Podcast Series: Holistic Nature of Us

Episode # 51: Meet: Gunther Hauk, Founder Spikenard Farm and Honeybee Sanctuary

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Hi I'm Judith Dreyer,

(please note: we had a few technical difficulties with this recording but hopefully worked most of it out. Gunther's wisdom and knowledge are a true gift to all of us. Enjoy.)

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 welcome Gunther Hauk back. This is his second time on *The Holistic Nature of Us* and today we're going to be speaking about bees and pollinators and their role in our environment. And Gunther is a retired Waldorf School teacher. He is the founder of Spikenard Farm and Honeybee Sanctuary that is located in Floyd, Virginia. He is also the founder of the Pfeiffer Center in Spring Valley, New York. Both farms operate on biodynamic principles. Gunther is featured in *Queen of the Sun* and *Vanishing of the Bees* Documentaries where he joins with others highlighting the issues and the grave concerns many have over honeybee population declines.

Welcome Gunther and thank you for returning.

GUNTHER: It is good to be with you.

JUDITH: Alright, so let's start with your love of the honeybees and how you started Spikenard farm and tell us about your beginnings with the bees.

GUNTHER: Okay, I'd be glad to do that. First, I would like to say a word about the title of your talk. Most people probably don't know that the word "Holistic" has to do with both "whole" to make things whole and "holy". And we have separated from nature on the one hand of course and that means we are not whole, and we have lost the holiness of our own being and also the animal world and nature in general around us. So, the bees were once considered a holy animal, a sacred animal, just like a cow, a holy cow and a scarab beetle, all of these beings that take care of nature and us, so the crisis of the honeybee is actually our own crisis.

JUDITH: Hmm. That's an interesting way to put it. I thought holistic too and holy was also connected to humus, the soil, word too. Is that correct?

GUNTHER: I'm not completely sure. I can look it up in my etymology book.

JUDITH: We'll have to do that because I thought I read somewhere that holistic, holy and humus were also connected. But I like what you said about, we've lost the sacredness, the holiness of taking care of the land and what that means, what the implications are.

GUNTHER: Right, right. So, I've been a beekeeper for over 40 years now and when I started things were very nice. You know, we lost 1-2 hives a year and had good honey crops and took care of the bees in a very wonderful, natural way, not exploiting them, not pressuring them to give more than what they were ready to give. And then of course in 1996 the Varroa mite reached a point where there were no more bees in orchards and on the farms. And there was an article written in the New York Times, "The Hush of the Hives", and I had just come back to America, returned to America to start, what was later called the Pfeiffer Center. I gave my first beekeeping workshop 2 months after that article, so I didn't lose at any time because I realized it's not only the mite that is causing the problem but all the beekeeping methods that have been invented for the last 100 years or more.

JUDITH: Hmm. So that's been since 1995 you started to see some problems.

GUNTHER: Yes, and so for everybody else, including the chemical industry, focused on how can we get rid of the mites? I focused on how can we strengthen the honeybee so that she can cope with a lot of things, maybe not all things, but a lot of things that we are putting out and so my path has been from 1996 on to help spread the word that it's not only them, the mites and the viruses and the bacteria and the bugs and all that that's killing the bees but actually it's our very own beekeeping methods.

JUDITH: That's interesting. What kind of response did you get putting that kind of message out there?

GUNTHER: Well the response was silence from the professional beekeepers of course but more and more hobby beekeepers showed that they were not willing to go on that path of constant treating against this and against that and the other. So, I found…and that has been going on since 1996. More and more people have awakened to our responsibility for the natural world and for the animals. The hobby beekeepers are the ones that are going to be the beekeepers in the future because we are losing 30, 40, 50, 60% of the bees every year. It is not sustainable. About 15% is sustainable because these can be replenished by making splits and you know by natural swarming and natural reproduction. But 30-40% is not sustainable.

JUDITH: And that's what we're seeing today?

GUNTHER: We're still seeing that today, yeah. Last year we lost approximately 46% nationally of our bees and it varies from region to region. Some regions are a little bit better and some are a little bit worse. And of course, there are instances where people, especially here in Virginia, lost 70-80% of their bees.

JUDITH: Oh, my goodness that's a high percentage. So, what does that mean for future implications? I mean how do people replace the bees, and can they replace them fast enough if they're losing 70%?

GUNTHER: No, they can't replace them fast enough. I had a call from California a little while ago from a professional beekeeper. He has 10,000 colonies and that's a small professional one, or a medium professional beekeeper, and he asked me what he could do. And I told him what we are

doing, and he agreed with everything that I told him. And at the end he said, I can't do it. I can't do it because my whole infrastructure is geared to trucking the bees from one place to another, from one monoculture to another. It costs him $250,000 a year just to truck his bees around.

Judith: Oh, my goodness!

GUNTHER: Yeah and of course moving them first from the almonds and then to the canola and then to the cranberries and then to the apples and then to the blueberries and back down to Florida, and so on. You know these bees are being trucked I would say 20,000 -30,000 miles a year and this is not what the bees like. Bees love to be in one place, get used to it explore it up to the very small flowers that need to be pollinated. Some of our medicinal herbs, plantain and goldenseal and when they get trucked from one to the other, they only basically eat the nectar or get the nectar and the pollen from almonds and citrus fruit and so on. That's like us eating only broccoli for 3 weeks and then oats for 3 weeks and so on. We would not be very healthy.

JUDITH: No, we wouldn't, and I don't think most of us realize the implications or what the costs are with these large bee farms and what they subject the bees to. To me it almost feels like the bees are enslaved in a way. You know they're transported here, transported there. They're expected to work. They're expected to pollinate and then they go home and if they can recover fine but if they can't, well, that's the way it goes.

GUNTHER: That's it. That's it. That's exactly it! So, they are a commodity now and the commodity is how much can I get out of them? It's the same of course with the cow and the chicken and the pig. It's not any different. So, the industrial paradigm has also influenced and taken beekeeping into its grasp; in other words, get as big as you can, specialize and location independence. These three basic facts apply to the modern professional beekeeper. From one location to another one get as big as you can so that you only are a pollinator beekeeper who gets money from pollination. Others only raise queens. Others only make packages of 3 pounds of bees with one queen, and so on and so one. So, the specialization is there too and get as big as you can. The biggest beekeeper has 70,000 colonies!

JUDITH: Oh, my goodness.

GUNTHER: You can't even picture them and imagine if he lost 40% and you have, you know, like 25,000-30,000 beehives in a row you can't even picture how many miles of beehives that would be.

JUDITH: Wow, right. Doesn't that…Isn't that also implications for when they get back home to have that volume of bees? What do they do when they get back home?

GUNTHER: They hatch in holding stations. They can't have them all in one place. They have locations in Florida, in California where they can over winter and then they get fed 2, 3, 4 gallons of corn syrup before the winter and that's how it goes. And then a lot of them are getting sold after the pollination because the beekeepers know they won't survive. And we have imported 100,000 bee packages from Australia in January, February to guarantee the pollination out west.

JUDITH: I had no idea about that either and I think most of us don't realize that when we pick up a bottle of honey. Hopefully it's local but if it's in the supermarket, and it may not even be just honey. When we pick up almonds what is the action and the choice that we make to buy almonds, it has implications for everything prior to us purchasing it. And that's the dot that we're not connecting very well.

GUNTHER: Exactly, ya. And almonds are right behind wheat as the greatest import into other countries, mostly China, Japan and so on. It's a huge industry where in the Sacramento Valley we have hundred thousands of acres just in almonds. Of course, there can be no bees. There are no insects there the rest of the years.

JUDITH: No insects?!

GUNTHER: Well maybe a few flies you know but actually those huge monocultures get sprayed so often that not much survives.

JUDITH: Right, right. Yeah and that's logical. That makes sense, right?

GUNTHER: Ya, that's the only way they can do it, ya. Well that's not the only way they can do it but that's what they're geared for. That's what their irrigation drip lines and everything else, their spray program, all of it is geared toward that. There is no idea about having maybe flowers there in the summer for insects. There are a few biodynamic vineyards and organic

vineyards that are doing a great job in having something there for the pollinating insects all year round. It can be done, it can be done but it's more work and the product will have to cost a little bit more, and that's why organic is more expensive. But we are so used to having everything cheaper, cheaper, cheaper that is problem. Let's say you have certain amount of income and you pay a 1/3 of your income for food, you have 2/3rds left for whatever else, your car, your home and so on. If you only have 16% or 12% for food than you have a lot more left to buy everything else, so that's the plan, to keep agriculture products as cheap as possible to get as much out of the economy otherwise.

JUDITH: Yes, I know.

GUNTHER: It frustrates, you know? They have to get bigger, bigger, bigger, specialize more and more. It's a treadmill.

JUDITH: It is a treadmill because that model is not sustainable and that's the piece that you and I are trying to connect through our outreach in various ways is to make the public aware of the fact that just because something is cheap doesn't mean it's cheap. There's a cost to pay whether we pay the piper today or we pay the piper in 3 generations. And the question is, do we want to be sustainable for those next generations, you know? That's what I'm all about and that's what you're all about in terms of getting the word out.

Tell us…since we've talked about big farming for the honey bees, tell us about Spikenard Farm and the principles that govern what you do.

GUNTHER: Yes, so when I retired at the Pfeiffer Center, I had a plan already in place and my daughter bought us 600 acres for that plan out in Illinois. That didn't work because where we were, we had neighbors that got sprayed by airplanes and I realized that's not where you can have a honey bee sanctuary. So, we moved to Virginia and we are now on 41 acres and there's a biodynamic next to us, an organic farm next to them and just orchards and pastures and woods around us. We are in a safe place here with the sanctuary. So, if I can say, the professional beekeeper asks how much honey I get out of my bees and that is a right question if you have a business. You can't say I keep losing you know, you don't have a business left. You have to make money and that was in one advertisement a few years ago for plastic foundation, I can explain that later, where the

advertisement said, ‘we asked some bees what would make them more profitable’. You can tell your wife I love you as much as you want if you want to get as much as you can out of her that’s not a loving relationship. So, every beekeeper loves his bees no mater what they do to him.

JUDITH: Hmm, interesting.

GUNTHER: Ya. Our question to the bees is, ‘what do you need to be healthy and happy and we only take the surplus from you’. So right now, last week, we weighed all of our hives and we know how much each box with bees and wax and comb, you know, all of that weighs and then we know how much honey they have. And if they have 150 lbs. of honey, we can certainly take 50 lbs and then we share some with the ones that have not built up enough stores and only then do we take what is a true surplus. And we always keep a good amount in winter in storage in case one hive needs, or two hives need some more food, or the swarms need a little bit of encouragement if the weather isn’t too good. Our whole attitude and our focus is ‘what do the bees need?’ and that goes from letting them build their natural comb, they can do it. They don’t need to build perfectly straight comb because we extract the honey and do the work by hand where as a professional harvesting maybe 500,000 individual frames of honey…

JUDITH: Wow!

GUNTHER: puts the frames into a decapping machine which takes the wax capping off and then it gets put into huge extractors. They’re brought into huge tanks and all of that is industrialized and we do that by hand. We let them build their own honeycomb. We let them over-winter on their own honey. They don’t get sugar. They don’t get corn syrup. I mean that’s really the worst to give the bees that produce the honey, they don’t take it from nature. They take nectar from nature but it’s a lot of work till this becomes honey. It’s their own enzymes and ferments and other substances that are put into it before it becomes honey. It’s actually the only food in nature that never spoils. Can you imagine that?

JUDITH: That’s hard to imagine, isn’t it?

GUNTHER: Ya. We have eaten honey from the tombs, the Egyptian tombs. Of course, you need a chisel to get it out of the vessel but it’s still edible. It does not spoil if it doesn’t get more moisture or something like that, then it

would start fermenting. But it's really a whole food and should be treated actually and sold as medicine and not cheap as it is now.

JUDITH: Well there's a little bit of, I want to say, negative press about honey because it is a sugar. People are very concerned about carbohydrates and they're concerned about their blood sugar levels but I think, as you do, there's nutrition in that honey. And isn't it better if we…doesn't it have more medicinal properties if we start eating it in between meals rather than in a cup of tea?

GUNTHER: It shouldn't actually ever go into a cup of hot tea because that kills the enzymes and certain ferments. It shouldn't even be used in baking to a great extent. Now we find honey in just about everything that you buy in the grocery store. So, you know the big production of honey goes into bread, into all kinds of things. Ya it should be treated like medicine and half a teaspoon or a teaspoon a day, especially for people over 35, mid life, is a great bone strengthener. It actually strengthens the body and that should take the place of milk. Milk is actually for the young person and for the old person it should be honey.

JUDITH: Wow, that's interesting. I've read a lot about honey and I've never heard that about honey. I knew it was good medicinally to not put it in tea and to have it for bone strengthening, I think that's fabulous.

GUNTHER: Ya, I think we would do a lot against osteoporosis if people would eat a little bit of good raw honey a day. Half a teaspoon, it doesn't take much. It's the silica force that's in the honey, the hexagonal force that is in the cells and that force is a strengthening force. Of course, once you have osteoporosis it's not going to help you to eat honey then. It should be done before that on a regular basis just as Steiner for example mentions that a couple that is engaged should eat, both men and women should eat a little honey and the child would not have weak bones. In other words, we gave Vitamin D at one time. What was that medicine?

JUDITH: I don't know it in this country.

GUNTHER: Great damage done to the embryo at that time. Anyway, honey is medicinal. It's the greatest wound dressing for burns because honey absorbs water, moisture, and that would mean you could pull the wound dressing off without tearing the new skin off.

JUDITH: And it's antiseptic too, right?

GUNTHER: Yes, yes. My dentist gave me a sheet of paper where they are using honey now after tooth extraction.

JUDITH: Oh, how about that?! I haven't heard that in my neck of the woods but something to keep in mind when we go to our dentist, huh?

GUNTHER: I don't think very many dentists know that. I have a very modern dentist.

JUDITH: No, I don't think they do either. Well listen, we're getting close to our time here and I would love you to give us your contact information for the Spikenard Farm Honey Bee Sanctuary and anyway we can, you know, contact you folks.

GUNTHER: Okay. Can I say a little bit more about the importance of the bees beyond pollination?

JUDITH: Yes.

GUNTHER: Most people know about pollination, you know from 35-70% depending on your diet, if you eat a lot of pasta, noodles and so on you don't need the bees as much as if you eat a lot of veggies and fruit because all of our grain are wind pollinators, they don't need these insects. And beyond that, the honey bee is actually very important together with the ants and hornets and the wasps because they produce a poison called formic acid. The Latin name formica means ant, so it's the acid that the ant produces when it bites you and you get a little welt. And that acid is as important for all living beings, just like our DNA that acid is important for every cell. It's actually the insects, the stinging insects, which are keeping nature alive. It's not that we are keeping nature alive. It's that these stinging insects and it has been shown that where the ants are missing in the forests, the forests are dying more quickly.

JUDITH: Oh, how about that? That's another dot I don't think we've connected very easily to. I'm in a Master Gardner program and that's not something that I hear about in any constructive way, so thank you for sharing that.

GUNTHER: Most people don't know that, but I thought it's important. And of course, one other aspect is that in all the…of all the animals, the bees are the ones that show us actually what our human evolution, the end goal actually is and that is service. In other words, they pollinate what needs to be pollinated whether it's a weed or whatever it is. What needs to be pollinated, it gets pollinated. And one single bee, most of the work goes for the future of the hive. About 2% goes for herself and it's about 98% of her work is for the other. In fact, it can become, if we know enough about the bees, that can become a great inspiration for ourselves. The bees are so close to us. Just imagine they are the only insect that can drop or raise their temperature. They can maintain a temperature of 95 degrees when they are eggs, larva and pupa in the hive, 95degrees, almost human temperature. It's the only insect that can do that. And they can come to a democratic decision. Imagine if we learned to do that!

JUDITH: Right. What this world would look like, yes!

GUNTHER: They are a great example for us in how we can evolve if we do it in the right way. It goes far beyond pollination what the bees do.

JUDITH: It does and that's what I like about your knowledge, your expertise, your message. And it's something that I feel very strongly about as well, with the answers that we need for today's problems are right there in nature. And we're starting to come into a mindset, if you will, away from conquer, command and control into something that is more sustainable and to be sustainable we do have to be in some kind of service. We have to take care of the land. We have to think about the next future generations. What can we do that leaves this place better than when we arrived?

GUNTHER: Yep, right now it's the opposite. 'What can I get out of the land, out of the animal, out of the other human being, you know? Actually, no sense of the future and that has to do with our still being very deep in a materialistic culture. In other words, we don't know that we don't only live once. If once we would know generally that we come back, we might take care of this place in a better way.

JUDITH: Well you know, I was just reading Brian Weiss' work on past life. He's an expert in the field. He's a psychiatrist and he said the same thing. We could be the children that's inheriting what we've done today or the

grandchildren. And that certainly would wake me up a little differently, right?

GUNTHER: Oh definitely. We are the evolution. It's not that we are here and then somebody else evolves. We are the evolution.

JUDITH: Such wise words Gunther. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

GUNTHER: Yes, I think in the United States we are really the only place that gives shorter and longer workshops, going into great depth. We have a 2 year program. We have a 4 session program. We have a 1 week program about the bees. So that I think Spikenard Farm is really a place where you can learn about how to care for the bees and be with the bees and enjoy them too in a wonderful way. And we have a really beautiful sanctuary. People come from all over the world to see it and to take classes. Australia, Israel, Germany, France, UK and Ireland, people come from all over.

JUDITH: It is a beautiful farm. I've had the wonderful privilege of visiting your farm a few years ago and to see people just burst into smiles and you can feel their deep caring for the bees on the sanctuary that you created is a gift right there.

GUNTHER: And what makes the people pursue something that they don't see is that we use the biodynamic preparations. Are you still there?

JUDITH: Yes, I'm here, yep.

GUNTHER: And that creates a vibrancy and health for the land and since you can not separate the bees from the land, whatever you do to the land, you do to the bees.

JUDITH: Yes, but we also do that to ourselves.

GUNTHER: And whatever you do for the bees, you do for the land.

JUDITH: Yes, yes. It's all interconnected, isn't it?

So just leave us with your contact information and we'll close.

GUNTHER: www.SpikenardFarm.org and you get our phone number and our e-mail. All of that is in our website.

JUDITH: Yes, cool. Alright, well Gunther I want to thank you again. I'm really grateful and honored to have you here and also for your wisdom and your very practical advice. I want to thank you for joining me again today.

This is Judith Dreyer. I'm the author of "At the Garden's Gate", book and blog. My book is available through my website www.judithdreyer.com as well as several distribution arms such as Amazon, Nook, Goodreads and more. I'd like to remind all of you that a transcript is available for each podcast. And please like and share these podcasts. Let's get the word out and support each other.

And remember**, now** is the time for practical action and profound inner change so we value our world once again.

Enjoy your day.