this before is just the start, so don't get discouraged if you are not able to do this from the get go. This method of perception is like building a muscle or learning to ride a bike. Again, some will find it easier than others. It's ok, just do the best you can and even the smallest shift is a great reward.