

The Spirituality of Flowers

Bríd Kennedy's thesis, *Spirituality of Flowers: What Flowers Do For Us* has awakened her to the 'beauty within' each person.

Since ancient times, people across all cultures have had a huge attraction to flowers, using them as a medium to express sentiments of goodwill, joy, love, beauty and sadness. Flowers, used since pagan times for celebrations and rituals, have held special significance for the human spirit. There is evidence that the Neanderthals buried their dead with flowers. They are also used to express religious feelings. In some religions, flowers are considered the direct route for spiritual communication. Flowers are with us at the most important, happy, beautiful and challenging times in our lives, being almost magical and healing.

Many great artists used flowers to express life, for example Wordsworth's poetry on flowers and the poem 'The Blue Iris' by Mary Oliver. Shakespeare made many references to flowers in his writings. Monet and Van Gogh used the image of the sunflower for much of their artwork.

The diversity of flowers is astounding, varying in shape, colour, size, scent, touch and the way they interact with their pollinators. Flowers are a social equaliser, as they are powerful in connecting people of all generations and demographics. They touch people and change their energy regardless of age or wealth status, as everyone needs joy and beauty.

Flowers can say things that we can't,

triggering an emotion or changing behaviour. When we receive a bunch of flowers for an occasion, it stirs an emotion within us. In Victorian England, when many verbal expressions of emotions were suppressed, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu developed floriography to send coded messages when sending flowers. When sending certain types of flowers, the message to the person was in the type of flower chosen.

Flowers have a long history of use in traditional medicine. Twelfth-century mystic Hildegard of Bingen used flowering plants to heal. She said illness was related to suppressed emotions, and by using our inner wisdom, with specific flowering plants, we open up to the spiritual forces within us. Her model has much in common with traditional Chinese medicine, Islamic medicine and Ayurveda, the traditional medicine of India.

Colour is a major determinant when people are selecting flowering plants or cut flowers to purchase or admire. The presence and experience of colour are at the very heart of human life, and each colour evokes its world of feeling and association. It's the colour of flowers that has a strong visual component that activates the visual and other areas of our brain, creating a stimulating, perceptual experience. There is an endless range of flower co-



lours, from pure white to nearly black. Each plant speaks to us through colour and sound vibrations that are specific to each energy centre within ourselves and are defined by the type of soil and climate it lives in.

The smell of flowers has an intriguing ability to evoke emotions, memories and visions and has played an important role in the world's spiritual traditions since the dawn of time. The fragrance of essential oils from flowers is used in many spiritual practices, such as Shinto, Buddhism, Native American rites through healing, prayer and meditation. Fertile soil, sufficient sunshine and water provide relevant conditions for different varieties of flowers to bloom. Like flowers, we all need the right nurturing at every level to grow and bloom.

Flowers such as dandelions, daffodils and primroses begin to bloom in spring, offering signs of hope through their new life. Summer fills with an abundance of flowers of all shapes, sizes and colours. Autumn is a season of great beauty and of decline, as summer's abundance decays towards winter's death. While flowers die, many of them resurrect again in the spring or summer, showing us that we all can come through dark times.

Humanity and flowering plants have evolved over the millennia. Flowers, through their sensory arousal, awaken us humans to the beauty that is an essential part of our innermost being, our true nature. The colour, smell, taste and touch of the flower capture our attention in so many ways, as it resonates with something beyond us.