

Introduction

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*“Though we do not wholly believe it yet, the interior life is a real life, and the intangible dreams of people have a tangible effect on the world.” – JAMES BALDWIN, *Nobody Knows My Name**

Describing the invisible world in terms of the visible requires a delicate touch. Since we can only see what’s in front of our eyes, to begin to speak of the invisible world, we must be fluent in analogies based on what we can see and be confident that the universe is a unified whole, not a mere amalgam of unrelated pieces. As the philosopher Aristotle says, we must begin with what we know. Without a unifying world conception, there is no impetus for scientific inquiry and no basis for knowledge. Life would be unlivable if everything did not always already possess an inner kinship. Just as we cannot see the wind itself but we can see what it does, we may not be able to perceive the tones of subtle “forces” but any of us can witness their effects if we put them to use. Similarly, we cannot see for ourselves the inner workings of the soil, but we can see the effects of the secrets of the soil in how the emerging plants express themselves above ground.

To journey into the realm of the invisible—which, if we’re honest, is *most* of the world—we must keep in mind the entire time that any analogy based on the sense-perceptible world will invariably be lacking. Our senses are not designed to perceive most of the cosmos but, rather, are tuned to a narrow bandwidth of a mere fraction of a percent of all possible information available. As such, any analogy based on that tiny fraction of a percent will be incomplete at best. But if

we approach the world with a “soft” gaze, we can allow disparate viewpoints to become a composite image of a living whole.

There is a story of blind monks grasping at different parts of an elephant: one thinks the leg is the trunk of a tree, one imagines the tail is a rope, one thinks the ear is a large leaf, and so forth. Each similarity, by itself, is incomplete, but that does not mean they are each individually false. The individual ideas of “tree” and “rope” and “leaf” are all, by themselves, correct concepts but they are all *misapplied* to the elephant. If each blind monk were to trade places with the others successively and try to reconcile these various perspectives, a clearer image of the whole—the elephant itself—would emerge. Each limited view is a legitimate vantage point as far as it goes—after all, there is a *likeness* between the elephant’s tail and a rope—but when these experiences of separate concepts are reconciled, an even greater concept of the whole emerges.

Some particularly bright stars, such as Rudolf Steiner, seem to have reached far beyond the limits of what is sense-perceptible (and therefore beyond what is externally empirical) into realms inaccessible to ordinary everyday consciousness. But if we need specialized sense organs to perceive light, there are analogous inner “organs” we require to perceive the dark light of the invisible world. If we want to glimpse the subsensible world, we might use a microscope. But if we wish to understand the meaning of the kaleidoscopic panoply of our ever-changing sense perceptions, we need to be able to intuit macrocosmic interconnections that no external technology can reveal for us. If we are like blind monks grasping at pieces, Steiner is like someone who could grasp the encompassing idea “elephant” while the rest of us are busy arguing from our smaller, one-sided perspectives.

How Steiner reached his clear-sightedness is somewhat beside the point for our current discussion of biodynamic agriculture. If I lack eyes, I cannot perceive light myself, but my blindness does not negate the empirical existence of colors for anyone else with eyesight. I may have no experiential point of reference to evaluate whether “red” or

“blue” exist—or even what those terms mean—but that does not mean that colors as such have no reality merely because I personally cannot experience them. Nevertheless, Steiner did not expect blind faith in what he observed. Anything Steiner disclosed he consistently said should be *tested* and empirically validated.

Steiner never asked people to “believe” what he said. On the contrary, Steiner asked his audience to *think* what he said and also to *test* what he said. The trouble these days seems to be that many of us cannot even begin to entertain a new idea unless we already believe it. The result of closed-mindedness is the inability of various groups to find common ground—blind monks insisting that an elephant is a “rope” or a “tree.” But if we dismiss out of hand a new idea merely because it seems “weird,” we will never grow outside what we already think we know. And if we do not submit an idea to empirical testing and document results, we cannot expect others to believe our claims. Funding for biodynamic research is often in short supply partly because it promises to make farmers buy less fertilizer, not more. Biodynamics, as part of the cultural sphere, aims to make farms more profitable and not extract greater profits from farmers themselves. As such, biodynamic research is nurtured primarily by the initiative of magnanimous donors seeking to help farmers worldwide become more ecologically and economically sustainable.

When the insights of Steiner drawn from anthroposophy (living consciousness of one’s humanity) are applied to agriculture, we find a distinctly humane approach to farming that we can call *biodynamics*. The novelty of biodynamics is not that it is sustainable. Indigenous practices worldwide—including in Europe—were long established before the industrial revolution—in many cases for millennia, as F. H. King demonstrates in *Farmers of Forty Centuries*, for instance. What makes biodynamics special is that it is a post-industrial attempt to return to natural wisdom. As Owen Barfield describes anthroposophy in his introduction to *The Case for Anthroposophy*:

What differentiates anthroposophy from its traditional predecessors, both methodologically and in its content, is precisely its post-revolutionary status. It is, if you are that way minded, the perennial philosophy; but, if so, it is that philosophy risen again, and in a form determined by its having risen again, from the psychological and spiritual eclipse of the scientific revolution.¹

Biodynamics is distinguished by the fact that it is a *return* from and through a mechanized prodigal society, not a regression. It is a return in a *new* way, like returning to your childhood home as an adult. As T. S. Eliot sings in *The Four Quartets*: “We shall not cease from exploration/And the end of all our exploring/Will be to arrive where we started/And know the place for the first time.” Anthroposophy is coming to “know the place for the first time” and arriving where we started, albeit ourselves changed. As Steiner suggested, we should continue to farm in any way that works and, to that, *add* the biodynamic preparations to sustainable practices. As such, biodynamics is universally applicable wherever sound farming practices are already employed. Above all, biodynamics is a practical application of insights gleaned from anthroposophy. One might ask whether you need to believe in anthroposophy to use biodynamics, and the answer is: of course not! Steiner did not want sycophants. Steiner said, we need “active fellow workers—no mere executive organs.”² It is not enough for people to follow orders from a centralized authority; we need creative coworkers who can not only fulfill tasks but add more than they are asked to give.

As a man well versed in scientific literature, Steiner would likely have had a special place in his heart for those who are skeptical about the claims of biodynamics and yet dare to test it with objectivity. After all, science should not shy away from what is weird—*superstition* does that—but rather, science tests whether a hypothesis is

1 Owen Barfield, introduction to Steiner, *The Case for Anthroposophy*.

2 Steiner, *Agriculture Course: The Birth of the Biodynamic Method*, p. 60.

repeatable. As the science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke famously wrote, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.” The theoretical basis of biodynamics may be somewhat difficult to grasp, but anyone can experience its concrete results.

In his *Agriculture Course*, Steiner advances a falsifiable (testable) claim that these biodynamic preparations, when properly employed, tend to help produce healthier crops when *added* to sound sustainable farming practices. Biodynamics does not aspire to replace agriculture as we know it, nor is it opposed to innovations. Biodynamics merely seeks to restore a piece of what is often neglected, though it cannot succeed without good farming practices as a rich foundation. Despite what some might suggest, biodynamics does not need to take much time—a stir here and there amounts to a few hours in the scope of an entire year. Good farming takes a lot of time, but the addition of biodynamics is a negligible investment of time by comparison, especially given its benefits to the soil. How long do we sit in traffic throughout our brief lives? We don’t stop driving because of that. If you make your own preparations on your farm, it undoubtedly adds a few more hours of work, but you’re cultivating “indigenous microorganisms,” now popularly referred to as IMO, in a new proactive way by making these special preparations.

It was only with my discovery of the microbiological work of Ehrenfried Pfeiffer’s *Soil Fertility, Renewal and Preservation* that I found my point of entry into biodynamics. While the preparations are irreducible to microbiology, they certainly contain a rich range of beneficial microbes. The work investigating these “smallest entities” explored by Pfeiffer, Maria Thun, and Eugen and Lili Kolisko, among others, bore enough fruit to merit repeating and expanding upon their experiments.

If the right nutrients and their activities are absent in the soil, the plants above will be unable to express themselves to their fullest potential. Biodynamics as such starts with the soil by offering a way to help restore to the exhausted earth qualities that have been

depleted by centuries of agricultural extraction. At first glance, it may look like how you already farm or garden. Biodynamics offers a way for regenerative and sustainable practices to improve synergistically. As such, biodynamics is applicable to almost infinitely varied agricultural settings. Perhaps you turn beds as usual, but now you spray out the horn manure or Pfeiffer's Field and Garden Spray immediately before cultivating.

A Zen saying tells us that you should meditate half an hour a day unless you're too busy, then meditate a full hour a day. If we don't have time to use biodynamic preparations on our farm, we probably already neglect other important things. Biodynamic soil tends to have a microbiological diversity closer to that of wild virgin land and healthy nutrient cycling. Biodynamic preparations, when made in each region, express an infallible connection to the *terroir* of that specific place. As biodynamic farmers, we are cultivating a unique ecosystem fostered by the innate biodiversity of each distinct region. We begin with the natural rhythm that already exists and finesse it to produce human food alongside rich biodiversity.

Biodynamics is a reorientation of agriculture to its primary purpose—not commerce, but life. Anthroposophy is not a fanatical movement, nor is it an iconoclastic movement. As Steiner says, we need cow horns to make the biodynamic preparations, but we do not need to be “bull-headed” about it. Only what is directly inimical to life should be rejected. What is useful and can remain fruitful for human flourishing should be retained. In a word, Steiner's suggestion of a humane economy harmonizes well with E. F. Schumacher's concept of “appropriate technology” in his idea of Buddhist economics outlined in *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. Whether this integrates with Steiner's more esoteric Christian approach to problems, as proposed in his *Threefold Social Order*, one needs only to recall how Schumacher himself said it might have been called Christian economics—but then no one would have taken him seriously. Biodynamics is not about

shifting a local economy to become dependent on others but rather about empowering individual spaces and communities to be ever more food- and energy-independent. After all, food is the primary form of human energy. Nurturing the human capacity for freedom through agriculture and nutrition is at the heart of biodynamics. Biodynamics aims not at reinventing the wheel but restoring whatever happens to be missing to otherwise sustainable farming practices. As such, biodynamics is not a complete system, nor does it particularly propose to be. Biodynamics is *added* to sound farming practices as an “appropriate technology” that can be produced within the limits of a diversified farm. The ideas of biodynamics are free to all. The spiritual world holds no patents on thoughts. You don’t have to be clairvoyant to put ideas to the test.

Properly utilized, the biodynamic preparations help farmers worldwide become freer from expensive inputs. While the ingredients for the various preparations may seem obscure, these were intentionally drawn from easily sourced materials on the farms of Steiner’s day. Offal and weeds—that’s all the preparations are made from. And, it should be remembered, Steiner said virtually all of the biodynamic herbs could easily be replaced—with the possible exception of Stinging Nettles (*Urtica dioica*). Does this mean that Stinging Nettles *doesn’t* have a suitable substitute, or is it not *easily* found? On this question, more research is merited.

Most of the biodynamic herbs are weeds that grow easily throughout the world, and ruminant offal can be found anywhere animals are processed. While the biodynamic preparations may seem odd, their ingredients were intended to be made from ready-at-hand materials within the limits of a diversified, sustainable farm. Though the reason for the combination of a particular flower with a particular animal membrane may seem obscure, they are meant to restore qualities that have been depleted and to do so without requiring outside inputs. It is almost as if the flowers and the sheaths “rhyme” in a

suprasensory way, though we don't have to be able to hear their concordance to use them and see results.

The revolutionary significance of biodynamics is that farmers do not need to import nearly as many synthetic fertilizers to produce nutrient-dense food. If we were to wed biodynamics with sound farming practices, farms could become nitrogen independent, learning to inhale more of what they need directly from the atmosphere itself.

The late Alex Podolinsky's work with farmers demonstrates the power of biodynamics on large swaths of land without any synthetic fertilizers. This is done by suitable deep-ripping with a subsoiler, diverse cover cropping, rotational grazing, *plus* the biodynamic preparations. Podolinsky discusses his process extensively in his three-volume set of *Bio-Dynamic Introductory Lectures*, encouraging us to imagine humus not as a material substance but as a "living process" of many things transforming into many other things. "There is no 'permanent' humus. Humus exists only at the height of a PROCESS of continuous becoming. That is, *in status nascendi*. 'Permanent' humus would be dead material."³ It is as if humus is not a single compound but a dynamic nexus where a collective process of ongoing transformation is sustained. Potential energy is added to the soil so that plants can express that as kinetic energy in growth forms. Restoring the "etheric" life potential to the soil is like recharging a battery. Depleted soil must be recharged, which Nature might take centuries to restore.

When we seek to re-enliven soil, we seek to restore its inner dynamism so that it is not dead dirt but a nexus where the intersection between earth and cosmos weave in an intimate and ongoing exchange. Human beings, at their best, humanize the environment. At our worst, when our cleverness serves mere consumption, we desecrate every landscape we touch. But when we use technology

3 Alex Podolinsky, *Living Agriculture*, p. 8.

judiciously while remaining open to life from above, we may become “wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”

The torchbearers for biodynamic work are relatively few and far between. Some tend the flame for a short period, others for a lifetime. Rudolf Steiner instructed Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, who brought biodynamics to North America. Pfeiffer taught Josephine Porter, and Josephine Porter passed her mantle to Hugh Courtney (1932–2020). Hugh Courtney founded the Josephine Porter Institute in 1985. He began *Applied Biodynamics* in 1992 as a quarterly newsletter for the Josephine Porter Institute.

The following collection of articles is from *Applied Biodynamics*, which blossomed into more than a newsletter. These articles were assembled primarily by Hugh Courtney as examples of some of his favorite pieces from his time overseeing *Applied Biodynamics*. Additional pieces have been selected for the purpose of filling in gaps in practical knowledge around making all the biodynamic preparations. There are many books on biodynamics, and this book is not intended to replace any of them. Instead, these articles are meant to disclose the *practical* side of biodynamics more than the theoretical aspects. This introduction is intended to provide some familiarity with the conceptual terrain from which biodynamics grows for anyone seeking to explore the spiritual wellspring that gives rise to the practical articles of *Applied Biodynamics*.

For those seeking a broader theoretical context for biodynamics, it is almost impossible to imagine biodynamics without the writings of Goethe, specifically *The Metamorphosis of Plants*. I would venture so far as to say that Steiner is almost inconceivable without Goethe, and biodynamics is almost unthinkable without *The Metamorphosis of Plants*. There is more packed into the little *Metamorphosis* than one might initially suspect—it deserves deep contemplation. As further context for biodynamics, Steiner’s early books concerning Goethe’s scientific work, including *Goethe’s World View* and *Nature’s Open Secret*, are both dense collections of excellent

thoughts. But of all the books Steiner wrote, one held a special place in his heart: *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path: A Philosophy of Freedom* (also translated as *The Philosophy of Freedom: The Basis for a Modern World Conception*). In short, *Intuitive Thinking* is not about a life of mere subjective feeling but rather about how to be a free human being, which is also at the heart of what a biodynamic farm aims to support. As a bit of forewarning to readers, if you find Steiner’s writing difficult, that is normal and even, according to Steiner in his introduction to *Theosophy*, intentional. As a muscle does not develop without resistance—and as astronauts lose muscle mass in outer space—there is an inner capacity you *exercise* by wrestling with difficult passages page by page and sometimes even sentence by sentence. Small weights repeatedly lifted build larger muscles. The effort itself is already a kind of success.⁴

It is reasonable to ask why these medicinal soil remedies are called “preparations.” In the first place, they have to be called something. Still, within the context of Rudolf Steiner’s oeuvre, there are three stages of disciplined spiritual development as articulated in *How to Know Higher Worlds*: 1) preparation, 2) illumination, and 3) initiation. The first preparatory stage lays the foundation for receptivity to luminosity from above, providing the basis of initiation. If a room is dark because a window is obscured, you must first remove the blockage so the light can stream in and *then* you can see new creative ways to use your free initiative within the freshly illuminated space. As St. Thomas Aquinas says, “The reality of things is their light.”⁵

Consider the analogy of learning to ride a bicycle. First, you might work with training wheels, striving to develop a sense of equipoise;

4 “This book cannot be read the way people ordinarily read books in this day and age. In some respects, its readers will have to work their way through each page and even each single sentence the hard way. This was done deliberately; it is the only way this book can become what it is intended to be for the reader. Simply reading it through is as good as not reading it at all. The spiritual scientific truths it contains must be *experienced*; that is the only way they can be of value” (Steiner, introduction to *Theosophy*).

5 Commentary to *Liber de causis* 1,6,

then you practice (and fail repeatedly) trying to balance on your own until finally there is that magical eureka moment where it *clicks*. The preparatory training wheels give way to illumination by the new capacity, which in turn delivers an initiation into a new kind of freedom theretofore impossible.

Biodynamics, as such, provides *preparations* for the soil so that the plant and farm “organism” can be more receptive to light from above and be initiated into freedom. The preparations help root the plant into properly enlivened soil and improve photosynthesis, which in turn improves the nutrient content of fruits and vegetables and enhances the carbon sequestration activity performed by cover crops.

The ideal of any farm is to provide as much of its own fertility needs as possible from within its own resources—to be free from external economic compulsion. As such, the biodynamic preparations are just that: *preparatory*. The biodynamic preparations do not replace sensible farming practices. They are not a panacea. Someone living an irregular and unethical life but incorporating sporadic spiritual exercises cannot expect to make much progress. Similarly, someone applying the biodynamic preparations on top of unsound farming practices cannot expect good results. When negligent people use biodynamics, they may claim that biodynamic preparations “don’t work” when it is the farm itself that was already not working. But if the preparations are used in combination with sensible farming, biodynamics empowers plants to be themselves and, by extension, facilitates a greater capacity for human beings to be themselves.

Steiner’s destiny, by his own account, was originally to compose a book of “peasant wisdom,” though he said he instead took on another man’s destiny to edit Goethe’s work. We should consider his words seriously because I do not think he failed to fulfill his destiny. What else is the biodynamic impulse but the fully embodied expression of this kind of peasant wisdom in a practical form? Despite its relationship to his destiny, Steiner did not seek out speaking on agriculture. He was nearly coerced to give these lectures when the son of Count

Keyserlingk showed up at Steiner's door and refused to leave without a commitment from him to speak on agriculture. Steiner complements the Keyserlingk family as having an "iron will." Steiner even traveled (against his physician Dr. Ita Wegman's recommendations) to offer this humble flower out of the anthroposophic impulse, which contains the rarefied destiny he had suppressed for so long.

Steiner gave the course (published as *Agriculture*) in Koberwitz, Silesia (in what is now part of Poland), in 1924. He died the next year. One might almost say that biodynamics is Steiner's swan song.⁶ The main audience of the original agriculture course was not farmers, and Steiner expected attendees to be familiar with the contents of his books, *Theosophy* and its sequel, *An Outline of Esoteric Science*. Neither are easy books, so if you find *Agriculture Course* confounding, it should be considered the third book of a demanding trilogy. Those seeking the broader context of biodynamics may risk exploring it, but for the rest of us who want to put ideas to *work* now, the following collection of articles is for you.

My relationship with biodynamics began by pestering Hugh Courtney with countless questions. While he did direct me to other resources, he primarily recommended that I attend his hands-on practicum that fall, where he would instruct a small group of gardeners, farmers, and other friends of the earth to make the biodynamic preparations. I didn't make it the first year I was corresponding with him, but I did the next year and for the last seven years of his life. Everything was new. It was hard to imagine that this could end and almost harder to imagine that it had ever begun. By the end of each day, I was exhausted in body and soul. Just trying to assimilate all the newness was overwhelming. But I returned year after year, and the process integrated as a conscious part of me. But with familiarity, even something as unusual as stuffing manure in horns or oak bark

6 For historical context on the lectures themselves, *The Agriculture Course Koberwitz, Whitsun 1924* by Peter Selg, and *The Birth of a New Agriculture* by Adalbert von Keyserlingk are both valuable resources.

into skulls can seem ordinary, obvious even. How easily we forget the miracle of life and how unnecessary, and therefore free, it is! Once I grasped the external process, I understood *how* to make these unusual preparations, but I still didn't understand *why* they were made like this.

It took me many years—over a decade—to begin to have a living appreciation for the biodynamic preparations. It was not until reading Jakob Böhme's work, specifically *The Aurora*, that the "life processes" behind the scenes in biodynamics began to germinate in me. *The Aurora* is an extended, repetitive "seed meditation" for those willing to undertake the exercise. Some may recognize elements from Steiner's seed and plant meditations in *How to Know Higher Worlds*. It was through Böhme's work that Steiner's *Theosophy* finally became unlocked.⁷ Before the living experience of the world in Böhme, everything else had been blind grasping, like a raccoon "washing" its food in water—I had only been feeling out the shape of the preparations with external questions grounded in the blindness of mere sensory experience. But since the preparations are drawn from suprasensory ideas, no amount of external skepticism can illuminate a single spiritual idea. Merely external questioning is akin to grasping a locked box but with a blindfold covering your eyes: with enough attentiveness to what your fingers are sensing, you can still evoke a fairly clear inner image of what you are sensing in your hands—the *gestalt* of the object. Owen Barfield calls this approach "dashboard knowledge" in *Saving the Appearances*—like a child who climbs into a vehicle and starts pushing buttons, we can get external results without knowing anything about how the inner operations of the world actually work. Even if we become proficient at driving a car, that does not mean we have the knowledge to repair the engine if something goes wrong.

7 As I later discovered, Steiner himself says, "One needs only to know Paracelsus and Jacob Boehme to know theosophy. Everything that they wrote is given from a deep spring, with immense deepness and magic power" (Steiner, Berlin, May 3, 1906).

Look at our environment today; it's hard to say that something hasn't gone wrong, but the kind of thinking that broke the world is not going to repair it. Superficial knowledge only goes skin deep. To this point, Gary Lachman quotes Saint-Martin in *Caretakers of the Cosmos*, saying, "The proof that we are regenerated is that we regenerate everything around us."⁸ If we wish to heal the world, we have to restore invisible qualities in the soil and in our own souls.

The good news is that just because I cannot see something does *not* mean that everyone else is blind to the same thing. Thankfully, the fruits of esoteric insights from those with insights into the invisible world may be communicated with the rest of us, and they can be put into immediate practice by absolutely anyone. We do not have to be clairvoyant to be sensible practical farmers, though Steiner did suggest in *Agriculture Course* that a farmer's intimate relationship with animals and plants has an innate tendency to produce *clairsentience*—clear and objective senses, which are the prerequisite to what Goethe called "exact sensorial imagination." Steiner did not suggest that farmers have any natural tendency toward mystical clairvoyance—clear sight into spiritual worlds—but rather that farming tends to produce clear, practical objective *sensing* in any attentive farmer. If we are not objective about what we're sensing, any inner image we produce from that sensory experience will be distorted. But the attentive farmer tends to look closely and pay attention to the sights, sounds, and smells of life—because the livelihood of a farmer depends on it. There is no room for mere abstract philosophical speculation, guesswork, or expensive gambles when your livelihood depends on maintaining healthy living beings.

Unlike academia, where errors can go unchecked and yet a tenured professor retains his or her salary, a farmer's relationship to feedback from the world of practical action is direct and costly. Over time, a farmer develops a cautious, conservative temperament because

8 Lachman, *Caretakers of the Cosmos*, p. 104.

the profit margin in farming is so narrow. This gives what Steiner calls the “gruff exterior” of the farmer, yet inwardly they’re inclined toward a deep tolerance for others. “If it works for you, go for it!” tends to be the seasoned farmer’s attitude toward his neighbors.

Hugh made preparations for longer than my lifespan. During that time, he learned to evaluate when a preparation was good or bad, with often little more than a glance. This objective sensory capacity approached the *clairsentience* that Steiner suggests would arise in daily practical work with living things. This doesn’t mean that Hugh’s conclusions drawn from his clear-eyed senses were necessarily always right. Steiner himself said that a normal, intelligent human being may correct a clairvoyant, and Hugh would never have claimed special insight into the spiritual world. Though not a farmer, Hugh Courtney learned to make quality biodynamic preparations from practical experience.

One of the first things that told me that there was something to the biodynamic preparations wasn’t their effectiveness on the soil—though that also proved itself valuable—but rather my own attempts to make them. I failed to produce anything but a smelly mess: this impressed upon me that there were indeed quality standards. And if there were quality standards, there was something valuable at work here, something more to strive toward. If my first attempts at making biodynamic preparations had succeeded easily with no need for careful attention, I would have had reason to doubt the value of biodynamics altogether. Because I made bad preparations, I knew there must also be good preparations and went out in search of them.

Hugh Courtney’s favorite preparations were the oak bark preparation and the horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) fermented decoction. For the oak bark preparation, he insisted on using fresh heads to remain as much as possible “within the realm of the living,” as Steiner recommends in *Agriculture Course*.

During one of my last visits to Hugh’s farm, he conscripted me to drive his old tractor down the steep muddy hill in Woolwine,

Virginia, to his burial site for the oak bark skulls. Now, I live on flatland and did not want to drive this machine with bad brakes in the rain on slippery clay. I had no experience driving a heavy tractor on steep inclines, but Hugh insisted because no one else there was familiar with riding a tractor—or no one else spoke up, that is. Hugh walked in the evening of his life with a cane, but he took a brisk pace down the hill in front of the tractor. As we entered a wooded area, the tractor tires began to slip on mud and leaves. Hugh never turned back to see if the tractor was about to barrel into him. The man walked like someone who knew he couldn't die until it was time to die. I, on the other hand, was tense and poised to turn the wheel and crash into the nearest tree instead of running over Hugh. Those minutes on that slope feel much longer, in my recollection, but we made it to the bottom safely.

One of the last things Hugh Courtney told me during my final visit was, “The next generation needs to take over biodynamics now.” This was in the fall of 2019, barely half a year before he crossed the threshold. It was at this final workshop that he handed over the oak bark preparation and asked me to teach the attendees. For a number of years, I resisted taking up the responsibility of helping produce biodynamic preparations. Hugh had warned me against the complexities of working with the Josephine Porter Institute and even more ominously that “biodynamics accelerates karma.” But it was already too late.

Hugh liked to remind attendees of his workshops that, “Biodynamics is *not* an intellectual path. Biodynamics is a path of the *will*.” As such, working from the outside inward, biodynamics begins with practical work, which gradually transforms inner feeling, which then transmutes thought. From that transfigured way of thinking, new feelings arise, and new actions are conceived. This is the obverse to many other initiatic approaches, even within anthroposophy, which has a tendency to begin with the head and hopes that having the right thoughts leads to the right actions. However, as we are embodied

beings—sometimes it makes a greater difference to take practical steps first and let the inner transformation follow.

Biodynamics begins with the hands, moves to the heart, and culminates with the head. I've said this many times before, but the greatest effect the biodynamic preparations have is not on the farm, though that is not insignificant, but rather *on the farmer*. Combining things that, by chance, would never be united, transforms the imagination. The practice of making the biodynamic preparations with your own hands creates new pathways and thereby opens up new possibilities for free expression. It's not a tangible change at first, but, before long, new possibilities begin to disclose themselves that previously were never conceived. Before long, you, yourself, are transfigured.

I had been asked to join the board of the Josephine Porter Institute but declined. Later, I accepted a small media manager role working with *Applied Biodynamics*, but I am writing now as the creative director of the Josephine Porter Institute as of 2023, whose role is expanding the reach of biodynamics, working with our board of directors, assisting our farm manager with maintaining and improving biodynamic preparation quality, coordinating research, and facilitating the actualization of the biodynamic ideal of the self-sufficient organism at the farm at the Josephine Porter Institute. Hugh saw the purpose of biodynamics as fundamentally spiritual and oriented toward human freedom; and this is the reason we undertake the task of healing the earth.

The following set of articles from *Applied Biodynamics* introduces readers to some of the basics of making the biodynamic preparations. These articles were compiled primarily by Hugh Courtney himself as examples of some of his favorite articles during his time overseeing *Applied Biodynamics*. However, some additional articles were selected to supply fullness to this collection. What is discussed in these articles is not the only way to make preparations successfully, but it is, for the most part, Hugh's way of doing so. Some people have undoubtedly made more preparations, while others have made

preparations longer. Still, there is no one I know of in North America who has made as many preparations *and* for as long a time as Hugh Courtney. Though Hugh had many students, and his light passed to many other candles, The Josephine Porter Institute for Applied Biodynamics continues to nurture a special heart of this sacred flame born out of practical anthroposophy and love for the world.

Even toward the end of his life here, if you asked Hugh a question, he would likely give a non-answer like, “Let me know what you find out.” As frustrating as that can be for a neophyte seeking ready-made answers, it deflected people’s focus away from him and back to the work at hand. I suspect Hugh often knew more answers than he shared. But as muscles only grow with resistance, Hugh did not shy away from making you wrestle with biodynamics by having you test it yourself. As such, I will direct you to the work remaining ahead of you.

It is my earnest prayer that the following articles provide the reader with sufficient technical know-how to begin to learn how to make quality preparations yourself and to remember we do this so *that the earth may be healed*.