

Applied BIODYNAMICS[®]



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Restoring a Useful Legacy from Ehrenfried Pfeiffer

Hugh J. Courtney

In this issue the reader will find, essentially as a separate insert, a questionnaire that represents my best effort to restore and modernize a most interesting and fascinating document found among papers gleaned from files once held by Josephine Porter as well as Ehrenfried Pfeiffer (1899–1961).

In 1984, when I traveled to Stroudsburg, PA to negotiate on behalf (as I then understood) of the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, the acquisition of the biodynamic preparations belonging to the recently deceased Josephine Porter, I also acquired several boxes of books and papers from Abby Porter, Josephine's daughter and heir. Regrettably, it was many months later before I found the time to look through any of those papers. When I did, I discovered several folders, each of which contained a farm survey questionnaire, filled out by the farmer who was using the questionnaire to furnish information on his farm, in anticipation of a future visit by Ehrenfried Pfeiffer to guide the farm into biodynamic agriculture. Again, when JPI received equipment in 1995 upon agreeing to take over the exclusive production of the Pfeiffer BD Compost Starter and BD Field Spray (now Field and Garden Spray), among the papers accompanying the equipment were files containing additional questionnaires. It took many years before I could return to a detailed examination of the questionnaires. When I did so, about five years ago, I resolved to try to revise and update the questionnaire so that it could be used as part of JPI's modest Farmer-to-Farmer Advisory Service. Unfortunately, the project to revise the questionnaire could only be accomplished during slack periods when there were no other demands upon my time. Such slack time has seemed more and more rare as interest in the use of the biodynamic preparations grows. My own

personal responsibilities have also increased the rarity of such slack time. Further time was required in order to have various competent farmers and growers examine the document for possible additional revisions. It is only now that the revision project has arrived at the point where I feel it is ready to share with a wider audience, for their use, as well as soliciting any additional suggestions for improving the document.

Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, who brought biodynamic agriculture to America in the 1930s, was an exceptionally keen observer, and although the questionnaires as I found them had no clear indication that Pfeiffer was the originator, the detail contained in them does seem to reveal his viewpoint. The questionnaire is most thorough in trying to elicit from the farmer as complete a soil and landscape profile as can be obtained through a description based on words, rather than one obtained visually. The questionnaire appears aimed at addressing a particular concern of Rudolf Steiner's, expressed during the Agriculture lectures where he stated: "Therefore, wherever we are studying plant growth, we should be clear in the first place as to the geological foundation out of which it arises."¹

As an example of Dr. Pfeiffer's astute observational skills, I would like to quote from Helen Philbrick's article, "Homestead and Garden Memories" which appeared in the Winter 1962 *Bio-Dynamics* (Issue #61) which served as a memorial issue for Pfeiffer:

"I would like to conclude with a story to show how thoroughly Dr. Pfeiffer studied every angle of every problem, including the living-togetherness of all the elements. We asked him about a certain peach tree which had suffered an injury to its trunk. We had pruned the branches and had excavated the decaying wood from the trunk but still the

decayed area continued to enlarge, and the tree languished. 'What should we do to heal up this wound in this peach tree?' Dr. Pfeiffer looked closely at the tree, up and down and all around. Then he studied the soil, the hillside, the sky and the adjoining woods. Presently he stepped out into the road and examined the drainage ditch and the fences. We began to suspect he had forgotten all about the peach tree.

"Finally he returned and said, 'The trouble with your peach tree is that row of fence posts over there.'

"He must have read in our faces both disbelief and the immediate question, 'What could fence posts away up there have to do with this tree down here?' With his accustomed patience and with no suggestion that our knowledge of biology was disgracefully limited, he explained: 'The fence posts are hosts to white shelf fungus which you can plainly see. The function of shelf fungus is to reduce decaying wood to topsoil so that it can be returned to earth to start its cycle again. The shelf fungus from the dead fence posts spreads into the decayed wood in the damaged peach tree and the wood thus continues to decay. If you will either remove the fence posts or treat them with crankcase oil, to stop the fungus there, you will save your peach tree down here.' We followed his advice and gathered many peaches from the tree in years following."

Another quote that appeared earlier in this same article

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by Philbrick may actually be a reference to the questionnaire we are now printing in a revised form:

"At one time the Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association sent out a questionnaire and everyone was amazed at the large percentage of responses – over 85% – which were returned. But the members in turn were amazed at the helpful answers which Dr. Pfeiffer returned, many times in his own handwriting."

In that same memorial issue of *Bio-Dynamics*, the hope was expressed that those wishing to contribute to a memorial for Dr. Pfeiffer could contribute to the continuance of the Biochemical Research Laboratory which he had started. Unfortunately, the Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association was not able to sustain its support of that institution.

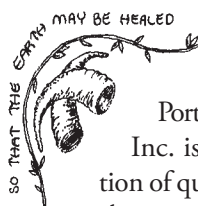
In a very modest way, perhaps the reinstatement of this questionnaire for use by the biodynamic community will serve to memorialize Ehrenfried Pfeiffer's contribution to agriculture.

Note

- 1) *Steiner Agriculture – A Course of Eight Lectures* – trans. George Adams, Bio-Dynamic Agricultural Association, London 1958, p. 31.

JPI Event Schedule

Please visit our website at <www.jpibiodynamics.org> to view a complete listing of events in which we will participate as well as workshops we will offer over the next several months.



Mission

The mission of the Josephine Porter Institute for Applied Biodynamics, Inc. is to heal the earth through production of quality biodynamic preparations based on the spiritual scientific discoveries of Rudolf Steiner and to advance education and research in biodynamic agriculture.

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Ehrenfried E. Pfeiffer

“...the Biodynamic Method, however, can be employed by every farmer. This must be stressed, since many, later, got the idea that one could not work biodynamically if one were not an anthroposophist. That on the other hand, knowledge of the biodynamic method gradually leads the one who uses it to another world-picture, that, he to begin with, learns particularly to judge the biological (i.e., life) processes and interconnections in a different way than the materialistic, chemically inclined farmer, is of course something obvious. So too, he will bring to the dynamic (i.e., play of forces) in nature a greater degree of interest and of conscious awareness. One must learn to understand that there is a difference between the mere application of the method and creative collaboration.”

E.E. Pfeiffer as quoted in *Rudolf Steiner's Contribution to the History and Practice of Agricultural Education*, by Hilmar Moore. Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association, 1992, p. 87.

Books and Lectures by Pfeiffer Available from JPI

<i>Biodynamic Composting on the Farm</i> , Blaser and Pfeiffer	
	\$3.50
<i>Biodynamics, Three Introductory Articles</i>	
	\$4.50
<i>Bio-Dynamic Treatment of Fruit Trees, Berries and Shrubs</i>	
	\$5.50

<i>Compendium – volume 1</i>	\$21.00
<i>Compendium – volume 2</i>	\$17.00
<i>Earth's Face</i>	\$21.95
<i>Grow a Garden and Be Self-Sufficient</i> , Pfeiffer and Riese	\$10.95
<i>Soil Fertility</i>	\$24.95
<i>Using the BD Compost Preparations and Sprays</i>	\$7.50
<i>Weeds and What They Tell</i>	\$9.95

Biodynamic Preparations Legend

BD #500 – Horn Manure
BD #501 – Horn Silica

BD #502 – Yarrow
BD #503 – Chamomile
BD #504 – Stinging Nettle
BD #505 – Oak Bark
BD #506 – Dandelion
BD #507 – Valerian

Compost
Preparations

BD #508 – Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*)

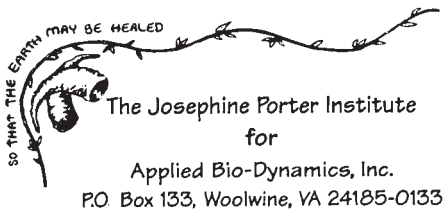
Prices do not include shipping. To place an order, please contact us at (276) 930-2463 or fax us at (276) 930-2475.

Associative Contracts Due

Please note that Associative Contracts are due now with a final deadline of March 31, 2009. Contact us by phone at (276) 930-2463 or by fax at (276) 930-2475 with questions regarding your contract.

Now the plants growing on the Earth are not the only things to consider – a certain complement of animal life also belongs to each region of the Earth. For reasons that will become apparent, we can leave human beings out of the picture, but we cannot disregard the animals, because the best cosmic qualitative analysis, if I may put it like that, takes place in the interaction between the plants and animals of a given area.

Rudolf Steiner – *Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture*, p. 41



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