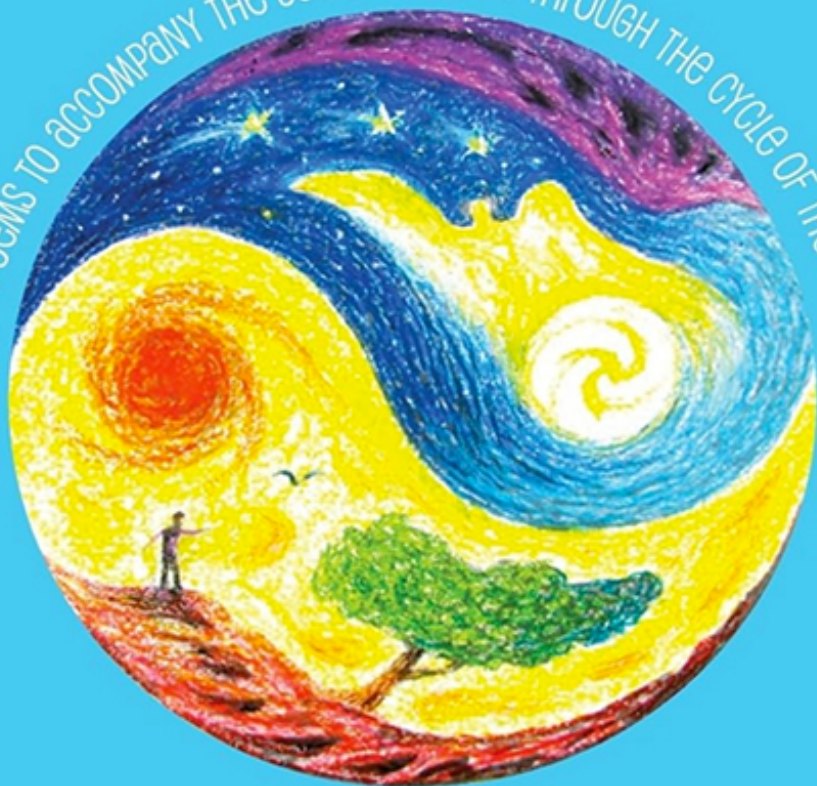


SEASONS OF THE SOUL

52 POEMS TO ACCOMPANY THE SOUL'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE CYCLE OF THE YEAR



Michael Hedley Burton

based on
THE CALENDAR OF THE SOUL
by Rudolf Steiner

Seasons of the Soul

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FOREWORD

Art is the priestess of Nature;
Nature is the handmaiden of God.

The Alchymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz, 1459

Art is a power that is able to lead us through the illusions of life. And yet today, when illusions are very strong and we have most need of something that could restore us to ourselves and to a meaningful participation with life, much of what goes by the name of art only serves to hammer ever stronger into us our sense of disconnection from ourselves and our isolation from the world. Led by interests which desire that human beings lose their connection to nature along with their understanding for the spirit behind nature, the arts today waste their potency and become "entertainment" that we are meant to "consume". Instead of providing us with a path to the truth, a high proportion of what is called art in our time is leading us even deeper into the mire. The priestess has been turned into a prostitute.

Real art is radical - it cuts through the illusion of our separation from life and helps us overcome alienation and powerlessness and regain the spiritual within ourselves.

People who have recognised that all is not as it could be within their souls can choose to do various things, and one of these is to return to the great Book of Nature. Read aright, Nature gives us everything that it is necessary to know. Yet how do we learn to read her rightly? Rudolf Steiner's *Seelenkalender*, first published in 1912, has remained unknown to most of the English-speaking world, and yet it is a source of untapped potential that can help humanity find its way out of the blind alley in which it suffers so terribly today. This book of English poetry is an attempt to bring Steiner's verses to a wider audience in such a way that English speaking readers are able to feel something of the original verses' transformative power. Those verses have here been freely paraphrased and translated and combined with new poems that I hope release something of the incredible concentration of the original writing.

My book *In the Light of a Child*¹ was published in 1989. It was a rewriting of the *Seelenkalender* into a form appropriate for children and "for the child in every human being". I have often worked since then on a further artistic rendering, attempting to discover what it is possible to say in the English language. This is an aim that, of course, can never totally be achieved, but my efforts have reached a certain stage of ripeness now that allows them to be offered to others. For poets and composers of the future - those who respect the priestess Art and reject the allurements of her step-sister, the prostitute - I believe that inspiration for their creativity will be found in the words of the *Soul Calendar* that will serve them for hundreds of years to come! And I hope that many ordinary human beings may find in *Seasons of the Soul* light and joy that will illuminate the journey of their earthly pilgrimage.

One of the qualities Nature can teach is that of the "marriage of opposites" of how apparently conflicting qualities can be brought into a higher harmony in the soul. For example, the strengthening of thought so that it becomes a power which prevents the enticements of the senses from overpowering the soul (Verse 45) must be accompanied by the understanding that thought is servant to a greater power lying in the heart (Verse 8). Another such contradiction is the whole nature of the self as something that must be both lost and won, sacrificed and possessed (see Verses 9, 11 and 12 and my book, *Thirty-Three Meditations on the Paradox of the Self*). Such things cannot be learned intellectually but become experience in the soul when we are able to participate in the cycle of the year.

The quality of paradox that the world expresses is the result of the fact that our true nature exists in both thinking (a picture of which is given to us by the world in winter) and sensation (expressed in the summer-nature of the world). To know ourselves, we must actually be able to know and experience both aspects simultaneously - must be able to find ourselves at every moment in the great breathing that takes place between world and self. This breathing is the dance of Nature. It is an important

¹ *In the Light of a Child*; Anthroposophic Press, 1989.

thing to be able to deepen the experience of our own breathing, feeling, as regards our relationship to the world, that every inhalation is as if culminating in a kind of winter event within us, resembles a spring/summer process². It is a further step to integrate our life into greater macrocosmic rhythms. The cycle of the year is also a process of breathing, but one that is taking place not just in us but in the entire living Earth. We, Nature's estranged children, can learn to participate in her life processes once more - we can come to join her in her dance.

A significant number of that generation (of which I am one) who grew up in the western world in the second half of the Twentieth Century realised as they came to maturity that their inner growth had been stunted by an education that did not respect or understand the true nature of the human being. Now, for a new generation - global this time, in both East and West - the situation can objectively be recognised in some respects as being far worse. Unless their parents and educators have consciously opposed the tendencies of increasingly intrusive social engineering inflicted upon them through their education and the media, millions of young men and women have been deprived of a major portion of their divine potential. Popular opinion would have us accept as normal what in the past would have been regarded as an intolerable burden of alienation from life, and the side effects of mass technology on those who are not strong enough to stand up to them can serve to hammer people's estrangement from the world even deeper into them. But those who come to insight into what has occurred have new and powerful possibilities to reclaim what they have lost. Great souls who realise they have been educated badly will move heaven and earth to heal and re-integrate themselves into the birthright that has been taken from them. For them, *The Calendar of the Soul* can be a powerful source of healing medicine. To learn to breathe again with the world is to enter a programme of recovery from abuse.

Most people today are able to recognise that the rhythm of the year is of great significance, although why this should be so is

² Note that, purely organically, this is reversed - the alveoli of the lungs, like leaves on a tree, fill with air in a gesture of growing and flourishing, while the deflation they go through as the air is breathed out is like a withering process.

THE BREATHING YEAR

Spring
"I AM"

Summer
"IT THINKS"

Autumn
"SHE FEELS"

Winter
"HE WILLS"



not generally understood. I have been told of refugees suffering from severe trauma who kept a communal garden and worked in it each day. They felt that healing came to them after they had undergone one full year of four seasons in that garden. That the period of one year was so significant for them was in part due to the deep connection between the rhythm of the year and the human ego. That we celebrate birthdays and other anniversaries is a reflection of this connection. If a person is able to add to the experience of the year and its four seasons, their growing familiarity with these verses, then a verse recognised becomes like an old friend to that person when it recurs. Along with the verse, there arise memories of the last time it was encountered, and the whole year can become more intimately felt. *The Calendar of the Soul* has the power within it to bring any person into a living experience of the way he or she is connected in their deepest self to the cycle of the year.

No doubt it is possible to participate in Nature's dance without the use of any *Seasons of the Soul* or *Soul Calendar*. But we are living at a time when, it can be argued, alienation from the natural world - and from ourselves and from our spiritual origins - is the single most pressing, underlying problem facing us today. We would not treat the natural world the way we do if we felt more closely connected to it. And, conversely, as we abuse the natural world, so the results of the devastation that we bring are driving us into an even deeper alienation from Nature. How do we break this cycle of abuse that, if played out to the end, will finish only in the destruction of the natural world and the enslavement of an ever-larger part of humanity?

There live already hundreds of people who have discovered for themselves what can happen through slow, gentle attention to these verses. People who have spent time with them become aware of qualities they would otherwise miss. They feel the threads of connection between their souls and the world. These threads are what were described by Rudolf Steiner at the very beginning of his long journey to lead human beings out of the darkness of materialism as "elements [within us] which we saved in our flight from Nature ... [qualities about which] we can say, 'Here we are no longer merely I; here is something which is more

than I””.³

Those who are able consciously to live amidst the life of the seasons, seeing the year as a path to find the spiritual, are needed on the earth today. They give something to the many who have lost their connection to the living earth and help to redeem the great sufferings and diseases that immature children are imposing upon their Mother. We evolve through our own suffering to a greater level of awareness of our responsibility for the world. Nature and our human nature need both to be healed. May these verses help this responsibility to be taken hold of, that redemption come both to us and to Nature, the long-suffering "handmaiden of God."

–Michael Hedley Burton, Easter 2012

MICHAEL HEDLEY BURTON has worked with the ideas of Rudolf Steiner since 1976. Out of the direction he has been given from this radical thinker, Burton endeavours in all his work to renew understanding for the significance of human speech. He is at present active in the fields of writing, voice teaching, speech therapy, chirophonetic therapy and live performance. He lives with his wife in Sydney, Australia.

³ *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*, GA 4, Chapter Two: "The Fundamental Desire for Knowledge"

WEEK SEVENTEEN – THE WORLD-WORD SPEAKS

Opposite verse: 43; complimentary verse: 36

First dating method:

Northern Hemisphere: July 28

Southern Hemisphere: January 26

Second dating method:

Northern Hemisphere: Seven-day week - Sunday closest to July 28

Southern Hemisphere: Seven-day week - Sunday closest to January 26

What is the World's-Word –
sounding sometimes in the growing-power of a tree
and sometimes in its rustling foliage –
saying now to me?

It asks me to lead all its whispered syllables
deep down into the dark ground of my soul.
There, in that still and silent place,
they shall be laid to rest.

Until, when time has past, there rise
new understanding for the rhythmic mysteries of the world,
new power of speech
and, in the heart, the coming-into-being of a Child.

Week 17. Steiner's verse, freely translated

*Q. Fourth week in July
28th July to 3rd August*

The World-Word speaks.
I lead it through the gateway of my senses
and let it penetrate the deep foundations of my soul:

"Your spiritual core – that realm of darkness where your life-to-come is formed –
let flow into it now my radiant, expansive light,
that you in time may find Me in yourself."

Week 17. Steiner's verse in the original German

*Q Vierte Juli-Woche
28. Juli -3. August*

Es spricht das Weltenwort,
Das ich durch Sinnestore
In Seelengründe durfte führen:
Erfülle deine Geistestiefen
Mit meinen Weltenweiten,
Zu finden einstens mich in dir.

Michael Hedley Burton is the author of *In the Light of a Child* – his rewriting for children of *The Calendar of the Soul* by Rudolf Steiner. Now, more than twenty years after the publication of that book, he has again rewritten Steiner's 52 verses – this time into poems that release something of the incredible concentration of the original writing.

This is writing that gets back to the primary importance of poetry as a means by which people are enabled to take hold of the power to transform themselves. Steiner's *Calendar of the Soul*, if followed by a sensitive participant through the course of the year, has within it the capacity to cut through the illusion of humanity's separation from the world.

As the book's foreword states:

We are living at a time when ... alienation from the natural world – and from ourselves and from our spiritual origins – is the single most pressing, underlying problem facing us today. We would not treat the natural world the way we do if we felt more closely connected to it.

It is now 100 years since Steiner wrote *The Calendar of the Soul*. Since that time, many of the predictions he made for cataclysmic events on earth have come true. These disasters were guaranteed to happen, Steiner stated, if human beings failed to find a new way of thinking that brought their ideas into harmony with the spiritual and natural forces that underlie all life. Steiner did not focus on the negative but gave us the means to change our effects upon the world and to bring about a huge revolution in the quality of life on earth.

In these poems the way is shown as to how this revolution through self-transformation can take place. If done, it will affect for the good far more than human life alone.



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