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# The Fragrant Heavens

Valerie Ann Worwood

## About the Book

The search for spiritual enlightenment has become a major force in the modern world, as people seek a sense of being that goes beyond their need for material goods. With *The Fragrant Heavens* Valerie Ann Worwood breaks new ground by examining the use of fragrance in spirituality.

Drawing on the pioneering research of eminent scientists and leading spiritual teachers, *The Fragrant Heavens* provides comprehensive advice on the use of fragrance in many fields of spiritual practice being used today. It describes how plant energies can effect a positive connection between the physical and spiritual self, and how fragrance is associated with the human aura. Extensive exercises and formulas demonstrate how aroma can be used in healing, prayer and meditation. Finally, *The Fragrant Heavens* provides a definitive reference to over seventy oils, explaining their uses with regard to spiritual and vibrational medicine.

Valerie Ann Worwood began her study of how the body, mind and spirit are enhanced through the use of essential oils and aromatherapy treatments in her bestselling books *The Fragrant Pharmacy* and *The Fragrant Mind*. Now, in *The Fragrant Heavens*, she concludes her exploration, providing a truly revelatory and comprehensive study that will guide you in your search for spiritual awareness.

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*Amber; Angelica Root; Angelica Seed; Aniseed; Balsam de Peru; Basil; Bay Laurel; Benzoin; Bergamot; Birch (White); Black Pepper; Camphor; Cardamom; Carnation (Absolute); Cedarwood; Chamomile German; Chamomile Roman; Cinnamon; Clary Sage; Clove (Bud); Coriander; Cypress; Dill; Elemi; Eucalyptus Radiata; Fennel (Sweet); Fir (White Spruce); Frankincense; Galbanum; Geranium; Ginger; Grapefruit; Helichrysum; Hyacinth (Absolute); Hyssop; Jasmine (Absolute); Juniper;*

*Labdanum (Rock Rose); Lavender; Lemon; Lemongrass; Linden Blossom (Absolute); Mandarin; Marjoram (Sweet); Melissa; Myrrh; Myrtle; Narcissus (Absolute); Neroli; Nutmeg; Orange; Ormenis Flower (Chamomile Maroc); Palma Rosa; Patchouli; Peppermint; Petitgrain; Pimento Berry; Pine; Rose Absolute; Rose Otto; Rosemary; Sage; Sandalwood; Spikenard; Storax (Styrax); Thyme (Red and chemotype linalol); Tuberose (Absolute); Vetiver; Violet Leaf (Absolute); Yarrow; Ylang Ylang; Yuzu*

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# The Fragrant Heavens

Valerie Ann Worwood

## DEDICATION

*For Nan and Pop who would remind me that ‘there are more things  
betwixt heaven and earth than we will ever know about’, and Uncle Will  
who understood the spiritual importance of fragrant plants.*

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Three special people were involved on this journey, and to them I am most thankful. In my search for the truth I was assisted by Julia Stonehouse, who helped me to wade through the literature and with the research into the energy of essential oils. As the fragrant threads and aromatic clues came together, we both felt the impact of enquiring into the spiritual and vibrational realms of fragrance. Lily, Julia's daughter, helped by always having the smile of innocence. And I'm grateful to my daughter, Emma, who offered her unique perspective when we experienced sweat lodges and sacred plant journeys together, and for her patience and love.

*There are eighty myriads of trees in every corner of Paradise, the meanest among them choicer than all the spice trees. In every corner there are sixty myriads of angels singing with sweet voices, and the tree of life stands in the middle and shades the whole of Paradise. It has fifteen thousand tastes, each different from the other, and the perfumes thereof vary likewise. Over it hang seven clouds of glory, and winds blow upon it from all sides, so that its odor is wafted from one end of the world to the other.*

LOUIS GINZBERG,  
*Legends of the Bible*

## PLEASE NOTE:

The material in this book is not meant to take the place of diagnosis and treatment by a qualified medical practitioner. Since the actual use of essential oils by others is beyond the author's control, no expressed or implied guarantee as to the effects of their use can be given, nor liability taken. Essential oils are to be used at the user's own discretion.

Any application of the recommendations set forth in the following pages is at the reader's sole risk. The author and publishers disclaim any liability arising directly or indirectly from the use of this book.

# INTRODUCTION

To see a world in a grain of sand  
And heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And eternity in an hour

WILLIAM BLAKE, 'Auguries of Innocence'

THE OMNIPRESENT DIVINE has been put through the prism of human experience, and is expressed in many different ways. Some people focus their ideas of the divine on an original Creator, God, and venerate prophets of that God. Some spiritual traditions pay reverence to the whole living environment; others turn inward, and use specific mental exercises to connect with the oneness of the universe. Whether we pray to God, whether we pay homage to Mother Earth, Father Sky or the spirit of the sage, whether we look to the stars, or seek the stars within, spirituality is about making connections. We may take different routes, but the destination is the same.

Although spiritual practices differ greatly, there's no coincidence in the fact that so many use fragrance. Every evening in India, the air is rich with the aroma of incense burning at home shrines. Smoke fragrant with the aroma of the smouldering resins, frankincense and myrrh, fills the air in Ethiopian Coptic and Orthodox Christian churches. Muslims use lavish quantities of sweet-smelling rose water to impart fragrance to mosques and other holy places. In Native American sweat lodges, for ritual purification and spiritual connection, the fragrant herbs of sage, cedar and sweetgrass are put on the hot rocks to release their aroma molecules into the humid atmosphere. Clouds of fragrant smoke rise from handfuls of incense sticks, placed at Chinese Buddhist shrines. In the *havdallah* ceremony held in Jewish homes at the close of the sabbath

every Saturday night, blessings for light and fragrance are recited over the candle and spice box. Each dawn, Tibetans go up on the roofs of their houses and light stoves in which they burn bundles of juniper – to force the sky door open. As plumes of smoke rise from the houses and fragrance fills the air, prayers can be heard.

It's the essential oils in fragrant plant materials, the aroma molecules, that are released by these various practices – they are what gives incense its aroma, just as the essential oil in pine needles gives a pine forest its uplifting quality. Essential oils exude from plants into their 'headspace', where we smell them when walking amongst nature, and humans have devised many methods to capture this essence of the plant, the molecules so many people have chosen to help them connect with and feel the divine.

Fragrance has been said to alert the gods to our presence, and act as a sign that the human mind is focused and receptive to spiritual guidance. In many cultures sweet-smelling aroma was, and still is, associated with divinity – with gods, heavens, angels and saints all being attributed a delightful fragrance. By being oneself fragrant, or burning fragrant material, a link or bridge could be formed to the divine. In *Legends of the Bible* Louis Ginzberg tells us that the Tabernacle had two altars: one brass, and used for food offerings, corresponding to the body; and one of gold, used for offering spices and sweet incense – 'for the soul takes delight in perfumes only.'

Fragrance and spirituality mingle as one in the spiritual traditions of the world. The heavens are redolent with exquisite aroma, the gods are sweetly fragrant, as are angels, saints, and those touched by the divine. The odour of sanctity has impressed many nations, and the people, in turn, make offerings of sweet-smelling aroma to the deity.

The Polynesian god, Urutaete, carried souls of the dead to Rohutu noanoa, a garden paradise perfumed with exquisite odours, known as 'Fragrant Rohutu' or 'Perfumed Rohutu'. Buddhists will pass to the fragrant mountain known as 'gandhamadana'. The gods of the ancient Greeks lived on the fragranced Mount Olympus, while Elysium, the pre-Hellenic paradise, was reserved for human heroes and heroines. They passed there without dying, and found the

Elysian Fields suffused with delicious aroma. According to Homer, those favoured by the gods had their body and soul made immortal in this land of perfect happiness. Lucian spoke of the 'scented Isles of the Blessed', and a golden city beside a river of myrrh, while Plutarch wrote about the intoxicating fragrance rising from the River Lethe where 'souls were imbibing these delicious scents aglow with pleasure and engaging in concourse with the other'.

The exhalations of the Muslim paradise have been described as of 'musk, ginger, amber and from the very ground of Eden'. The French Christian saint, Gregor, around AD 310, apparently after a brief sojourn there, said paradise was a 'prairie from which rises at all times an extraordinary perfume'.

In the last book of the New Testament, Revelations 5:8, we hear of the twenty-four elders in Heaven, who fell down before the Lamb, 'having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints'. Heaven is fragrant indeed. In 8:3–4, an angel came to the altar holding a golden censer and was given much incense 'that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense . . . ascended up before God'.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is often said to be made known by a mystical fragrance, while so many Christian saints were said to be sweet-smelling or to produce fragrant relics that the idea of an 'odour of sanctity' has likewise continued through the aeons of time. Homer described the Greek god Zeus as 'wreathed in a fragrant cloud', and the ancient Greeks and Romans recognized they were in the presence of a deity when they smelled an especially powerful fragrant odour. Artemis appeared in this way, as did Bacchus – who smelt of saffron and myrrh. The garments of Demeter were said to be fragrant, while Aphrodite/Venus had fragrant robes and hair, and a fragrant temple. Plato wrote of Eros, 'Love will not settle on body or soul or aught else that is flowerless or whose flower has faded away.'

Gods were often said to have been born from various scented parts of plants – the resin that exuded from a cut in a tree, the



fragrant bark that was so often used for making incense, or a flower that was, and still is, used for making perfume. The ancient Egyptian god Amon Ra emerged from a lotus, as did the Indian God, Brahma, while Adonis was born from a myrrh tree. The Egyptians called the incense resin that exuded from certain trees, 'the tears' or 'sweat of the gods'.

Egyptian hieroglyphics tell the story of the holy conception of Queen Hatshepsut. Her mother, Queen Ahmose, was awakened from her sleep in her beautiful palace by the majestic aroma of the god Amon. 'All his odours were from Punt', the inscription says, which is perhaps why his daughter, Hatshepsut, felt driven to organize a trade delegation to the land of Punt (probably present-day Somalia) with orders to bring back incense trees, which she had planted in the garden in front of her palace.

Shamans across the world today, as ever, use fragrance to invite the ancestral, animal or nature spirits into this world, and sometimes spirits are recognized as being present by their fragrance alone. So it is with the Chewong, of the Malay peninsula, who have a group of female spirits they call the 'leaf people' – they are recognized by non-shamans as being present in the meeting house only by their fragrance. Nearby, the Batek Negrito say their spirits live in a land that is perpetually fragrant with the aroma of fruit blossoms, and that they love incense and the scent of flowers, while the Warao of Venezuela believe that fragrance originates in the refreshing land of the God of Life.

Places of worship were often fragrant because of the building material used. The temple of Solomon where Jesus taught in Jerusalem was made with the magnificent, fragrant cedars that once covered Lebanon. Indian sandalwood temples are called 'houses of fragrance', *gandhakuti*, and at the Spiritual Grove Temple in Hangzhou, China, an aromatic effigy of Buddha stands fifty feet tall and emits the aroma of its seventy-four blocks of camphor wood.

When the Dalai Lama was a young boy, Tibetans still walked, and prostrated themselves on the earth, along the long circuitous processional route to the monastery at Lhasa, past endless fires of burning juniper. Today, sadly as refugees in Ladakh, Kashmir, the

Drokpa Tibetans in particular burn huge amounts of juniper in offering to the minor deities and gods of place – a tradition that predates Buddhism and denotes purification, atonement, and hope for rebirth.

The aromatic tradition is often hidden in symbols, the origins of which we have long since ceased to question. The word ‘rosary’, for example, stems from the fact that early Christian priests wore garlands of roses around their necks on feast days. The first rosaries were made from 165 rosebuds or rolled up rose petals, sometimes held in place with lampblack. And the famous Jewish candlestick with seven arms, the menorah, the emblem of Israel for over 3,000 years, is a material replica of the fragrant healing plants of the *Salvia* species that not long ago still covered Mount Moriah in Jerusalem.

At Jesus’ birth, the kings brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh – gold, perhaps, to help financially; frankincense and myrrh as incense material and medicine. Two days before the Crucifixion Mary Magdalene took ‘a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment’ (St John 12:3). Spikenard is related to the valerian plant; its aroma is earthy yet sweet and its effect is sedative. Jesus was going to need it, and when Judas Iscariot complained at the waste of such a quantity of precious oil, saying the cost could be given to the poor, Jesus said, ‘Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.’ (St John 12:7)

The word ‘messiah’ means ‘the anointed one’. Kings had from very early times been anointed as a sign of their kingship, and Jesus was a king in the line of David. Shakespeare describes the spiritual and irreversible nature of the anointing of Richard II: ‘Not all the water in the rough rude sea; Can wash the balm from an anointed king; The breath of worldly men cannot depose; The deputy elected of the Lord.’

The ingredients of the royal anointing oil have changed little over hundreds of years. At the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953, it was composed of the essential oils of neroli, rose, cinnamon

and jasmine, together with benzoin, musk, civet and ambergris, blended in sesame oil. This differs from the oil used at the coronation of Charles I in 1626 only in that sesame replaced 'oil of been'. Charles was anointed on the breast, between the shoulders, on both shoulders, in the angle of both arms and on the head – seven places in all. Elizabeth was anointed on the palms, the breast and on the head.

The coronation oil has historically been prepared by the royal physicians, in 1953 by the Surgeon-Apothecary, but it is applied in a spiritual context. The oil for anointing Elizabeth was consecrated – set apart as sacred to God – by the Bishop of Gloucester in the chapel of St Edward the Confessor, in Westminster Abbey, before it was laid on the altar, with the crown, ready for the ceremony. It was contained in a gold ampulla in the shape of an eagle, which was used at the coronation of Henry IV in 1399. The precious holy oil was poured from the beak of the eagle into an elaborate golden spoon dating from around 1200 which, with the ampulla, is now part of the crown jewels at the Tower of London. The act of anointing hallowed and dedicated Queen Elizabeth II in her office – it set the seal of God's approval.

The first English king to be anointed was Egforth of Mercia, in 785, in a ceremony derived from the Jewish tradition described in the Old Testament. The aromatic traditions go far back in time, and are continuing into the future throughout the world. Until recently we did not require an explanation as to why aroma was used in spiritual practice. Fragrance simply drifted between supplicant and deity, joining the two by the shared olfactory experience. A connection was made and more hoped for. Today, we want to know how everything works, including the spiritual use of fragrance.

Unfortunately, we have yet to figure out exactly how aroma works. We can see that two olfactory bulbs protrude from the front of the brain, and have nerves extending down into the top of the nose, where they come into contact with aroma molecules. We also know that aroma is made up of molecules with particular configurations, vibration and light-refraction qualities, and that they 'lock' with receptors, sending messages to the brain. Aroma evokes

memory and we can identify the part of the brain involved, but nobody has any idea how the aroma of jasmine, say, can make a picture of a garden on a warm starlit night jump into your head.

Bliss, superconsciousness and even transcendence may prove easier to explain, as opiate and other interesting receptors are most highly concentrated in the limbic system, which is the part of the brain immediately stimulated into action by aroma molecules. Aroma molecules get as close to the brain as it is possible to get, without actually *being* the brain. They stimulate the brain, that is their job, and the olfactory bulbs reach out to meet them.

Aroma evokes emotions, as well as memory, and often the two are connected. Emotions run deep, to the very core of our being. But aroma can reach them, instantaneously. Time means nothing to aroma. Although aromatic functioning is so often accidental and unconscious, within a spiritual context it is deliberate and conscious. We choose particular fragrant materials, and use them in a particular way.

The fragrance molecules, the essential oils, come from plants, to which people are inextricably linked. Plants make the air we breathe, and provide the food for all living beings, on land or in water. Without them life comes to a stop. Because of them, we live; that is the humble relationship we have with them. We think we know about plants and even fiddle with their genes. But the fact is, we could not *make* one plant cell from scratch. We can clone, but not create nature – because we don't know how it works. From an energetic and informational point of view, there is more to life than we know.

Essential oils contain this mystery of life; they have powerful inexplicable energies too. Standing in an ancient forest, under a thick canopy of stars, I have felt the energy of the universe. Plants are the interface between cosmic energies and the earth upon which we depend. They capture the sun in photosynthesis, that much we know. Their aura can be caught by Kirlian photography, and, even when a leaf has been cut, the otherwise invisible outline remains. What this energy is, we do not know, but we see it also emanating

from humans. Here is an energy field that connects us, and the likelihood is, it is one of many.

If neither nature, nor aroma, has yet been fully explained, how can we hope for science to pin down spirituality? And do we even need it to? Spirituality has its own 'proof', in experience. And if the scientific secret of spirituality is to be 'discovered', it will probably be through experience of it!

Twenty years ago in aromatherapy, there was an unwritten rule that we would not be too open about the spiritual side of the essential oils we worked with. We talked about their anti-infectious qualities, their beautifying effects on the skin, and about any number of benefits to body and mind. The positive spiritual changes were recognized, but silently. It seemed far too bold to suggest that the strength and confidence of nature was carried in the essential oils, or that the light and wisdom of the universe flowed through them, their fragrance like messengers from heaven, aromatic angels that come and touch us with the positivity and love of the deity.

All this is a long way from 'anti-bacterial agents'. But being able to talk about spirituality has gone hand in hand with scientific developments which have forced us to open our minds. Quantum physics and chaos theory turn everything topsy-turvy, while the insistence of physicists that the influence of an observer must be put into the experimental equation really focuses the mind. It seems the flutter of a butterfly wing on one side of the world affects events on the other side, and that what we think makes a difference to the universe. The idea that there is a division between body and mind has been put well and truly to rest by the latest discoveries in psychoneuro-immunoendocrinology: it appears that, because there are receptors to brain chemicals throughout the whole body, mind and body are in fact one. On a molecular level, there are striking similarities between parts of humans and plants, and we can see our evolution was deeply entwined. So many connections can now be made, between people and plants, mind and body, the observer and the observed, that it is difficult to see sharp divisions. Indeed, it's now logical to state 'all is one', or agree with the inscription found

on the first known picture of a distillation unit, from first-century Alexandria: 'It is towards oneness that all phenomena tend.'

We all have spiritual experiences; it's a question of degree. We all love, and, as they say, 'God is love'. Love transcends time and place, so we feel that loving connection whether the loved one is with us or not. Some people hear the forest sing and are moved to their very core. Others stand in their garden in the morning and feel the unity of the universe in every shaking leaf. Many people have had instant, spiritual experiences, which change their lives for ever.

Whatever form it takes, it is the depth and strength of the spiritual experience which carries conviction forward. More than just 'tradition', spirituality puts us in touch with the cosmic network which permeates all time and space.

From a brain biochemistry point of view, the pursuit of spirituality through aroma makes a great deal of sense, as the mechanics of smell are but one short biological step away from consciousness, including higher consciousness. Thinking of it in terms of light, essential oils *are* captured light, passed from the heavens by plants to us. From a vibrational electromagnetic and energetic point of view, essential oils are in harmony with life. They resonate with us, as the vibration in one violin string can cause vibration in another. We hear the message they have to bring. On a molecular level, natural plant aroma molecules touch cells' receptors with the lightest of contact, then retreat, their job of instigating a series of reactions having been done.

With an etheric quality, essential oils activate the receptors of love, compassion and empathy. They are an information network, carrying messages and crossing boundaries; operating on many different levels. Through them, we can contact the wisdom of nature, the power of the light, the energy of the universe, and the love in our hearts.

What is remarkable about essential oils is that they influence the whole being. Just as they are the catalyst that can make a wound heal, or a mind relax, so they can transport a soul. I know of no other substances that can do that. They are flexible, adaptable, multifaceted, deep, complex, light, subtle, etheric, and all in a

positive way. If molecules could be angels, they would surely be essential oils.

The fragrant molecules that are essential oils have been the vehicle for many spiritual journeys. Weaving in and out of the body, as they weave silently through the atmosphere, ethereal but real and deep, essential oils can put us on a wavelength, a network, a web, something which connects the whole. It may be that the experience is brief, but it is never forgotten. Indeed, it is imprinted on the very soul.

Journeys often need guides, and *The Fragrant Heavens* is such a guide – to the spiritual aromatic adventure. I will point out landmarks, introduce aromas and show the view. I can even take you to visit ‘museums of spiritual aroma’, and to futuristic research labs. Beyond that, I cannot go, because spirituality is always a personal journey.

## *Chapter One*

### LET THERE BE LIGHT

The scientist's religious feelings take the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, in comparison with it, the highest intelligence of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection.

ALBERT EINSTEIN

AS EACH DAY dawns, pure sunlight sparkles in dew drops, shimmering on the grass, and on the leaves and flowers of the world. Walking through the woods, light filters through the leaves, creating a green haven of peace. The plant world is full of beautiful sights; there isn't a tree or flower that doesn't look good.

Although we might think so sometimes, providing aesthetic pleasure is not the most important thing about plants. By taking carbon dioxide and water from the air and, with light, converting it into carbohydrates, plants are the ultimate production machine, purifying the air and providing food and medicine for humans and animals alike. Plants are both the lungs and the larder of the earth. They are the conduit between the light of the heavens, and the dark of the earth, channelling energy from the sky into the crystalline structures of mother earth, to be reflected throughout the planet.

Plants are magnificent. The tallest tree in Redwood National Park, California, is the height of twenty-six London double-decker buses stacked on top of one another. These trees can live over 1,000 years, but even one only 800 years old has stood through the coronations and reigns of thirty-five kings and queens of England. The size and longevity of these masterpieces of creation is humbling, but to



actually walk amongst the immense trees of an ancient forest is more humbling still.

The smallest seed is awesome in its capacity to create another plant, perfect in every detail, including its store of seeds for future generations. Plant seeds have been found in archaeological sites and germinated, thousands of years after they were dropped – testament to the monumental capacity of tiny seeds to hold life.

Most of us live not in a living, breathing jungle but in a concrete one. We can redress this balance somewhat, by bringing the essence of plants – essential oils – into our homes, but to understand these fully we need to reacquaint ourselves with their heritage, their source – plants in their natural habitat.

## **THE SINGING FOREST**

*The trees are the teachers of the law.*

Brooke Medicine Eagle

In the 1950s something happened in an ancient North American forest. The event was so poignant that it went down in folklore but, because of the ‘Chinese whispers’ effect over the years, there are now two versions. In one, the central character was a US Forest Service employee, and in the other he was a Ph.D. student conducting research for his thesis on the age of trees in a bristlecone pine forest.

The man walked deep into the forest for many days until he found a tree he thought might be the oldest. He planned to extract a sample using a core drill, to enable him to count its rings and date it, but the drill didn’t work. For some days he tried to fix it, without success. He also had a saw. He looked at the saw and he looked at the tree; he thought about the long walk back to get another core drill, and about the importance of his research. So he cut down the tree and dated it. It was 4,000 years, old enough to have lived through most of known human history. When Moses was a baby, this tree was already five hundred years old.

People have different relationships with nature. Some, like the man in this story, don't treat it with the respect it deserves, making it a sacrifice to the human ego. Others claim that plants have intelligence, soul and the capacity to communicate, and would no more cut down an ancient tree than cut down a grandmother. Attitudes differ. Some people hear the forest sing, some don't.

One hundred and forty million years ago most of the northern hemisphere was covered in redwood and other trees. Mankind made its appearance maybe 200,000 years ago and has, especially in the last 200 years, remorselessly cut the forest down. As early as 1905 American congressman William Kent and his wife Elizabeth recognized the potential ecological danger, and bought 295 acres of redwood forest in California, for \$45,000, naming it 'Muir Woods' after the conservationist John Muir. He wrote to the Kents, 'You have done me great honor, and I am proud of it.' We owe thanks to them all because today Muir Woods is one of the few remaining enclaves where you can stand amongst these magnificent trees without hearing the sound of a distant saw indicating that clear-cut logging is heading your way.

It is a humbling experience to stand under ancient redwood trees. In Muir Woods I felt like a three-year-old in the presence of very large, old and wise men, in awe yet certain I would be completely protected. I did not want to leave their presence. Leaning on a redwood that extended too high into the sky for me to see its top, I felt the energy flooding into me, a cosmic river of refreshment for the soul.

I heard the drone of a distant saw but knew in this protected forest island it must only be someone cutting dead wood and undergrowth, to clear the ground. Even so, it reminded me of other areas of the world where international logging consortiums are destroying huge areas of precious forest, and I felt an overwhelming emotion of sadness and guilt. I apologized to the trees on behalf of human beings. Strange as it may seem, the trees spoke to me, directly, without voice, from their heart to mine. They conveyed to me their resignation, deep sadness and incomprehension as to why we should want to do such things.

To someone living in a large city, a long way away from trees, having a conversation with a tree might seem an odd thing to do. But when you are actually out amongst them it seems the most natural thing in the world. I can fully understand why traditional Native Americans, when planning to cut down a tree to make a totem pole or boat, asked permission, and gave thanks directly to the tree making the sacrifice.

My love of trees started when I lived in Switzerland and used to take my dog for a walk in the forest late at night. When the moon and stars illuminated our path we walked on and on, for my pleasure rather than for the dog's convenience, as the silence and majesty of the forest filled me with feelings of reassurance and gratitude. It was there, high in the mountains, that I first sensed the living connection between the night sky, the trees and the earth. Many years later, in ancient redwood and cedar forests in North America, this impression was reinforced. Standing under a thick canopy of stars illuminating the sky, I sensed that trees, particularly very tall, ancient trees, act in some way as planetary antennae. The very tops of the trees seem to attract starlight and other cosmic energies, 'earthing' that energy as it travels down through the trunk, into the roots and the earth. I also wonder if the trees don't also transmit information back into the sky, sending vibrational energy, including human thought energy, out into the cosmos. I have no scientific proof, of course, but the thought remains: these giant trees are receivers and transmitters of energy, crucial even to cosmic balance and human spiritual growth.

Anyone who studies trees knows that there is still a great deal to learn about them, especially in terms of energy and communication. Even in terms of mechanics and chemistry, areas we think we know so much about, new discoveries are being made all the time. Scientists of the British Columbia Ministry of Forests only recently found that certain tree species can share resources by using an underground network of fungal threads. Seedlings of Douglas fir, paper birch and western red cedar were subjected to carbon dioxide containing different carbon isotopes. Two years later, 10 per cent of the carbon-type fed to the birch was found in the fir. Both species

share mycorrhizal fungi, which created the network of threads between them, and the carbon travelled along this complex connection. Because this same fungi does not connect with cedar, its particular experimental carbon composition was unaffected. Meanwhile, in Kenya, scientists have discovered that as well as sucking water up from the deep earth a ‘substantial’ amount of water is transported downward by trees, to the dry sub-surface. These are pretty fundamental discoveries, which tell us a great deal about the working of trees we did not know before, in an area – the mechanical – we thought we already understood.

In British Columbia, Canada, the drive to harvest large-dimension lumber is in full swing, as logging companies race to bring down the last remaining trees before politicians accept what environmentalists have been telling them for years and bring the harvest to an end. Standing in these forests is scary. You can hear the drone of mechanical saws and you know you’re standing among doomed giants. These magnificent trees are silently performing crucial ecological tasks for the whole living planet; they have lived through so much of human history and yet are helpless to stop our saws cutting through them. This helplessness, coming from such powerful, massive living things, is infinitely sad.

I was intrigued to hear about a woman who claims to have heard the forest sing. Living deep in a forest in British Columbia, where the loggers cut 1,000-year-old trees, Gladys McIntyre earns a living planting seedling trees. In June 1990, in a part of the cedarwood forest called Howser Creek, Gladys found herself thinking about the ‘immense verticality’ of the trees when ‘a profound vertical alignment took place in me in response; and suddenly I felt about twelve feet tall. I wondered for a moment if this was soul-consciousness, then I was struck in my solar plexus by an impact of sound. It grew to an upwelling, crescendoing symphony of sound, in range and tone unlike anything I had ever heard before! Emanating from the forested hillsides across the valley, it was unquestionably a great hymn of adoration, of joy in Creation and praise to the Creator! Words cannot possibly express the magnitude of this joyous sound, nor my absolute awe at witnessing it.’

But from being a song in praise of the Creator, the song abruptly changed from 'overwhelming joy to abject sorrow'. Gladys writes: 'My cognitive mental faculty seemed to be translating information received by my soul from that incredible presence at worship over there.' It said, 'O noble and worthy, exploiters and conquerors, have mercy, have mercy, do not end our singing which allows the conditions necessary to all life on the planet as you know it.'

Reports as powerful as this can easily be dismissed as the workings of an overactive imagination, so I went to visit Gladys, to try to get closer to the truth. I found her living with her husband Vince, growing organic vegetables that are exquisitely formed, massive, and with a delicious, vibrant taste. Those vegetables positively vibrated and shone in pure, verdant, colourful perfection, well-loved and content. Gladys is a person clearly in touch with the laws of nature, and as sane as you or I.

I came away thinking that if the forests do communicate, Gladys is the right person to hear it. But she is not the only one. In another ancient forest a young woman and her boyfriend went to sit on a splendid mountain ridge to admire the forest view. But instead of feeling glad to be in the splendour the girl became overcome with a sense of panic and fear coming from the forest. Sick with anguish, she had to return home. Days passed, but the sadness wouldn't go. The girl felt driven to return to that part of the forest, to try to understand why she had been so affected. When she arrived she was horrified and stunned to discover the whole area had been clear-cut to the ground.

Although to 'civilized' people communicating with trees may sound bizarre, it is in fact something that's been going on for a very long time. Indeed, trees have long been central to spiritual culture. In ancient Egypt the 'world tree' was associated with a 'sycamore', possibly the sycamore fig that gave shade to the goddess worshippers in their 'groves'. Kabbalah, the mystical aspect of Judaism, has its 'tree of life' and has traditionally been taught to men over forty while they sat under trees. In the last book of the New Testament, Revelations 22:2, we hear that the tree of life is in 'the midst of the street' in Heaven. Buddha received enlightenment

while sitting under a tree. The ancient Assyrians had many tree cults, with the tree of life sometimes depicted as a cedar, fir, date or pomegranate. The Chinese associated the tree of life with the peach, and in later times the cassia, while in Norse mythology it was the ash. A Polynesian legend says ‘out of this magic breadfruit tree a great goddess was made’. The sacredness of trees is universal, and this may not simply be because they routinely offer up their bounty, but because they have a spirit we can feel.

## **PLANTS THAT FEEL AND SPEAK**

When we suddenly remember to water our plants, is it because the plants sent us a message across the room – ‘hey, don’t forget about us’? Why shouldn’t they talk to us, we talk to them. People in their high-rise apartment blocks, or in their gardens, say to their plants, ‘You look lovely today,’ or, ‘What’s up? You’re looking a bit off-colour’, and then fuss around them, administering love and fertilizer – organic, of course. Chatting to plants is a regular occurrence, even for royalty, and some plant aficionados play them music, taking care to choose something they like.

Edward Bach, famous for his Flower Remedies, attributed certain medicinal qualities to plants because the plants themselves told him what they were. An entire Western healing system is thus based on plant communication, and has inspired further plant-human exploration. Meanwhile, in many cultures it is considered quite wrong to become a healer without first having had dreams or visions relating to the plants to be used. In other words, the spiritual realm is seen as the source of accurate information. Cultures that are very much in touch with the earth and all that grows in it believe unreservedly that plants have a spirit. Obviously a plant is unable to speak, so to communicate with it we have to get into the spiritual ‘space’ we share with it. If you want to know what a plant can do, go to the source and ask it. To indigenous peoples, that’s the logical thing to do. There are variations on this cultural theme; with some people believing the spirit of the individual plant conveys the information; or that each species of plant has a kind of ‘overall’