

Podcast Series: Holistic Nature of Us

Episode #32: Meet Gunther Hauk, Biodynamic Farming

www.judithdreyer.com

Hi I'm Judith Dreyer,

Thank you for joining me for this pod cast series "The Holistic Nature of Us".

My intent is to take us, you and I, into a better understanding of the concepts behind our holistic nature and how that ties directly to the holistic nature of the world around us. How can we connect the dots in practical ways that we are nature and nature is in us?

I will be featuring authors and educators, practitioners and others whose passion for this earth helps us create bridges. We'll see what's trending, what's relevant to our world today, not just for land use, but to connect the dots between nature and ourselves. It's time for practical action and profound inner change so our natural world is valued once again.

Today I'm delighted to introduce you to Gunther Hauk. Gunther is the founder of Spikenard Farm in Floyd Virginia. It is a bee sanctuary that incorporates biodynamic farming principles. He is also the co-founder of the Pfeiffer Center in New York City and he is featured in the documentary Queen of the Sun.

Welcome Gunther, I'm so happy to have you today!

GUNTHER: Well thank you for having me.

JUDITH: I always like to start with my guest's story. How did you get into the Waldorf School and the biodynamic farming? Tell us more about your journey.

GUNTHER: I have to go back to 1971. I was teaching at Allegheny College in Pennsylvania and was dissatisfied with my profession there teaching college students. And so, I quit my job telling the president that I would stay

on for the rest of the school year. And then a hippie in Detroit sent me a book after talking to him, *How to Know Higher Worlds* by Rudolph Steiner. After reading that I went to the library and there was one lecture by Steiner, "The New Art of Education". When I read that, I knew why I had given notice. Nine months later I had sold my house, the car and a lot of other things and was internally doing the Waldorf training. And I started out at the original Waldorf School, which was founded 100 years ago in 1919 in Stuttgart. I became an English teacher, foreign language teacher in Germany and then I got into gardening. That was for me, actually, a wonderful experience. There was a beautiful, beautiful, biodynamic garden for the children and it was just wonderful. It was really a holistic garden. It had some animals. It had orchards, berries, flowers, bees and vegetables, and the children really got a wonderful education in that. So that's how I got into biodynamics because that was the basis for working the garden. It was biodynamic agriculture and that was given by Rudolph Steiner in 1924, eight lectures to about 100 farmers and gardeners and those were not necessarily small ones. The biggest one had 19,500 acres so those were professional people, you know? And that's the basis of biodynamics, biodynamic agriculture, all those lectures, In 5-1/2 more years we'll be celebrating the 100 year anniversary there.

JUDITH: Interesting. So you took those principles and you decided to be a teacher in the Waldorf School and teach these principles, correct, to the children?

GUNTHER: Well they are taught in a very indirect way. In other words, we ran the garden. We worked the garden in all aspects and of course the children would sometimes spray a certain preparation on the land and depending on the age you didn't say too much. But they would experience the vitality and radiance and the taste of the food. It's like one student whom I met later as a shoe salesman, he said, "I never tasted tomatoes like at your garden." So, it's the experience that did it, not the teaching itself.

JUDITH: Tell us something about the principles of biodynamic farming.

GUNTHER: Well I can say that solid, good organic principles are the basis for biodynamic farming. In other words, crop diversity not mono-cultures, crop rotation, compost – building up the humus instead of just giving mineral fertilizers, NPK, (Nitrogen, phosphorus, Potassium)those are the basic principles. And biodynamic goes beyond that by stimulating the life

processes, not so much adding substances. If they are added, it's in the homeopathic form. Very, very small quantities are given.

JUDITH: Let's talk about that. One of my heroines is Vandana Shiva and all the work she's done with seed saving, the education that she imparts around the world. And of course, you and I both know that the use of synthetic fertilizers denatures the soil. It actually deadens the soil. It doesn't rejuvenate or regenerate it. And that's a holistic principle right, is to have the soil be regenerative and sustainable?

GUNTHER: Exactly. So interesting, in 1924, when Steiner was asked to give these lectures. the farmers, the observable degradation had already begun and the farmers noticed that. In other words, they noticed the decrease in soil fertility and the fertility of the animals and that's why they asked Steiner to give some advice and insight into the problems. So just three decades of conventional fertilizing was actually noticeably bad for the health of the animals and the people and everything.

JUDITH: And what puzzles me is that when you have farmers getting together who observe this, I find it odd that mono-crop agriculture has taken such root and such a hold on our agricultural system when it really doesn't make sense in the long run.

GUNTHER: Well you know it's interesting. Justus von Liebig, sort of the father of modern chemical agriculture, who invented this NPK, in other words basic substances have to be given back into the fields when you take off the fruit of these fields, the harvest. And later in his years, towards the end of his life, he realized that equation only works where the humus is depleted. In other words, where you have 4%, 5%, 6% humus in the soil that equation didn't work any more. But his followers just ran with that basic principle that you've got to put back what you take out. And they ignored his later findings. What gave a great boost for conventional agriculture, what is not conventional agriculture, was the end of WWI because the nitrogen factories that produced the nitrogen for ammunition didn't have a market. Then they told the farmers that's why you can use it for, the nitrogen. So that's how conventional farming got a real boost in the 20's and 30's.

JUDITH: Yes and especially again after WWII. What folks don't realize is that nitrogen is addictive. The more you put in the more you have to keep

adding in. The more you keep adding in the less the microbes and microorganisms take up the nitrogen in the soil. So it's this never-ending cycle that I'd like to see broken where we can pay attention to nature more and it's principles and apply them in our gardening, such as what you've learned and what you teach so beautifully through your farm, to build up the soil. I'm a member of the Bionutrient Food Association, I don't know if you've heard of them.

GUNTHER: Yes.

JUDITH: They have some great information on soil building and people haven't connected the dot that if we have really good healthy soil, we have far more nutritious food as the outcome that creates better health in us as a human being as well as in our animals, the animal kingdom.

GUNTHER: Exactly. Well, agriculture used to be the basis for culture. And our present-day agriculture is also becoming the base for our culture. In other words, depleted and not holistic, actually degradating and damaging rather than healing. We have to go back to holistic principles and these require a mindset that is different than our present one. It actually calls for a paradigm shift.

JUDITH: It does and unfortunately that happens literally from the ground up. So, for us to make a change as a culture, it's going to happen one garden, one farmer, one next door neighbor at a time to try to make that difference in the mindset. I do a lot of talks. I go to garden clubs and all and I'm always amazed and surprised and saddened that some of these beautiful, beautiful gardeners who have their hands in the soil, who love being in the soil, continue to use something like a Roundup product in their garden. And they've said, "Well I've got to rid of it right now, so I'm using it." And that's the mentality and unfortunately that's not a sustainable mindset. We need to think about future generations.

GUNTHER: Exactly, yes. That's so true. You know a former farmer used to be proud to leave to the next generation that had maybe a 1/2% more use. Now we take pride in getting the most out of any soil. In other words, what can I get out of it? How many pounds; how many bushels, or whatever? It's a different mindset. It's one of exploitation and degradation, I can only say.

JUDITH: But it's also a mindset of, "Give me, give me! I want, I want. I'm going to take because I can." I see that with the tree people. I see that with

biodynamic farming. They're up against sort of a brainwashing mentality of the corporate bottom line comes first and hopefully, again, from the bottom-up we can change that mindset.

Could you talk to us a little bit about carbon in the soil? I find that's something that most gardeners really aren't that aware of and most of us as consumers are not aware of carbon in the soil and how important that is.

GUNTHER: Yes, so enriching your soil with humus you're enriching the soil with carbon. But not only carbon. It goes into other substances and trace minerals, enzymes and so on. Carbon is the basic substance, if I talk spiritually, with which the spiritual world forms anything. Whether it's a plant. Whether it's animal or the human body, we all have the carbon and this basic structure is carbon. And that then is enlivened with oxygen which is the carrier of life forces and then comes in the nitrogen which is the carrier of the astral forces, the soul forces. In other words, that lets an animal, or a human being have feelings and move, motion and then emotion. So, carbon is a very basic substance with which the sculpting of form is accomplished by the spiritual world all the way up from the hierarchies down to the elemental beings.

JUDITH: Well that's fascinating. I've never heard it explained quite in that way. My research has shown that emissions is one issue for putting excess carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. But if we keep growing more small farms, in our backyards, in our neighborhoods, putting in more diversity, we actually can capture some of that carbon and bring it back into the soil.

GUNTHER: Yes, that's true but what a lot of people don't know is that nitrogen is about 20 times as effective as carbon responsible for global warming. And we don't touch that because then we would have to change our basic agriculture with all the input of nitrogen. And of course, the nitrogen is then washed out into the rivers and into the oceans and we have wonderful blooms in Florida, in oceans that tell us that we're doing something wrong. Nitrogen is really also very heavily used and we're just using it too much to grow fast and big fruits. And that does not have anything to say about quality.

JUDITH: No, it doesn't. It doesn't. And we forget that, again, because of our advertising we forget the principle behind having healthy food. We overlook it for the sake of cosmetics, is what I'm getting at.

GUNTHER: Can I add something to that?

JUDITH: Sure.

GUNTHER: We are just surrounded with so many lies. Like you need the conventional agriculture to feed the world. Well, if we stopped wasting one quarter of the food which we do in America and if we eat a little bit more judiciously, we can feed a lot more people. A lot of food gets wasted in transport and other things. The Rodale Institute, having worked on organic principles for 50-60 years, they have proven that in a 10-year study they can produce as much as conventional agriculture because the plants are more resilient to drought and to wetness and so on. It's a lie that we can not feed the world with organic agriculture. I mean there are so many lies out there. You don't have to look into politics to see them, you know?

JUDITH: That's true and that's what I'm hoping with this podcast is to sort of bust up some of the lies with really good expertise, research, experience that says, you know; Here's the deal. Do you want to eat a watered-down pale tomato from big Ag or do you want to have an organic tomato and you can taste the difference? We have to keep at it. Keep getting the word out there.

Gunther could you tell us about Spikenard Farm? I know it's a bee sanctuary. You do biodynamic principles there. Tell us about your farm.

GUNTHER: Well we have 25 acres and soon we'll have 14 more acres. It's in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains and we're just lucky. We have an organic farm next door and just pastures and forests around us. So, we are not endangered with the GMOs as much as in other places. We have built up a beautiful honey bee sanctuary and teach sustainable and biodynamic bee keeping methods there. People come actually from all over the United States, Canada, Mexico and other countries, 5-6 European countries, Australia, Israel. We have people from all over the world coming to learn really good beekeeping methods. And of course, you cannot separate the land from the bees. Whatever you do to the land, also is done for the animals and the human being. Biodynamics is for us the only way we can actually do something good for the bees aside from planting a lot of good beneficial pollinator plants. So, people come, and they are amazed in just a few years we have built up a really vibrant and beautiful sanctuary with gardens, vegetable gardens and pollinator gardens. That's the biodynamic

preparations that we use that are responsible for their vitality. People actually notice it coming into the sanctuary; that there is something different about it.

JUDITH: That's true. I had the wonderful pleasure of visiting you folks a few years ago when I lived in Virginia and being around the bees and the beautiful wildflowers, not to mention the garden was a real treasure in the Blue Ridge Mountains thanks to you folks and the deep commitment you have to the teaching and the folks that you touch all over the world.

Could you give us three tips that people could take home today that they could apply?

GUNTHER: Yes, I think maybe I can. If you **think about agriculture again as the basis of culture**, what does it do then to the oceans, to the rivers? Is a monoculture the right thing? You see it's so interesting. The Industrial Revolution was great, you know, for many things. We don't have to work as hard with our hands. We can use machines for many things. But the laws of industry are 180 degrees different from the laws of nature. So, the laws of industry are: get as big as you can to outdo the competition. Specialize on one thing and become location independent. And the laws of nature are diversity, not specialization. There are limits to growth. Limits, you know, you don't have 20-foot people around. Limits to growth and every farm, every garden is located in a unique place on this earth. Going with the laws of industry, that has actually taken us into this deep crisis we are in. Some people don't even realize what a deep crisis we are in with food, with agriculture, with bees. The bees are just the tip of the iceberg. So, coming back to laws of nature and reading about it, studying is one thing. In other words, nothing, for me nothing has been as comprehensive, as holistic as *Rudolf Steiner's work and basic book is Theosophy* which explains what a human being is; what is an animal; what is a plant; what is the earth as living being, and so on. So that would be one thing that is really beneficial to the individual and beneficial to a lot of things if you **start reading something that has a spiritual tack like that.**

And then if you want to learn about Biodynamics I can say you can come to a workshop we give especially for biodynamic preparations. We make the preparations and explain them. It's actually in a way good and in a way sad that biodynamic was introduced to Rodale, the old Rodale. He learned from

Ehrenfried Pfeiffer but the way the preparations are made, sometimes too strange for our modern minds so he chucked that and went organic. And now people are trying to catch up with the spiritual side of agriculture. A lot more interest is present for biodynamic agriculture which gives you also the spiritual aspects.

JUDITH: Gunther let me ask you this. Your workshops, are they available on-line as well? Do you have any tutorials on-line?

GUNTHER: Not on biodynamics. Our co-worker Alex just gave a 12-part webinar on beekeeping this year and probable will do it next year too. So actually, to demonstrate how these preparations are made, the experience is much more valuable than just reading about it. Reading about it can turn you off, you know? You put this into a stag bladder and you think those people are crazy. They probably dance naked in the moon or something like that.

JUDITH: (laughing) Yes, we're silly aren't we, with our assumptions? That's funny.

GUNTHER: There's a logic in all of that but you have to be very open in your mind to understand synergy and true holistic thinking. It's interesting that the word holistic is etymologically, historically connected to the word whole, w-h-o-l-e, to make things whole and to make things holy. We have to discover the sacred in agriculture and in us and our surroundings again. It's actually one thing and the word holistic has become a slogan, a good one and just calls for also the sacred and to think broader, you know, not so narrow as we are taught to think.

JUDITH: That's true. And for me the concept of holism goes beyond what we think of in the alternative health field. You know the mind, body, spirit that's beautiful, wonderful. It got us to where we are today and some of our understandings. But for me you can not have a functioning whole if the parts aren't working right. And the earth has parts that aren't working right. My deep desire is to see us go back to that holistic model to get the parts in harmony again, in sync again. Because that's how we're created; our physical body absolutely has communities. They know exactly what to do. A liver knows what to do versus a pancreas and it's interconnected. And when we feel healthy it's because everybody is doing their part and they're all functioning the way they should be. So today we're facing the crisis of

global warming with severe storms, fires, etc., heating, and that to me is a symptom that we are not listening to.

GUNTHER: Yes, but I think that we should also be grateful for the crisis because the crisis wakes us up. And if we listen, a crisis always, always, whether personal or on a broader scale, tells us that the path we have taken is not the right one.

JUDITH: You're absolutely right and that's a very, very good reminder.

Gunther before close today, could you please give us your contact information, the farm, etc.

GUNTHER: I'd be glad to. You can find us on-line and our website is www.spikenardfarm.org We are a non-profit organization, so that's why we have the org there. And you'll find everything else, our e-mail and our telephone number how to contact us. A lot of information is on there about plant, about the bees, about frequently asked questions. A lot of information is on our website.

JUDITH: Yes, it's a beautiful website and they do have a lot of information. I encourage all of my listeners to check them out.

Gunther do you having anything else to add before we close?

GUNTHER: I think what we have to do is look West as you put out. (note: Gunther is referring to the concepts I outlined in the four directions as the basis for this podcast series.) You know, in the West there is reverence. Actually, all of it (the wheel). The Holism in the East; the sustainability in the South; the reverence in the West; the intelligence in the North and the intuition within. We cannot go further without intelligence. In other words, we can't just chuck our minds, what we have developed over 500 years now, so use that in order to reach out broader. Develop the **reverence for everything**. A blade of grass is as precious as your bank account, or maybe even more. Sustainability – what is truly sustainability is a big question. We could talk more.

JUDITH: Oh, that's wonderful. I love your wisdom and thank you for sharing that.

GUNTHER: You're very welcome and reach out to us if you're interested in biodynamics and the bees and we'll reach out to you.

JUDITH: Great. Alright, well I want to thank you, Gunther, for joining us at the Holistic Nature of Us. I'm inspired by you. I was inspired when I visited you folks a few years ago. I love your practical advice and your wisdom that comes from your experience.

This is Judith Dreyer, author of "At the Garden's Gate", book and blog. I am so delighted to have you joining us today. Please note that my book is available through my website which is www.judithdreyer.com as well as several distribution arms including Amazon, Nook, etc. I'd like to remind all of you to please like and share the podcasts. Let's get the word out. Every podcast has a written transcription as well. The contact information and also other suggestions, are easily found through the transcript.

It's time for us now to really think about practical action and profound inner change so our world is valued once again.

Thank you everyone and have a great day.