A poem from Goethe well describes the ‘destiny weaving’ many of us experienced as we participated in the formation of Community Biodynamic Vietnam.

How each the WHOLE its substance gives, 
each in the other works and lives! 
See heavenly forces rising and descending, 
their golden urns reciprocally lending: 
on wings that winnow sweet blessing 
from heaven through the earth they’re pressing, 
to fill the All with harmonies caressing.

Community Biodynamic Vietnam is a new community-based group formed to support interested and committed people. Accessing information, facilitating camaraderie and revolutionizing agricultural practices in Vietnam are key motives. Facebook is the underlying medium of communication.

There is currently a biodynamic farm centred on care for developmentally challenged youth near Hue in Central Vietnam. It is a thriving and glorious Rudolf Steiner Camphill community (www.eurasia.org.vn – Foundation and Association for Special Education in Vietnam, established in 2002, with its current land and community development completed in 2006/7). Lisi Ha Vinh and her husband Ha Vinh Tho, both eurythmists and trained Waldorf Teachers, began it. Mr Hung is a biodynamic farmer trained in India and U.S. There are also visiting biodynamic teachers there.
For the rest of Vietnam there is much work to be done to educate people in another way of practising agriculture that will help to heal the air, waters and lands, and as well as the plants, animals and people.

Enter Tarun Nguyen Tri, a student of Vietnamese/Australian Thanh Cherry’s Steiner Early Childhood Education (ECE) Teacher Training Program for whom the question, ‘How can I help to support the health of my family and friends, the land and the bees?’ was: ‘You must become a biodynamic farmer,’ she said. Within two months Tarun Tri, a practising Yoga teacher and graduate of the IT world, organized two 3½ day residential biodynamic workshops in both Northern and Southern Vietnam in May. These workshops were in addition to and in conjunction with two one-day parent/teacher ECE workshops hosted by aspiring Steiner kindergarten programs in Hanoi and Saigon respectively.

Some ECE attendees registered for the biodynamic workshops after they realized that the education of children and the healing of humanity is inherent in studying and practising biodynamic agriculture.

Barriers of fear and notions of impossibility dissolved as we got programs, locations, responsibilities, supplies and possible participants organized in Australia and Vietnam.

After ascertaining what the settings would be for our biodynamic workshops outside Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (formally Saigon), I sent a list of supplies necessary for making compost, cow pat pit, horn manure, horn silica and tree paste in each of the locations. The settings were to be: an organic farm on the outskirts of Hanoi (mixed vegetation and trees), then a half day workshop in a fledgling inner city community garden in Saigon.
and the remaining 3 days on a medicinal rainforest outside Saigon (which used to host Japanese soldiers and then American troops).

For my preparation, I attended the Master Prep making workshop in Bellingen with Alan and John just days before going to Vietnam. (I have been practising biodynamic agriculture since beginning my study with Gunther Hauk in N.Y. 1997 at the Pfeiffer Centre garden.)

I got practice in Vietnam by creating a compost pile in a cumquat orchard for the Hanoi Steiner School. The plot was out of town and surrounded by monoculture plots with much evidence of chemical spraying and nitrogen fertilizers. Some young professionals from Saigon joined the farmer and the owners and paid staff of the school for their help in our daily afternoon compost making. The resulting photos being posted on social media helped to arouse people’s interest to the workshops.

Tarun Tri’s network was based on his Yoga and meditation practice and his experience with the developing Vietnamese Steiner Education community. Initially, paying customers were equalling the number of people volunteering for the event but when the day arrived for our first half day session the numbers had thankfully doubled. The people attending included farmers, marketers, agricultural equipment manufacturers, teachers, engineers, merchants, restauranteurs and health industry specialists. Every day the numbers grew. Those sceptical became convinced of the value of biodynamic agriculture and expressed their gratitude for the life changing experience. We were at ‘30 plus’ each day. There were a few full families (children, parents, grandparents) with 4 heavily pregnant women too. Children wove in and out of our activities.

The approach we used for the training was a mix of practical and lecture formats with much singing, artistic, and Goethean meditative activities. These plus creative movement consciousness raising were included to support healthy balanced learning.

As we were living-in, Tarun Tri insisted that we cook vegan macrobiotic food together and have ‘cultural evenings’. Yoga after watching the sunrise, began our days. Singing, discussion and much laughter after watching the sunset, ended our days.

The community development happened as much in between structured classes as it did in the actual classes themselves. The students were bubbling with conversation before and after each learning session. As all of my words
had to be translated it was necessary to again go over the concepts that may have been difficult to grasp like the making of the preparations.

The first biodynamic workshop was held at an intentional Buddhist organic farm outside Hanoi, Tue Vien May 13–16, 2016. Moringa (the Miracle Tree), Guava (both mature and sapling) and many vegetables are their specialty. Their fresh foods are packaged and distributed around Hanoi daily. The dried goods consisting of tea, medicinal and cleaning products go farther afield.

This farm is also a centre for the slow food movement. Some of the farm has been companion planted and is healthy and thriving. Other parts of the farm are monoculture and these crops appear to be suffering. The contrast is stark.

There are many compost heaps, worm farms and liquid manures with EM too. The turmeric compost was striking with its resulting golden soil. I believe the whole farm will benefit from animal inhabitants and their resulting manures.

Our first activity as a group was to make a compost pile. In this case it was to teach the balances of acid/alkaline; balance of carbon/nitrogen and of wet/dry. After we ceremoniously put the preparations into the pile, we sang a Vietnamese song about the movement of the birds being what makes the world go around! This then became a ritual after the finishing of each compost pile that we made, or making of preparations.

It was particularly moving for participants to embrace the soulfulness that can be attained with biodynamics. I believe this practice of reverence and goodness as we conducted our agricultural business helped people to have the necessary mind/body/soul shift for adopting biodynamic agriculture. Sometimes the mood was like a festival with people laughing, singing, dancing and philosophizing as they made compost, stirred or kneaded or pasted, crushed eggshells, stuffed horns or buried them.

We began our 7am sessions at the compost each day and made visual and tactile observations. There was much amusement as a toad or two hopped out from under the banana leaves with which we had covered the compost, seemingly in response to our singing and our inquisitive presence. Many of the participants had had very little exposure to nature and so were startled and excited at such events. This added to the impact of these biodynamic workshops.

I was most impressed to see how eagerly many got their hands into the making of the cow pat pit and
the tree paste, both involving cow manure. These activities evoked distant childhood memories. Some said they would never again pass a cow pie on the street without being conscious of its medicinal properties for agriculture and people.

The stirring of the preparations was very moving for many participants. They felt at one with the water; they marvelled at the transformation of the texture of the water and the sacred geometry forms. One engineer who has studied biodynamics academically for years said ‘NOW I understand what the Stirring is about’, and he also made a picture of the vortices in the bucket to express this aha moment.

When we applied the tree paste in a suffering guava grove, there was much squirming and screaming of young women and men. They were provoked by ‘hairy caterpillars’ that were devouring the little trees and the obscuring web-making spiders in the decrepit site. After our persistence in ‘rubbing down’ the saplings; applying the paste and de-caterpillaring the trees; the 30-tree grove looked positively upright. On the other hand, prostrate were the sweet potatoes’ leaves growing under the trees that took a trampling under our well-meaning activity.

The participants who were so uncomfortable with the insect life were encouraged to take this time to face their fears as it was imperative to their ‘biodynamic ambassadorship’ that they be comfortable in nature. How can the children be expected to relax and embrace nature and NOT rely on insecticide spray, if the adults around are acting terrified? This gave a great opportunity for learning about the unwelcome insects and addressing some ways that they could be minimized, including the making and use of peppers. The farmers took pride in the prospect of teaching the nature-phobic about the life cycles of the insects and teaching how to catch them. What
we did with them was a useful exercise in raising a different consciousness. During our session on bees, we showed some of Gunther Hauk’s ‘The Hour of Decision’ video on bees and the threat to them posed by chemical agriculture. The ensuing discussion was inflamed! There was sheer terror in many participants at the dire consequences to humanity and life on earth. Yes, education is needed.

As many of the participants are vegan, the cow horn use and other animal parts being used for BD preparations was of moral concern. I was able to convey the deep respect that biodynamic farmers have for these sacred animal body parts. The architecture of each body part is so perfectly constructed that it cannot be replicated by any human creation. The students were relieved to learn that biodynamic practitioners do not kill cows just to obtain horns or a myxentery. We are respectful in our approach. Thus it is about honouring animals rather than exploiting them.

When I spoke of cow manure being farmer’s gold, one participant recalled that in the old days it was said ‘a Vietnamese farmer begins a farm with one buffalo’. The wisdoms are the same the world over.

The hosts of the farms we worked on also participated in the workshops. While other participants will visit and check on the status of the preparations, the ongoing support of the hosts is imperative to the work continuing on site.

At the Saigon Inner City Garden being created on a demolition site and drug junkie hangout, there is a strongly-founded view that the trendy are being drawn to biodynamic agriculture. Contrary to this, I noted that the earnest young founders are most impressive in their dedication.

Ironically Mr. Cong of the Medicinal Rainforest outside Saigon, burns one ton of organic and inorganic waste a day. Making composts on the rainforest site and clinic/factory sites will be an amazing contribution to the soil improvement (and creation!) in the city. As bags of nitrogen fertilizer are currently dumped around the bases of so many trees, it is my hope too that the CPP and Soil Activator will take the place of this deadly farming tool.

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I highly recommend that anyone interested in sharing their knowledge and time visit Vietnam and meet these enterprising enthusiastic people. Of course I learned so much too of current and traditional agricultural ways.

I believe Steffen Schneider’s statement for The Institute for Mindful Agriculture (IMA) exemplifies what is being born in Vietnam: ‘...reshape agricultural theory and practice to create a world where individuals are once again strongly connected to the source of their sustenance and where food is grown in active dialogue with nature and distributed in a socially just manner.

To meet its responsibilities in the future, this new agriculture will require us to consciously develop mindful life practices... IMA will engage the visionaries, practitioners and educators of this emerging food culture and economy in research focused on accelerating the growth of this transformative paradigm. Together we will work to ensure that a truly regenerative form of ‘agri-culture’ takes hold on a local and global scale. (The ‘Koberwitz Impulse’: Biodynamics and the Institute for Mindful Agriculture, Part 1, Stella Natura 2016)

When inserting preps into the compost at the Medicinal Rainforest headquarters, and discussing equivalent local plants for preparation-making in Vietnam, our host, Mr Cong (Chinese Doctor and LaoTze expert), recited a 1000 year old poem about Yarrow! A maiden was crying for having lost her yarrow braided hairpiece. Why not just make another one? Because that one had been given to her by her lover.

Community Biodynamic Vietnam has now sent a large order for preparations to BAA. They are committed to going to each other’s land and practising biodynamics. The informative BAA Resource Manual has now been translated, with the translation of BAA News Leaf to follow… Their facebook page address is currently triyogahealth.

The Vietnamese recipients are most grateful for BAA’s contribution of complimentary News Leafs, Resource Manuals, Soil Activator and preparations. Nancy and Alf Finch of Eden Seeds, sent books as requested.