USING OUR HEARTS TO CALM OUR MINDS IN NATURE

By Lea Tran, Horticultural Therapist at The Guelph Enabling Garden, and friend of Bridges-Over-Barriers

We all have places that are dear to our hearts, places that give us a sense of peace and well-being. Working in The Guelph Enabling Garden, I often hear people comment that being in such a garden, and appreciating its beauty, makes them feel calm and relaxed, especially after a mentally or emotionally exhausting day. In other words, after too much thinking and worrying!

What is it exactly about nature that makes us feel so peaceful? What changes must occur in us so that we are able to interact with nature to benefit from and to fully appreciate what it has to offer? Perhaps there are ways to enter into a state of being while we are in a natural environment to significantly lessen the stress and anxiety that we might feel on a daily basis.

During the last Bridges-Over-Barriers meeting, the group discussed how we might be able to quiet our anxious minds by consciously focusing on our sense perceptions, and also on our hearts to communicate with and feel more interconnected with plants and nature. Stephen Harrod Buhner’s book *The Secret Teachings of Plants* goes into detail about how the heart can be used as a reliable organ of perception.

Many friends at the meeting agreed that being outdoors on a farm, at a lake, park, or garden gives rise to more positive feelings because of the ability to interact with more natural smells and sounds. Kevin R. mentioned that although he doesn’t enjoy *all* natural smells, seeing things in nature makes him feel connected to the world. Kevin V. said that he notices the “peace and freshness of nature. [He] feel[s] alive, and at the same time, relaxed.”

This last comment by Kevin reminded me about the connection between our states of mind and the body. Whenever we focus our consciousness on an external object in nature using our senses; on our breathing; or on our hearts, our cardiac cycle slows down and our pupils dilate (Buhner 2004,
The ultimate effect on the body is a relaxed feeling due to a reduction in the release of stress hormones, and an increase in adrenal gland hormones that are associated with a sense of well-being (Buhner 2004, pg. 101).

John MD and Sara mentioned that they feel a spiritual connection when they are in nature, and I am wondering if this is because they are communicating with nature through their hearts.

According to Buhner, in the proper state of mind and being, humans and plants can communicate with each other. Some ancient native ancestors from different parts of the world are familiar with this form of communication as they claim to have learned about the uses of plants from the plants themselves rather from scientific experiments in a lab (Buhner 2004, pg. 2).

How can this be? How can we possibly communicate with plants without talking to them? Believe it or not, we are always extracting meaning from the environment through the interactions of energy frequencies that each person and thing gives off. All living things communicate by means of electrical and magnetic signals as they go about their everyday activities, emitting their own unique energy field that extends beyond their form (Buhner 2004, pg. 86).

How do we hear? From sound waves of a certain frequency hitting our ear drums and communicating that information to our brains. How do we smell, see, touch, and taste? It is because our bodies understand the non-verbal language of energy waves coming from the world around us. And since we are also a part of this world, we too are giving off signals that others can sense without us even opening our mouths.

So why would focusing on our hearts be so important when communing with nature? Stillman states that the “higher order of logic and understanding of the multisensory human originates in the heart” (Stillman 2006, pg. 23). The heart produces an electromagnetic field that is stronger than that of the brain (Buhner 2004, pg. 86). When the heart’s energy field is in close proximity with another energy field, they affect each other to
produce a unique field containing new meaning and frequencies that Buhner says humans experience as emotions (Buhner 2004, pg. 92).

If the electromagnetic field of our heart changes, our state of being is greatly affected (Buhner 2004, pg. 71). Changes in our heart field can affect the frequency at which electrical waves are produced as our heart beats (Buhner 2004, pg. 90). Cardiac waves work in coherence with the flow of blood, carrying oxygen, chemicals, and important information to all cells in the body, including those in the brain that affect our physiological well-being, cognitive abilities and emotions (Buhner 2004, pg. 71).

A wonderful thing about our heart is that it doesn’t judge, or worry about the past or future. Our analytical minds do these things more than enough for us! Placing consciousness on our hearts creates a feeling of harmony and interconnectedness as non-verbal communication occurs between living things (Tolle 2005, pg. 26). This is when it is apparent that the intelligence of our bodies is inseparable from all living things on Earth (Tolle 2005, pg. 195).

When we focus on our mind and it is not peaceful, we easily feel anxious because most times our emotions are the result of our hearts responding to what we are thinking (Tolle 2005, pg. 132), rather than what we are perceiving directly from nature (Buhner 2004, pg 150). When we observe a situation and respond with our mental interpretation of it, we place attention on our analytical mind so that our brain waves affect the energy field of our heart (our emotions) (Buhner 2004, pg. 105). The mind is good at thinking about the meaning of an object or situation in an analytical manner, isolating and separating it into parts, and so feelings of isolation and separation easily arise in the thinker.

So, in order to more accurately learn about nature and its benefits, we should do so directly, through our hearts. Just like people, plants also have an energy field, and both can interact with each other so that a connection on an energetic/spiritual level is possible (Tolle 2005, pg. 5). Since a perturbation in our heart’s energy field can be experienced as an emotion that gives rise to a release of hormones that affect our physiology and sense of well-being (Buhner 2004, pg. 101), communicating with plants in
this way can heal us emotionally, spiritually, and physically (Cowan 1995, pg. 33).

During our Bridges meeting, we were fortunate enough to have nice weather and so were able to spend some time outdoors in the Ignatius Courtyard Garden. I introduced an exercise based on suggestions in Buhner’s book that might help us to focus on our senses, including our sense of well-being using our hearts.

Sara picked a plant in the courtyard that she found attractive and we all gathered around it. She chose the plant Echinacea, a tall medicinal plant with pretty pink petals and a stiff bristly centre.

I introduced the concept of the exercise, encouraging folks to try it on their own later in a more private and quiet place in nature. The exercise involves focusing on a plant using each of our senses, and then focusing on our heart’s energy field using a visualization technique.

In the company of friends, John MD was able to enjoy good emotions using his sense of sight. Andrew B. also appreciated the plant’s beauty with his eyes and could “feel the colour in [his] heart”. Ken M. also used his eyes to observe the plant’s qualities, its interaction with the wind, and how nicely it fit in with the rest of the garden. The plant invited Ken “to enjoy looking at it.”

Kevin V felt a special connection with the plant:
“I feel joy because the plant has such beautiful flowers, and I feel it in my stomach. I like the sound of the wind whistling through the trees. I see the beautiful rosy petals and the green leaves and the graceful stems. With my skin, I feel the leaves are rough and raspy and the centre is like a burr. What is it? [Seed]. I feel the energy of the plants as a force of greens and blues, and I feel this in my centre near my stomach. The [pink] colour of the petals is different from the energy forces. I love being here in the garden and it loves people looking at it and staying with it. I feel that the plants and I are friends and that we feel the presence of God in our midst.”
Later when back indoors in the meeting room, Kevin V shared more: “Autistics have ESP to a higher degree than other people. This gives us a uniqueness that is special and valuable. We have awareness of the feelings and moods of people and animals and plants....Plants have awareness of thirst and cutting. They emit sounds and colours like an aura. All of creation throbs with smells and colours and sounds. Even stones have sensory emissions but theirs are muted.”

Nature has a lot to teach us, and we can learn a lot by opening up our hearts. I encourage folks to try again and again to connect with nature using their whole bodies to perceive communications from the environment. It will take a lot of practice, but perhaps we will get better and better at calming our minds when we focus on the beauty around us. I hope you will be able to visit The Guelph Enabling Garden at the next Bridges meeting to try it yet again. I look forward to hearing about all of your experiences.

References:


