

Have you heard ofthe Doctrine of Signatures?

Contributed by Julie Hand

We all know that nature is wondrous, immensely powerful, and beautiful. But how many of us realise how intricately and intimately connected everything is – from the planets, through to us humans, through to plant life – and also how straightforward this connection really is.

The Doctrine of Signatures is almost like our road map to living on planet earth. It is the most amazing philosophy of nature, which shows us how earth and sky are truly connected. Have you ever thought about how, in springtime, the ground is covered in predominantly yellow flowers? The Doctrine of Signatures says this is like nature's signpost pointing out to us that we should eat yellow foods. Yellow foods largely act on the liver and kidneys – the ‘flushing’ systems of our body and, according to Ayurveda, it is exactly this flushing of the system that is required in the Spring to help rid our bodies of toxic build-up during the winter months. In autumn we see red berries and fruits around us ……and it is red foods that are full to the brim with the healthy anti-oxidants we need to bolster up our system before winter. How clever is that?? No guessing required, the signs are all around us in nature. Looking further, rhubarb leaves are known to have properties which protect and heal the gut – and if you look at a rhubarb leaf – or the leaf of any plant in the rhubarb family – its markings resemble the interior lining of the human bowel. The leaves of the Wild Yam resemble a uterus in shape…and the vegetable is renowned for its ability to balance oestrogen levels in women. I could go on….but I think this is a journey you may want to take for yourself. I'm sure you won't look at plants or trees in the same way again!!The Doctrine of Signatures is a concept I really know very little about. I don't even know who coined the phrase and I can't recall where I first read about it. But it is increasingly coming to my attention and is sufficiently awesome that I wanted to at least share the basics with you in the hope that others may come forward and fill in the details???Key to this knowledge is Rudolf Steiner, the prominent visionary who was consulted on agriculture by the newly created biodynamic movement back in the 1920's. His approach offered a view of life that reconnected the earth and the cosmos – and his inspirational teachings went beyond agriculture, encompassing medicine, nutrition, education and much more into his spiritual world-view. Each planet in our solar system has its own force field, and each planet can be seen in every part of the zodiac at some point, so the earth can be pictured as being surrounded by these seven force fields. Steiner believed that the pattern of a leaf spiral and the positioning of the leaf around the stem indicates which planetary force field the plant is reacting to. So we can see that plants and planets correspond closely. If we know the properties of the planet we can understand the properties of the plant. It is a healing art which has been largely lost – but just the knowledge of it is enough to bring us to a place where we can see the world just in the leaf of a plant – and see the wisdom of nature in its shape.It is HUGE and yet so simple… Having only read about these concepts a matter of months ago I am now looking at nature around me in a whole new light – knowing that the shape of the plant leaf, the colour of a plant, its markings, its growth pattern, any of these signs, are reminders of our connection with the sky and with the earth. We are all bound in a magnificent WHOLE – and it makes my heart sing. I also cannot bring myself to plant or re-pot my growing vegetables unless we are in the phase of the waning moon. Plant life responds to the phases of the moon - to its ebb and flow - and when the moon is descending from full, the sap of the plant also descends towards the root, enabling the plant to quickly anchor itself in the earth. Conversely as the moon waxes and ascends, so the sap of the plant flows upwards, filling the leaves and shoots with vitality.Our current climate is increasingly one of backlash against mechanistic cultivation and exploitation of the soil. And against this backdrop the bio-dynamic philosophy of planting in harmony with the cosmos and integrating crops to maximise insect life, pollination and soil health is experiencing a new lease of life and understanding. I firmly believe that we need to re-learn these ‘old ways’ and re-connect with ALL THAT IS. What I am learning from the Doctrine of Signatures is that all the knowledge we need for our health and well being is out there in nature, waiting in glorious technicolor for us to use and benefit from.Like you I am on a journey of discovery but if you want to find out more I would suggest searching references to Steiner, bio-dynamics, spirit plant medicine and other related subjects.Enjoy the journey …….

Julie Hand 2009My personal journey over recent months is taking me back to the soil. And in a bid to get closer to the rhythms of the earth and understand more about my connection with it I have been led to biodynamics. It is a concept which emphasises the importance of planting and growing in tune with the sun, the moon, the elements and the cosmos as a whole. It emphasises the importance of the soil and how we need to nourish and cultivate it in order for us to grow foods which will in turn nourish our bodies. Julie is a Yoga teacher (BWY) and Reiki practitioner. She has been teaching for 6 years and is now working specifically with the breath as a tool for transformation and relaxation.