

# BEE *medicine power.....*



*..... known as messengers between the material and spirit worlds, bees have long been symbols of abundance and happiness, and models of tireless industry for the benefit of the family and community. Their hive is an architectural inspiration and their devotion to the next generation of their kind, unquestionable ....*

 Bees recycle nectar and pollen by repeatedly regurgitating and dehydrating it

 To make 1lb of honey, workers in a hive fly 55,000 miles and tap two million flowers

 In a single trip, a worker will visit 50-100 flowers and will return to the hive carrying over half her weight in pollen and nectar

 A hive can make and store 2lb of honey a day; 35lbs of honey gives enough energy for a colony to survive the winter

 The energy in 1oz of honey would provide one bee with enough energy to fly around the world

 China, the top honey-producer, processed more than 140,000 metric tons of honey in 1997

Bees are evocative of the summer landscape; the faint ceaseless background buzz of insects can sometimes swell as a bee passes slowly by, on the persistent search for nectar.

We may get a glimpse of the yellow bundles on their hind legs that are the pollen-filled sacks that play a vital part in fertilising our own food crops.

And if we follow the sound, we can discover tiny insignificant flowers hidden in the undergrowth, or within the leafy branches of trees that the bee has homed in on, driven by the ceaseless search for nectar.

This intimate association with the heady scents of flowers, sunny weather and of course, the

delicious - and health-giving - properties of honey, ensure bees' traditional folklore connection with the delighting of the senses, including sexual potency and attraction.

While foraging for nectar and pollen, bees inadvertently transfer pollen from the male to the female components of flowers.

Each year, bees pollinate 95 crops worth an estimated \$10 billion in the U.S. alone. All told, insect pollinators contribute to one-third of the world's diet.

Bees can accurately describe the location, quality, and quantity of a food source to their hivemates through dances and sounds.

Honey bee language was one of

the first to be studied and interpreted by scientists.

Bee-keeping has been regarded as a mystical occupation for many centuries, and bees are said to attend the deaths and funerals of bee-keepers who have treated them well. One example in recent years tells of a swarm that arrived on the morning of an elderly bee-keeper's funeral and settled on the wall of a house opposite to hers. When the funeral was over they flew away.

This reputed familiarity with the portal of death has given rise to many folklore traditions, including 'telling the bees' - a way to relay messages to deceased friends and relatives.

## *Ancient Bee Wisdom*

In Egypt bees were known as the 'tears of Ra', the sun-god, and the hieroglyphic symbol of a bee was also a symbol of Lower Egypt.

For the Egyptians, bees represented death and rebirth, the bees re-appearing miraculously each year; they were also associated with the soul, as their swarms flew up into the sky. And so honey played an important part in offerings to the gods.

From Hindu tradition, the bee above a triangle is a symbol of the

god Shiva, and a blue bee is sometimes shown on the forehead of Krishna, as the avatar of Vishnu.

The Hindu god of love, Kama, targets his 'victims' with a bow and arrow and his bow string is made up of bees. Love arrives with a sting in its tail!

In the practices of yoga, the sound made in meditation for the lowest chakra (our strongest energy bond to the physical world) is a hum that sounds like a bumblebee.

For the ancient Greeks, the bee

represented the soul and indeed, the second temple built at Delphi was reputed to be built by the bees. Throughout the Mediterranean region bees are a symbol of Spring, for they re-appear with the blooming of the early flowers of the gorse that heralds that season.



## A NEW GENERATION

During the mating flight several drones will deposit upwards of 90 million sperm in the queen's oviducts. The queen, however, will not use all the sperm. She stores about seven million sperm in a special pouch, the spermatheca.

In one day a queen can lay her weight in eggs. She will lay one egg per minute, day and night, for a total of 1,500 eggs over a 24-hour period and 200,000 eggs in a year. Should she stop her frantic egg-laying pace, her workers will move a recently laid egg into a queen cell to produce her replacement.

Worker honey bees select which fertilized eggs to brood in queen or worker cells but the queen decides the sex of her young through a mechanism of sex determination known as haplodiploidy, ensuring that fertilized eggs become female offspring, while unfertilized eggs become males.

## THE STING OF THE BEE

On the end of the bee's abdomen is its stinger which it uses as a defensive weapon. The honey bee's stinger has barbs on it, so that once it has been stuck into an animal's skin it stays there, which enables the attached venom pouch to pump a chemical mixture containing melittin, histamine, and other enzymes into the victim.

When the bee pulls away the barbs still anchor the stinger in the target's body so the retreating bee tears the stinger and the venom pouch out of its own body. This gives the bee a mortal wound and it soon dies.

However, when a honey bee stings another insect rather than an animal, such as a honey-plundering moth, it does not leave its stinger planted in the invader. As it retreats from the insect victim, its barbed stinger tears through the insect's exoskeleton.

Bees wings beat over 11,000 cycles per minute and their flight speed averages only 15mph

In rain, bees shelter, as their flight muscles can chill so much that they cannot fly



While bees cannot recognize the colour red, they do see ultra-violet colors.

Bees possess five eyes: the three *ocelli* are simple eyes to measure light intensity; each of the two large compound eyes contain about 6,900 facets and are used for detecting movement up to 1/300th of a second.



*'A swarm of bees in May,  
Is worth a load of hay.  
A swarm of bees in June,  
Is worth a silver spoon.  
A swarm of bees in July,  
Isn't worth a fly.'*

traditional rhyme



# on the Path of Pollen

**SIMON BUXTON**

describes his personal initiation and discoveries following the 'Way of the Bee', a path of wisdom that can be traced back to ancient Egyptian practices

It is rarely disputed that the bee is our most ancient ally. They have been on the Earth since the Cenozoic period, which amounts to some 55 million years, and if we look at the surviving images from the civilisations of Old Europe, we discover that, next to serpents, bees are the creatures most often depicted.

There are certain things that the serpent and the bee have in common; both live in small, dark places, both carry venom and both issue forth from the hole at certain seasons of the year.

But whereas serpents might be depicted as symbols of either 'good' or 'evil', bees were almost always regarded as beneficent.

## **KEEPERS OF KNOWLEDGE**

In my mid-twenties I was introduced to a small group of men and women who work with an indefinably ancient, vibrant and entirely shamanic body of work regarding and revolving around the honey-bee and the hive.

This group was largely made up of those of Eastern European extraction, although they were headed by a Welshman, whose formal title within this bee cultus was the 'Bee Master'. Over time I would come to know this Bee Master well, serving a formal apprenticeship with him that lasted thirteen years.

He was a man who has been described in various ways by those who knew him, perhaps most accurately as being 'a poet with an axe'.

His thoughts were crystal clear and diamond hard, and yet within him there was room for considerable magic and wonder.

Bee Master headed this small group of practitioners of hive wisdom; men and women who were custodians of an ancient initiatory path proceeding from both historical succession and contemporary vision.

## **BEE INITIATION**

The primary initiation into the tradition involves receiving multiple stings by bees on certain parts of the face, neck and body. This painful and stressful initiation induces a threshold experience in the apprentice that brings about a



move from his or her known, habitual world into the world of the hive.

The combined impact of the bee venom, the power and prayers of the senior bee shaman, and the considerable psychic tension present, induces in the apprentice a rebirth into the hive itself.

This in turn initiates a symbiotic relationship with the honey-bee, which - if successful - is never broken.

Over countless millennia bee shamans have mapped out the application of bee venom, and use the bee sting much in the way that needles are used by the traditional acupuncturist. Indeed, to this day in China it is still possible to find a small number of acupuncturists who dip their needles into bee venom before inserting them; this may represent a tentative link to the largely unexplored shamanic roots of Chinese acupuncture and the bee cultus itself.

Yet unlike acupuncture, where one is largely working with pre-defined meridians, the bee shaman operates in concert with the wisdom of the hive-mind and is in large part guided by this wisdom in the placement of the sting and venom.

### TOOL OF AWARENESS

"There is no honey without sting" as the Bee Master was wont to state, and indeed the initiation experience - as well as being almost indescribably ecstatic and liberating - is also terrifying and potentially dangerous.

Upon its completion I endured a period of nearly a month in which I slipped ceaselessly, and with little control, from one world to another, hitting uncertain and ever fluctuating boundaries of potential psychosis.

There was some small comfort in learning that my response was largely typical and thus broadly expected by the Bee Master, but I was nevertheless watched over carefully during the after-period and housed within a purpose-built structure to anchor and stabilise the experience and my sanity.

Within the bee cultus - known as The Path of Pollen - the bee sting is used not only as a tool for creating altered states of awareness, but also as a therapeutic tool for health and

healing. Its recorded history can be traced back to one of the earliest of the Egyptian papyrus scrolls, the Smith Papyrus, which dates back over three thousand years.

Thus much of my training involved learning how to apply bee stings whilst in communion with the wisdom of the hive, a practice which begins by becoming a humble beekeeper and undertaking the daily and seasonal duties and responsibilities attached to this rewarding past-time.

### LINKING RHYTHM

There are two primary tools used by the bee shaman to assist in their communion and communication with the hive, the first of which might be described as the bee shaman's 'drum'.

To date there has been no archaeological evidence of drums having been used by our British ancestors for religio-magical shamanic work, even within archaeological digs that in all probability would turn up such ceremonial tools, such as peat-bog excavations.

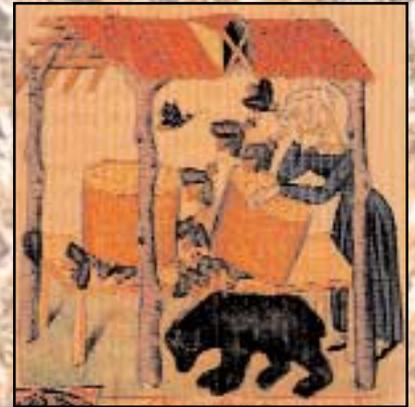
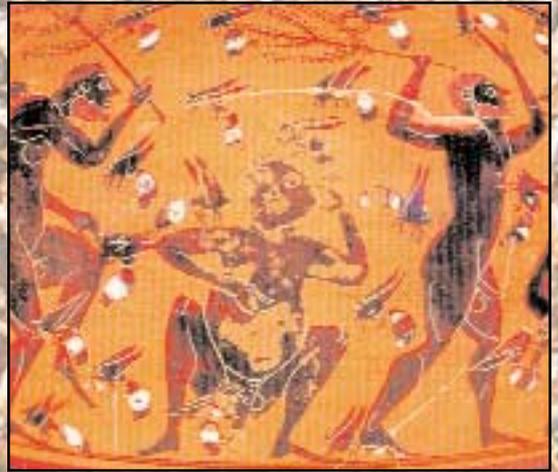
However, within the bee cultus such an instrument is used and is known as the tanging quoit which resembles a small flat frying pan, usually crafted from beaten copper.

The process of 'tanging' - hitting a flat piece of metal - is well known to modern beekeepers, supposedly as a means of subduing bees, but this is largely dismissed as superstition - and rightly so.

In truth, the act of tanging is for the sole benefit of the shaman and not for the bees! Seen through shamanic eyes, tanging has exactly the same function as the shaman's drum when played in a certain monotonous beat of four to seven strikes a second.

It puts the shaman into what Michael Harner has called a 'Shamanic State of Consciousness', and it is in this state that the bee shaman does his work.

Recent studies<sup>1</sup> have shown that shamanic drumming produces changes in the central nervous system and facilitates the production of brain waves in the alpha and theta ranges related to creativity, vivid imagery and states of ecstasy.



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The repetitive sound of the drum is the channel through which shamans travel to other worlds to do their work via the shamanic 'flight' of ecstasy - a term that might have been especially coined for the bee shaman!

A further reason for the tanging was explained to me at the start of my apprenticeship with the Bee Master: "Imagine we get a number of old-fashioned pendulum-type grandfather clocks. Let us hang them on a wall and arrange their

ABOVE: caught in a swarm - decoration found on an ancient Greek amphora.

Collecting honey while a bear cub looks on hopefully, from a 15<sup>th</sup>C manuscript

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pendulums so that they will be beating out of phase with one another. In a day or two, we would discover that all the pendulums would be beating in phase, as if locked together.

The larger the number of clocks, the more stable they will be as a unit and the more difficult to disturb, and if one clock becomes wayward it will be brought back into line very quickly.

So, the tanging will begin to bring you into the same rhythm as those others who walk the Path of Pollen and thus assist in giving you access to the hive".

### PSYCHOTROPIC HONEY

The other tool used within the Path of Pollen for hive communication is that of a visionary honey - a honey that has been derived from the nectar and pollen of plants that are psychotropes. It is a potion which is considered to be the jewel in the crown of the bee shaman's ancient pharmacology and carries certain similarities to the so-called 'flying ointments' of the medieval witch cults.

The plants in particular are a British *Datura* (known as Thorn Apple), *Henbane* (or 'insane' as the Bee Master named it, due to its effect on certain people), and *Belladonna* (Deadly Nightshade). These plants are widely known as being extremely toxic, and if ingested in even minute quantity, can seriously debilitate and cause death. But by allowing the bees to collect the nectar and pollen from these plants and produce the honey, it allows a level of toxicity that is safe to ingest.

As the Bee Master explained to me: "The bees collect the pollen and nectar from these plants, producing a honey that is the ambrosia, the quintessence of the plants, all in a concentration that has not - in living memory at least - killed anyone.

The bees are told of the aspirant who is going to be exposed to the honey for the first time and they collect just enough of the psychotropes that will be needed to bring about the necessary experience; it is their sacred 'prescription'.

A few grains of pollen, a few drops of honey, is all the distance you are between one side and the other side".



the rhythm of tanging has united the community of bee-keepers with the hive from earliest times

At the time I was struck by the extraordinary notion that the bees produced this psychotropic honey, and did so in the exact formula to best serve the apprentice, the bees themselves performing the precise pharmaceutical and energetic operations necessary. This visionary honey is applied on rare occasions only, usually connected with certain rituals which aim to connect the person with the mythical origins of the bee tradition itself - and the first bee shaman in particular, known simply as the Sorcerer.

### THE MELISSAE

Traditionally the Bee Master teaches a single male apprentice at a time. His opposite number within the Path of Pollen is known as the Bee Mistress. However the Bee Mistress teaches six women at a time, six being a particular number of interest to those who work within the Path of Pollen - in part because of the hexagonal cell into which the bee larva is placed, and from whence in due time it emerges as an adult bee.

The female students are known as *melissae*, a term from ancient Greece that was adopted by these women. In ancient Greece, at the Temple of Demeter and Aphrodite (who was also known as *Melissa*), the priestesses were called *melissae* which simply translates as 'bees'.

"We men" the Bee Master once remarked "are guests of the Bee tradition, and the *melissae* are our hosts, for bee society represents the zenith of feminine potency of nature. We men are simply the drones, and we'd better bloody remember that!"

I sensed what was being said was not the complete picture. Rather, it seemed to me - and was later verified - that the role of the Bee Master and the Bee Mistress and the connection between them, was not based on who was the superior of the two; both roles were distinct and of equal importance.

The women within the Path of Pollen are transmitters of an archaic impulse, indicated by the fact that Melissa was the goddess of intoxication and sexual passion. Both of these are used as doorways to a communion with all of life, and it is this archaic impulse that the melissae continue to transmit.

The melissae are said to fall within two distinct groupings, two primary types being drawn to the work. According to the Bee Mistress "There is one sort of bee that moves from flower to flower, sipping nectar from each luscious blossom, picking up pollen from this bloom. She deposits it from one to the other, circulating pollen everywhere, fertilising all the flowers. As a result, the garden flourishes.

Back in the hive she deposits the pollen-rich nectar into the communal vats which, in the fullness of time, will ripen into dark, rich, sweet honey. This is a visible offering to the visible face of the Spirit.

There is another type of bee who also moves from flower to flower but does not sip nectar. Rather, she devours the blossom with all of her senses, inhaling the fragrance, savouring the taste, absorbing the colour, and so on. She imbibes the song of joy evoked by the sunlight hitting the petals. Back in the hive she also shares her bounty with the community.

As they gather together, each bee will dance an expression of the blessings that she has gathered - dancing the joy, dancing the splendour, dancing the delight. One by one, all the bees add their share to fill the cauldron in the centre and then they all dance together, encircling the cauldron and singing the praises of the visible face of the Spirit. The resulting blend will ripen and ferment into honey, which is also rich and sweet, and to most people utterly invisible."

### DIMINISHING NUMBERS

The number of beekeepers in the world has diminished dramatically in recent years. In Britain just after the Second World War there were eighty to ninety thousand beekeepers. Now it is thirty to forty thousand.

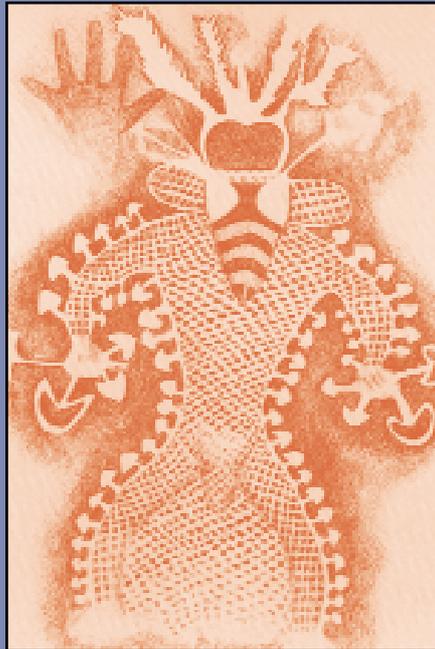
We need more bees to keep the world a fertile place, for without the honey-bee, our Earth would bear a very different appearance; practically all our fruit and flowers would be absent and it would be a much less beautiful, exquisite world. The Bee Master once remarked to me "When nature has work to be done, she creates a genius to do it: the humble honey-bee, our most ancient ally."

### NOTES

1. Harner, Sandra, and Warren W. Tryon. Psychological and Immunological Responses to Shamanic Journeying with Drumming. Paper presented at the Third International Conference of the International Society for Shamanic Research, Nara, Japan, November 1995.

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