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Background, History and Practical Implementation of the Art of Beekeeping

Background

I walk. Every morning, before lunch and at sunset. I walk with my dog between the houses, in the city, on the Kada Hill, in different circles. For me, these walks are like when a Japanese Buddhist monk gets up between zazen meditations and walks around the dojo, the garden, the Fuji. Kada is my Fuji. Anyway, my dog is very happy and is happy that we walk three times a day. It was on one such walk that I noticed a row of beehives in front of a beautiful old house made of stones in the valley of the Sztelin stream, less than ten minutes from my home. Behind the beehives, an elderly gentleman worked with slow, unhurried movements, amid the puffy clouds of smoke from the smoker. He used his netted beekeeper's hat as an awning rather than against the bees, rolled it up and smiled underneath as he smoked his pipe. He did not notice that I was watching. I saw that every move he made was deliberate, conscious. I could see he was happy. I found him very beautiful and serene.

At that time, we had just started our small garden on the hillside, I was an inexperienced beginner in growing peppers and tomatoes, but being a good liberal arts student, I read everything, looked at everything critically, and because I was not very experienced despite growing up in a village, I unfortunately learned from my own mistakes. This is how it works. The garden offered

a similar meditation to the walks. To take a break from reading and writing, to reflect, to contemplate, to calm down and empty out. True, the walks are nice in themselves, but I always had a purpose in the garden. Nice plants, nice overall appearance, good yield. Yet the garden is also a meditation space, with different movements, different meditation. But when I saw the old beekeeper in the valley, I remembered Béla Hamvas' quote: 'The apiary is nothing but the application of revelation.' I have always wondered, what does that mean? How can 'revelation be applied'? I did not know, but I guessed, that the apiary had something to do with real magic, with real religiosity, with sincere and deep faith. The apiary has to do with 'the application of revelation', whatever that means, and perhaps even salvation.

Two years passed and I felt it was time to create my own apiary. I went to the old beekeeper, bought honey from him, talked to him. I got to know him as a nice man. I told him I wanted to learn to be a beekeeper. He told me to think it over. So I set out to think it over, and another year passed, and somehow I still didn't know if I was ready, if I was up to the difficult task. Am I good enough? Am I mature enough, wise enough to set up my own apiary? I admit I was afraid. I was afraid I would fail. That I will be weak, that I will be incompetent, ignorant. I feared that the lives entrusted to me would die in my hands. I was afraid that in the great cycle of life and death, I would have to appear with my whole being, with full consciousness. True, I had been practising this in my garden for five years, but I was still afraid of the responsibility of being a faithful shepherd to the daughters of the sun.

Then fate, the angels or the creator himself took care of that too, although he certainly left time again for me to enjoy the rampage of my own self-made demons. One day, as I was telling my gardener friend, in deep thought, why the apiary was the most important place for Dániel Berzsenyi to write poetry, to meditate, why the apiary was the 'magic eye' through which to view the world, he suddenly stopped me in my story and told me that there were two bee colonies of bees in two beehives that might not survive the winter. 'You should take them home,' he said. I was frightened. I rang up the old beekeeper again – his name is Uncle Misi, by the way – and told him what was going on. He advised me to try it and took me on as a student.

We took the bees, fixed them up, dewormed them, and although we had little time, we strengthened them for the winter. In the meantime he showed me his own apiary, I am very grateful to him, I have learned and am learning a lot

from him. The two rescued bee colonies are, as I write this, buzzing softly in their beehives, waiting for the coming spring. I quietly put my ears to the beehive and listen to them singing and dancing in bunches. I love the solid winter ball of bees. I like bees because they calm me and they are beautiful. I have learned a lot from them over the past year and I feel that they have taken me into their confidence. For some reason, I think I've been noticed, my wife has been noticed. They recognise us. I know many beekeepers think so, and many studies talk about bees not recognising the beekeeper, yet I hear them buzz differently when I approach alone or when I bring strangers near. I don't think I'm the first poet to feel such a strange, mystical connection with bees, and certainly not the first person. After all, the relationship between bees and humans is more ancient and deeper than you might think. Is it possible that the development of human civilisation is partly due to bees? What is certain is that the bee, like the dog, was linked to man very early in history, and their cooperation was sometimes wonderful, sometimes disastrous, at least as far as bees were concerned.

When man saw bees as partners, our relationship was always prosperous; when man robbed and destroyed them, it was disastrous. This must be a very important lesson for the 21st century, but I will come back to that later.

History

There are several rock drawings from prehistoric times showing very early human beekeeping, the most famous of which is the drawing of a bee in the 'Cave of the Spiders' in Valencia, Spain, where a 'honey hunter' is seen on a long rope. The peculiarity of the drawing is that, if you observe it carefully, you can see that the honey hunter's hand seems to be holding an incense burner. Probably as long as 8,000 to 10,000 years ago, similar attempts were made to 'calm' bees. Equally interesting cave paintings from the Stone Age can be found in a wide variety of places, from Zimbabwe to India.

However, the most interesting 'bee' rock drawings are to be found deep in the Sahara, in the Algerian part of the Tassili n'Ajjer labyrinth, which stretches for some five hundred kilometres. The mountain range is made up of sandstone, and erosion has created some very peculiar and unique shapes. The wanderer sees a landscape of space, even now richer in flora and fauna than the surrounding Sahara desert, but thousands of years ago this was a place of Par-

adise. In the rock drawings found in the mountains, we see people bathing in rivers with their rich streams, countless animals now extinct, vast herds, battles fought as senselessly as our present-day struggles between our common ancestors, and above all, life in full bloom. But the brilliant life has vanished beneath the grinding mills of millennia, and a hot desert wind howls through the dead shadows of the dry rocks.

Terence McKenna writes in his book *Food of the Gods*:

'In the Tassili n'Ajjer, rock paintings date from the late Neolithic to as recently as two thousand years ago. Here are the earliest known depictions of shamans with large numbers of grazing cattle. The shamans are dancing with fists full of mushrooms and also have mushrooms sprouting out of their bodies. In one instance they are shown running joyfully, surrounded by the geometric structures of their hallucinations. The pictorial evidence seems incontrovertible' (McKenna 1993, 70).

I have no intention of doubting him, except to note that I find it particularly interesting that what he describes as 'bee-faced mushroom shaman' (McKenna 1993, 73) are, in other – even more determined – ideas, 'astronauts wearing bee suits'. Right, who wants to see what and what into what? The human imagination is quite wonderful because it can be creative and creative as much as it can be destructive and crazy. What we can be sure of, however, are the depictions of mushrooms and bees in human form: anthropomorphisation.

The best researcher of these petroglyphs was a French photographer, Jean-Dominique Lajoux, whose beautiful book (Lajoux 1962), if you look for it and if you are lucky enough to find it, you will see that there is not one but many more 'bee shaman' depictions among the rock drawings. Lajoux points out that a similar 'bee mask' depiction was found sixty kilometres away, and he believes that the now mysterious meaning of the figure could be 'the spirit of the place' or 'a local myth'. We don't know, and McKenna's term 'bee shaman' is an afterthought, because we have no idea whether we are seeing a bee god or a man dressed in a bee costume and mask, during some kind of ritual. But what is very interesting and common to all Stone Age bee and honey hunter rock drawings is what Eva Crane has noted in her excellent and comprehensive book (Crane 2013), namely that unlike many other drawings over the millennia, these bee-related drawings have never been drawn anywhere. Not in Africa, not in

Europe, not in Asia. This can only mean that for thousands of years, generations have known that the representations and information about bees are irreducible, sacred and taboo, inviolable and of key importance.

Today, in the 21st century, we can see how right the prehistoric people were. If the bees and the knowledge and care of them die out, then the whole of humanity is doomed, because these bees are responsible for at least two thirds of the pollination of flowers, so if there are no bees, there is no pollination, no harvest. Without bees, humanity will starve first and then die out.

Therefore, it is incomprehensibly stupid and a crime to use chemicals in agriculture that are responsible for the mass extinction of bees. This must stop immediately, and agriculture, like our villages and towns, must be made bee-friendly! We need to create bee-friendly gardens in our country.

Prehistoric man lived immeasurably closer to nature, not alienated from it, but like us, they have also been affected by climate change. In the rock drawings of the once prosperous and river-riddled Tassili n'Ajjer, we can follow the succession of cultures over thousands of years, the disappearance of swimmers, the disappearance of bee people, the appearance of wanderers on camels replacing endless herds, and the drying up of the whole plateau, the desertification of the surrounding area, and its former inhabitants left, and nobody continued their drawings. Today, only a few Tuareg tribes pass by, the lonely and barely decodable witnesses to the rampant life and high culture of the rock drawings of many millennia ago.

Not far from this magical land, however, beekeeping soon blossomed again in the history of mankind, specifically in the Nile Valley.

The Daughters of the Sun

In ancient Egypt, bees were highly valued from the very beginning, and beekeepers were classified in a special caste – I note that beekeepers in later times were mainly priests, monks, teachers, diligent and educated craftsmen – and in Egypt, even the names of kings were preceded by the hieroglyph of the bee, there are countless depictions, descriptions and drawings throughout the Egyptian millennia of bees, cylindrical laid scythe, beekeepers, honey, wax, as excellently summarised in Gene Kristky's book (Kristky 2015). He is the one who has published the poem that preserved the belief in the divine origin of bees:

'The god Re wept and the tears
from his eyes fell on the ground
and turned into a bee.
The bee made (his honeycomb)
and busied himself
with the flowers of every plant;
and so wax was made
and also honey
out of the tears of Re.'
(Salt papyrus)

According to ancient Egyptian mythology, the god Ra is the creator god, the god of the sun, so bees were associated with creation, the sun and light in the human belief system from very early on.

Not by chance.

In her comprehensive work, the aforementioned Eva Crane writes that two mythical animals have accompanied humanity since the creation stories: one is the snake, the other the bee. Both live in a dark place and come out into the light, both have venom, but while the snake is a good or bad character in different mythologies and religions, bees are absolutely positive characters in all myths, religions and cultures. For example, in ancient Greek mythology, Aristaios, after driving Orpheus' lover Eurydice to a snake bite and thus to her death, repents his sin immensely and sacrifices a bull to the gods. As a sign of Zeus's forgiveness, bees flow from the body of the flaming bull, and Aristaios becomes the first beekeeper and the patron god of ancient beekeepers. It is perhaps worth noting that the bees appear here as a sign of divine forgiveness. But to return to Egypt a little more, traditional Egyptian beekeeping flourished throughout the long millennia of the pharaohs, and even in ancient Egypt there were 'travelling beekeepers' who would migrate up and down the Nile with their beekeeping boats, their makeshift beehives (we would call them primitive hives) and their bees, to match the blossoming of the bees. A separate category was the hundreds of rows and walls of beehives made from the clay of the Nile, where generations of families were beekeepers. Moreover, after the last hieroglyphics were written in Egypt and all the pagan churches were closed by order of the Christian Roman emperors, traditional Egyptian beekeeping was allowed to survive, with its traditions.

It is no wonder that archaeologists in Tel Rehov, Israel, have uncovered very similar clay cylindrical bee apiaries, estimated to be around three thousand years old. It would have been strange if the Jews had not known about bee-keeping and honey, since the Old Testament mentions honey fifty-five times and Israel sixteen times as 'Canaan flowing with milk and honey', and honey cakes are still eaten on many Jewish holidays. The mouths of Jewish children are smeared with butter and honey at birth, perhaps to give them a taste of the nourishing richness and sweetness of life. Honey, honeycomb honey, like a kiss, the bride's lips and consummated love appear in the Song of Songs, but elsewhere in Scripture as wisdom itself. Honey has become a traditional symbol of Jesus in Christianity, according to Catholic lexicons. I think that the blessing of honey, along with milk and water, may have been a continuation of an ancient ritual, such as the way the early Christians offered honey to the baptised at baptism. Later, the 'benedictio lactis et mellis', or blessing of milk and honey, was the ritual of the union of human and divine nature in man through baptism.

It is true that honey has retained its significance on the Christmas table, but unfortunately these old, deeply meaningful rituals have faded from memory.

Honey was also incredibly important in the ancient Roman Empire, as in the fourth hymn of Virgil's *Georgica* and many Latin authors, but also in China, where it was as important throughout the history of the Chinese Empire. The bee venom therapy in apitherapy is particularly interesting, where bees sting people to heal them, is very popular in the tradition of acupuncture, where bees sting points where they would otherwise be stung with needles. I would not be surprised if the two healing traditions had come from the same source thousands of years earlier. Nor would I be surprised if it turned out that Jesus and his disciples, his followers, in addition to the power of faith and love, healed not only with olive and hemp oil, but also with honey.

The healing properties of honey and beekeeping products have been known since ancient times, only the application itself was not all the same.

Apitherapy, which today means a very extensive, varied and diverse range of remedies using beekeeping products, is in fact an ancient tradition that we must partly relearn and partly apply to the people of our time.

Perhaps the first thing to understand is that therapy means applying something continuously, consciously, with a healing, nutritious purpose, and it is effective continuously. But today's man is spoiled by sugar, and it is no coincidence that Terence McKenna writes in his book that

'Of the many new commodities that made their way into Europe during the breakup of the medieval stasis, one in particular emerged as the new spice or drug of choice. This was cane sugar. Sugar had been known for centuries as a rare medicinal substance. The Romans knew that it was derived from a bamboolike grass. But the tropical conditions needed for the cultivation of sugarcane ensured that sugar would be a rare and imported commodity in Europe. Only in the nineteenth century, at the encouragement of Napoleon I, were sugar beets developed as an alternative to cane sugar' (McKenna 1993, 173).

There is much more to this than first meets the eye, e.g. colonialism, slavery, dependency, health destruction, wars, diseases, one by one can be attributed to sugar as a drug. And people still feed and reward their children with sugar!

There are huge differences between sugar and honey, both economically and physiologically. On the one hand, honey cannot be produced in as large quantities as sugar and is therefore more expensive, and on the other hand, honey is absorbed differently (better and more beneficially) than sugar, but of course honey should be consumed in moderation.

Apiculture in Hungary

With the advent of sugar, beekeeping in Europe changed completely, but the final blow came from the oil industry, when paraffin candles and oil lamps appeared. Until then, besides honey, beeswax was one of the beekeepers' most valuable products, and was used to cast candles (and in some places still is). Perhaps not incidentally, beeswax candles, unlike paraffin wax candles and lamps, do not emit harmful substances, have a pleasant light and a delicate fragrance, and are also said by many to purify the air when burnt.

In Europe, by the way, 'honey hunting' has long been the norm, but not in the way many people imagine, moreover, Eva Crane devotes a special chapter to the forgotten Hungarian beekeepers who found bee colonies in the forests of the Carpathian Basin, in the hollows of a large tree, marked the trunks of these trees and returned to them. These honey hunters did not completely rob the bee colonies, they did not destroy them. The Hungarian beekeeping literature is later highlighted by Samuel Tessedik, who opened a beekeeping technical school for children in Szarvas, and it was documented that from 1794 onwards he

practised beekeeping without killing bee colonies, moreover, he planted a bee pasture as a great supporter of the naturalisation of acacia. Of course there are two sides to acacia, good and bad, but today our country has probably the most acacia trees in Europe, so we are also the first in terms of acacia honey. It is precisely because of acacia honey that Hungarians have become accustomed to honey as a liquid, and no longer buy crystallised honey. This is a big mistake, sooner or later all honeys will crystallise, but this does not take away any of their goodness, unlike if they are often overheated. Honey falsification could be a separate chapter, but as I also count food falsification among major crimes, and I am always distracted by the silent killing of silent killers, I will not go into that now, but just point out that honey is best bought from a beekeeper.

The best possible thing, of course, is for someone who is in the middle of their life to get to a apiary. Be the apiary their own, a friend's, a family member's, a master's. Perhaps this is how Béla Hamvas came to the apiary, which he commemorates so beautifully in his writings when he says of Hungary:

'I can always see better that I made the right choice. Rightly, here in this sleeping nation, because it's still worth more to sleep like this than to live like this. This is the people and the land of Berzsenyi and Sándor Kisfaludy, you can destroy it, but you will never be able to wake it up from its golden age. This is the land of the apiary' (Hamvas 2020).

However, before we get too carried away, Hamvas probably said this about only a very small corner of Hungary, about the genius of the Southwest, or and more specifically about its manifestation. Because the great geniuses Hamvas has set up can appear anywhere in the country. It is likely that this Southwest genius, this serene spirit, is evident in every Hungarian apiary.

And what does Hamvas write about this? It is that the Southwest home, the mansion is the most important place for the apiary:

'The most intimate place in a mansion is not the dining room, or the reception, or the library. Something has been created here that you won't see at any other point on earth. This is the apiary. One has to imagine Berzsenyi in the summer, on a radiantly hot day in August, walking across the sparkling courtyard after lunch, with Horace under his arm and some papers on which he had sketched his ode. The apiary is fifty steps from the house.

He opens the door. Bees buzz around the beehives, flying in and out of the window. Apart from the beehives, just a softwood table and chairs, nothing else. It looks out at the blazing garden, then turns to the apiary, the book lying on the table, the paper, the outside world disappearing and sinking away somewhere where the hot summer garden and the beehive are no longer visible. There he sits, motionless in the hustle and bustle, as if something inside him is beginning to noisily knead and spit out everything he has collected in his life: childhood, his parents' house, his loves, what he has learned and seen and read. Something is working in him and turning his life around. The apiary is a place of wakeful sleep (...) And Berzsenyi sits there, this life barely human in this buzzing heat and the solitude of Zeus with time flowing oily slow' (Hamvas 1988).

This is how it is described by László Németh, the first great populariser of Imre Somogyi's Garden Hungary Idea:

'The fairy goddesses of this apiary explain and fairy to him the reform, in the horse race arena of which he would like to see an Elisian course, with the Hungarian Greeks, twined and elevated in celebration. It is the Hungarian Greeks of the Danube valley that he thinks of in his economic study, and even in contrast to Széchenyi's calculating Hungarians he does not drop the "imaginative Hungarianism", which is "a great office for the most beautiful humanity"' (Németh 2014).

But Berzsenyi's apiary took a fatal hit during the twentieth century.

'We reach the edge of the garden by going around the house. Here once stood the apiary that Béla Hamvas calls the most intimate room of the noble mansion, the "place of wakeful sleep" in the South-West. Berzsenyi often came here from the house, which was always cool, dark and smelled of smoke. Right here, behind the house, because only the common people sit outside the gate to watch the street and smoke a pipe. Here he could be far enough away from the chatter of his four children, from the chatter of his wife, but still close enough to be able to take action when he had to. Here, in the apiary, he could close himself in a book or open himself up in a poem or a letter. And if he reached for his wine glass, he could look up

and see the farmer's eyes gazing with satisfaction around the detail of his estate. No one has sat out here for a long time. The current visitor sees the empty, grass-covered nothingness. And that: only a few stray wasps from the nearby orchard visit the place of the once-evolved apiary (...)' (Smidéliusz 2011).

But, fortunately for us, we can still find a single orphan photo of Dániel Berzsenyi's apiary on the wall of the mansion in Nikla. László Kenéz wrote about this:

'Let's go out again, at least find where the apiary was standing. Finally, we have the place based on the old picture. And then, in that place, everything becomes clear as the sun. The apiary was the link between the grove and the mansion. Now that it is gone, the optic through which the spirit of nature could be projected into the rooms of the house is missing. Hence the sharp contrast between the bright garden and the barren interiors. The apiary was an oculus, a magic eye. It is enough, then, to stand in the cold place of the apiary, to look at the one who is really there, instead of the neon-lit, absent Berzsenyi' (Kenéz 2008).

And with the disappearance of Berzsenyi's apiary, the great possibility of a life with bees seemed to disappear. And although János Arany wrote some nice bee poems, Béla Ambrózy takes incredible glory for founding Hungarian beekeeping, Boczonádi, Pál Órösi and many other excellent Hungarian beekeepers could be mentioned, and as I have shown, Béla Hamvas and László Németh knew about the importance of the apiary, but beekeeping remained a kind of a neglected side issue for some very determined Hungarians. And yet the inhabitants of these apiaries do incredibly valuable work, and their products are our real treasures.

If you asked me, I would say: (1) children should be taught beekeeping, to love the daughters of the sun, (2) domestic honey should be promoted as much as possible and (3) the establishment of bee pasture should be encouraged, (4) a centre for apitherapy research should be established and research should be supported, (5) ban the use of pesticides harmful to bees, (6) organise artistic and scientific events around beekeeping and ecological issues, and finally (7) launch a national campaign for 'bee-friendly gardens'.

But of course I am not asked, unfortunately, so there is nothing I can do but write and learn beekeeping quietly myself, to contribute as much as I can, according to my modest means, to the survival of the land of the bee apiaries and its people.

Practical implementation

‘Marcus Aurelius says that by the age of forty, a man with a spark of intellect has lived and knows everything that has happened to men in time before him, and everything that may happen to men in time after him’ (Márai 2006).

This is what Sándor Márai wrote in his *Füves könyv (Herbal Book)* and it is worth pondering for those who are not yet forty, for those who are already over forty, and above all for those who are just turning forty. That’s a bit of what I thought in May 2021, when I started my first year of production with seventeen bee colonies, more as a breeder than a beekeeper.

My wife and I moved to Szentendre, to the Kada peak, in 2015 from the downtown of Budapest, where we lived for seven years, before that I was studying at the University of Szeged. According to my degree, I am a philologist, a ‘literary gentleman’, as Antal Szerb wrote about the like-minded in the *Pendragon legenda (Pendragon Leged)*. Otherwise – although I was born in Eger – I grew up in a village in the Kisalföld (Little Plain), our parents had a big garden, we did a lot of gardening ourselves with my brother, with whom I still have a close and loving relationship, so he helped me a lot in beekeeping, too. Lucky is the one who has at least one good brother, a few good friends and a wise wife, and I consider myself so lucky because I have been given all these things, despite all the difficulties. My mother put me in a food (dairy) secondary school, even though I was already writing poetry at the age of ten, and I had no intention of becoming a gardener or a cheese-maker. Somehow, in the end, in addition to continuous learning, writing, reading, gardening and beekeeping, food production and manufacturing came back into my life.

Originally, I wanted to progress step by step, expanding slowly, and I imagined beekeeping as a kind of additional pastime that I would learn in my old age, but it turned out differently. From the beginning, my connection with bees was not a livelihood, but a particular passion, just like gardening.

Our beehives are twenty-four-frame large beehives for single colony and two bee colonies from Nagyboconád, such beehives are only used in Hungary, in the rest of the world it is more common to use loading beehives. I've read and learned a lot about beekeeping with these, but I'm still learning. I love these beehives because they are like books, with the frames of the honeycombs being the pages of the books in which we write our golden poems together with the bees, which is honey itself. So, I have a typical, small, standing Hungarian apiary on the outskirts of Szentendre. We were also very interested in new technologies, for example, we built a honeycomb cabinet with lockable vents and a small ozone generator, which performed surprisingly well. For me, for example, the solar wax melter I inherited from our brother Józsi works very well, with the addition that I have mounted wheels on it, so I can set it on the terrace facing the sun, and it melts the used honeycomb very nicely in summer. Anyway, I find it typical of beekeeping that there is always something to be solved or fixed. Perhaps I am not offending either the more professional or the more self-aware beekeepers when I write that beekeeping for me is often like an 'adult Lego'. A skilled beekeeper can be quite ingenious when it comes to solving a previously unknown problem.

In my first productive year I was constantly struggling with the health of my bees, trying to develop a sustainable mite protocol, but I still need to improve. In the end, we had a very good honey harvest, even though the two-month drought at the end of the summer and the resulting lack of pollen did give us a challenge, climate change, human activity, deforestation, disappearance of bee pastures and the use of chemicals, invasive pests are all affecting bees and making them increasingly difficult to keep alive. I could also say that bees are the most sensitive 'litmus paper' of environmental change, directly seeing on them how the planet is being destroyed.

I try to practice ethical beekeeping, which also means that I always leave honey for the bees (yes, acacia too), I never fully empty the beehive, and the primary concern is the well-being of the colony, so the real success is not a large amount of honey, but healthy bees. In addition to honey, we also collect pollen, make propolis solution, and use the wax extracted with the solar wax melter to make Christmas candles with my wife, Virág, who is my partner in this. For us, beekeeping is therefore not a question of making a living just yet, but an opportunity to develop, to learn and to 'rethink our relationship with nature'.

In the meantime, the art of beekeeping became a book, and when I finished it – in October 2023 – I had already overwintered with twenty-six colonies, and built – also thanks to my friends – a small beehive house, or ‘beehive airy’ house as they say elsewhere, as a sort of laboratory, and started to study the healing power of bees: apitherapy. I always look forward with excitement to spring.

I read and researched a lot about bees, not only as a beekeeper, but also as a philologist and poet. I have written *A méhészet művészete* (The Art of Beekeeping), about the important, fascinating and interesting role that bees have played in the cultural history, literature and art of mankind from the beginning to the present day, and the strange interaction that has developed between bees and humans. For two years my essays were published in the journal *Méhészet* (Beekeeping), and finally these essays have been collected in one volume. A lot of things were left out of the volume, such as a more detailed explanation of apitherapy, or a description of the possibilities of chemical-free practical beekeeping, but these would have already stretched the already very directional ‘art of beekeeping’.

I go out to the bees when my family members die and tell them what has happened, just like the American poet John Greenleaf Whittier, who wrote a beautiful poem about Kossuth, and I can only hope that the bees will relieve my immense sadness more than poor Sylvia Plath, who took up beekeeping before her suicide and wrote a series of poems about bees that are movingly beautiful. But I have a different relationship with these bees, I sit among them and I can hear them flying over fences and barriers, they don’t distinguish between mine and yours, they know that the whole landscape, the whole Earth, every flower belongs to them and is beautiful to them. They knew this millions of years ago, when their ancestors decided to go vegan and chose flowers over meat, changing the face and destiny of an entire planet. If we decided to stop eating meat, wouldn’t the world change? Could we save ourselves from extinction if we took the protection of bees seriously?

I ask this in the apiary, so I could ask it in eternity, and the others could just shrug it off, come on, these are rhetorical questions.

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