

# New Age Hierophagy? Spiritual Transformation through the Consumption of Bach Flower Remedies and Other Vibrational Essences\*

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## Abstract

The creation of Vibrational Essences, including the Edward Bach Flower Remedies, represents a twentieth-century innovation of homeopathy that takes the notion of ingestible healing liquids into entirely new territory. While homeopathic remedies can be understood as a form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), New Age practitioners have expanded the scope of liquid essences to reportedly harness the metaphysical powers of sacred places and otherworldly entities. These essences are best described as hierophagic since they are believed to originate in a divine or semi-divine source and are designed to facilitate spiritual transformation through consumption while delivering sacred knowledge. Following a brief history of Vibrational Essences since the 1930s, a close examination of textual sources investigates how New Age practitioners create these essences through pilgrimage and ritual practices, including communication with intermediary beings. This evidence raises questions about otherworldly agency and contributes new research into spiritual embodiment practices in contemporary esotericism.

Keywords: New Age; spirituality; religion; hierophagy; essences; angels; sacred sites

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New Age spirituality is primarily concerned with healing and spiritual growth and has developed a plethora of activities designed to facilitate these goals.<sup>1</sup> New Age healing is grounded in notions of “holism” and considers the mind, body and spirit to be intimately entwined.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, healing addresses not just health issues but also mental beliefs, emotional traumas, and energetic “blockages” in an attempt to restore optimal wellbeing.<sup>3</sup> New Age healing is almost inseparable from spiritual growth where illness or personal challenges are understood as important learning experiences designed to fuel individual spiritual development.<sup>4</sup> The variety of New Age healing practices are innumerable and include group classes, individual therapies, and the performance of solitary rituals.<sup>5</sup> In their construction of healing modalities, New Age practitioners draw from an eclectic mix of sources, often reinterpreting traditions from other cultures to suit their needs or reworking existing modalities to fashion their own brand.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, New Age healing can be characterised by innovation and *bricolage*. Close examination of specific forms of healing can deliver valuable insight into New Age praxis and highlight the development of religious ideas in contemporary Western cultures. Although “New Age” is a contested term that some scholars would prefer to discard,<sup>7</sup> Wouter Hanegraaff describes New Age spirituality as a modern form of religion based on a privatised symbolism

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1. Originally associated with counter-cultural and millennial expectations of the Age of Aquarius, more recently New Age refers to a range of holistic, alternative, and esoteric spiritualities that have become popular since the 1960s. As demonstrated in this article, the development of Vibrational Essences builds on Theosophical understandings of an energetic ontology and this lends continued relevance to New Age as an appropriate term.

2. Hedges and Beckford, “Holism,” 172-73; Tighe and Butler, “Holistic,” 418-19.

3. Hammer, *Claiming*, 92; Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 54.

4. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 54, 243-44.

5. MacPherson, *Women*; English-Lueck, *Health*; Ultriainen, “Doing”; Crockford, *Ripples*; Sointu and Woodhead, “Spirituality”; Roussou, “Transnational.”

6. Aldred, “Money,” 71-72; Heelas, *Spiritualities*, 146-47.

7. Frisk, “Quantitative,” 119; Sutcliffe, *Children*, 9-10

that reworks myths and images from both religious and secular culture.<sup>8</sup> In this syncretism, New Age draws extensively on Western esoteric practices that underwent processes of secularisation during the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> The development of Vibrational Essences examined here exemplifies this view of New Age spirituality as secularised esotericism and it is understood in this context for the remainder of the discussion.<sup>10</sup>

This article investigates the New Age advancement of Vibrational Essences designed to be ingested for healing and spiritual transformation. These liquid essences are produced by individual practitioners and delivered to consumers worldwide through local and online businesses. Some brands such as the Bach Flower Remedies and Australian Bush Flower Essences are also stocked by pharmacies and health food stores.<sup>11</sup> Vibrational Essences are usually packaged in 30ml glass or plastic bottles with fitted pipettes that administer a number of drops into the mouth or under the tongue. Essences are made from purified water which is sometimes collected from natural springs and mixed with a small amount of brandy or similar alcohol as a preserving agent. Most essences are produced through the creation of a ‘mother’ or stock tincture which is subsequently diluted for sale.<sup>12</sup> It is possible to categorise Vibrational Essences according to the qualities or powers they reportedly harness and on the basis of how those properties are allegedly deposited into the carrier water during production. This article identifies four broad types of Vibrational Essences including those derived from natural objects such as flowers, gemstones or seashells; essences designed to absorb the energies of natural landscapes or sacred sites; those allegedly created through otherworldly agents such as angels and ascended masters; and essences designed to capture the transference of

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8. Hanegraaff, “New Age Spiritualities,” 152-53.

9. *Ibid.*, 146.

10. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 522.

11. Chemist, “Rescue”; Sunnybrook, “Australian.”

12. Hall, *Crystal Bible*, 371-72; Australian, “Stock Kit.”

human intention. Of course, many practitioners report using a combination of these methods and this list is not intended to be exhaustive. This research does not aim to classify Vibrational Essences in a scientific fashion but rather to present an historical overview of their development and highlight significant innovations in praxis from the 1930s to the present day.

In their creation of Vibrational Essences, New Age practitioners have taken the idea of homeopathy, which can be understood as a form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), and developed it into a practice best described as hierophagy. The term “hierophagy” was occasionally employed in the context of ancient religious and biblical writings before being further developed by Meredith Warren to denote a genre found in ancient Mediterranean texts.<sup>13</sup> Warren’s research examines hierophagic consumption in writings such as Apuleius’s *Metamorphosis*, variations on the ancient Greek myth of Persephone, and Biblical texts Revelation and 4 Ezra, among others. Warren defines hierophagy as the act of transformational eating with three essential characteristics:

1. the substance eaten is otherworldly in origin and binds the eater to that place,
2. the eater is transformed by the hierophagic consumption,
3. the hierophagic meal transmits knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

In some ancient narratives, hierophagic transformation is physically dramatic such as in Apuleius’s *Metamorphosis* where Lucius is reconstituted from animal to human form.<sup>15</sup> However, other instances of hierophagy deliver more nuanced bodily effects, for example Warren notes that in *Joseph and Aseneth*, the heroine’s face is described as shining after she consumes heavenly honeycomb.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, hierophagic transformation does not only result in physical transfigurations but can also be expressed in altered behaviour, as illustrated by Aseneth’s subsequent conversion to the faith of Joseph. Warren reports that the gift of prophecy features

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13. Warren, *Food and Transformation*, 1-2.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, 3.

16. Warren, “Food and Transformation in Ancient Mediterranean Literature.”

strongly in Biblical accounts of hierophagy: Ezra, Ezekiel and John of Patmos all receive new abilities to speak prophetically to their audiences.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, it is transformations in faith, knowledge, capabilities, and healing that are central to New Age narratives of the hierophagic consumption of Vibrational Essences.

It is important to note that a hierophagic meal is not always comprised of food in the everyday sense of the word. Any substance that is consumed by mouth can function in a hierophagic manner regardless of whether it is solid, liquid, or even edible in ordinary circumstances. One notable example of an unusual hierophagic meal would be John's consumption of the scroll in the Biblical book of Revelation.<sup>18</sup> Although Warren's research focuses on the ancient Mediterranean, hierophagy is a cross-cultural phenomenon that is also prevalent in the modern world. Prominent examples can be found in popular literature such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* where Alice shrinks to fit through a small doorway after eating a cake and drinking a liquid labelled "EAT ME" and "DRINK ME," respectively.<sup>19</sup> Critically, Alice's transformation through hierophagic consumption affects more than her physical form because it grants her access to the otherworldly place of Wonderland.<sup>20</sup> This illustrates the function of hierophagy as a mechanism through which social actors can "cross boundaries from one realm to another through ingesting some item from that other realm."<sup>21</sup> A salient example of contemporary hierophagy is found in the 1990s film *The Matrix* which expresses several New Age themes.<sup>22</sup> When the protagonist Neo played by Keanu Reeves chooses to eat the red pill, he undergoes an awakening that reveals the true nature of reality and discovers his salvific destiny.<sup>23</sup> The knowledge Neo receives through ingesting

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17. Warren, *Food and Transformation*, 3.

18. *Ibid.*, 2-3.

19. Carroll, *Alice's*, 6-8.

20. Warren, "Food and Transformation in Ancient Mediterranean Literature."

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

23. Warren, "Food and Transformation in Ancient Mediterranean Literature"; Wachowski, *The Matrix*.

the hierophagic meal allows him to move freely in and out of the world of the Matrix while he develops superhuman abilities that empower him to ultimately transcend physical limitations.<sup>24</sup>

Warren's description of hierophagy as a genre is based on Carolyn R. Miller's definition of genre as social action, which she extends to include fictional action in a literary context.<sup>25</sup> This distinction is useful, since this analysis of New Age Vibrational Essences relies on the published narratives of practitioners who create the essences and market them to consumers. Although these stories may represent accurate accounts of practitioners' work, they also constitute promotional material designed to sell products and therefore may be embellished with some normative fictional elements. The sources chosen for this research were located by Internet searching with "vibrational essences" as keywords to discover detailed accounts of how these essences are created. This article examines the practitioners' reports of preparing the essences as well as their descriptions of what the essences are expected to deliver in terms of therapeutic benefits and spiritual transformation. Thus, the hierophagic consumption is situated in these texts in the present tense as an anticipated future action. Analysis of consumers' experiences of the hierophagic essences would make a valuable addition to this study but is presently beyond the scope of this paper. The research was limited to English language publications including books, websites and videos posted online. However, the use of Vibrational Essences extends far beyond the English-speaking world with publications in several languages including French, Spanish, German, Japanese, Dutch, Swedish and Norwegian, among others.<sup>26</sup> The sources mentioned in this article are not intended to be authoritative spokespersons of New Age spirituality, which is a broad and diverse field, but rather demonstrate salient features of Vibrational Essences and their anticipated use in contemporary praxis.

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24. Wachowski, *The Matrix*.

25. Warren, *Food and Transformation*, 4-6.

26. Les élixirs floraux de Flora; SEDIBAC; Yggdrasil, "Meine"; AFEEJ; Mamboya; Orchid, "Svenska Orkidéessenser"; Raphael, "3 faser."

The idea of spiritual transformation is central to many New Age activities; however, hierophagic consumption remains an unexplored topic in the academic literature. The New Age use of fasting as a transformative practice has been examined,<sup>27</sup> while New Age dietary philosophies such as healthy eating, “whole food” and vegetarianism have also been explored.<sup>28</sup> Substantial research has been undertaken into the New Age use of entheogens such as ayahuasca and the concept of hierophagy may prove useful for these studies, depending on how the plant medicine is understood with respect to otherworldliness and transformation.<sup>29</sup> The New Age use of flower essences, especially the Bach Flower Remedies, has been mentioned in some studies which provide a valuable point of departure for this research.<sup>30</sup> However, the subsequent expansion of New Age Vibrational Essences to incorporate gemstones or seashells and to reportedly harness the power of sacred sites and otherworldly beings remains unexplored. Therefore, this article has three aims: to introduce hierophagy as a hermeneutic genre to the study of contemporary spirituality, to document the development of New Age Vibrational Essences as an important feature of contemporary esotericism, and to examine practitioners’ ritual narratives for insight into New Age praxis.

### **A History of New Age Vibrational Essences**

In the 1930s, British physician and homeopath Dr Edward Bach developed a series of flower essences designed to be ingested for therapeutic benefit. His Bach Flower Remedies became an international success and remain a popular form of complementary and alternative medicine today.<sup>31</sup> Although the Bach Flower Remedies are often likened to homeopathic preparations, the underlying philosophy is substantially different. Homeopathy, which was developed by the

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27. Crockford, “Becoming”; Nash, “Mutant.”

28. McKanan, “Salad”; Jacobs, “A Life”; Crowley, “Gender.”

29. Gearin, “Dividual”; Partridge, “Inner”; Hanegraaff, “Entheogenic”; Fatiou, “Working.”

30. Hammer, *Claiming*; Molgaard et al., “Bach’s Flower”; Sutcliffe, *Children*; Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual*.

31. The Bach Centre, “Remedies.”

German physician Samuel Hahnemann in 1796, is based on a theory of “like cures like” which claims illnesses can be cured through the ingestion of a natural substance that causes similar symptoms.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, the Bach Flower Remedies are based on the positive healing qualities reportedly found in flowering plants which Bach attributed both to “Nature” and to God.<sup>33</sup> Hahnemann was a Lutheran and a committed Deist who was also likely a Freemason.<sup>34</sup> His approach to healing was influenced by vitalism and Mesmerism which he discussed in the later editions of the *Organon*.<sup>35</sup> Hahnemann posited that living beings were animated by a “spirit-like vital force” and all disease occurred as a result of disruptions to the harmony of this dynamic principle.<sup>36</sup> In his early work *Heal Thyself*, published in 1931, Bach praised Hahnemann for devising homeopathy as an exception to the “materialistic methods” of modern science and he encouraged its further development.<sup>37</sup> Although Hahnemann claimed that imagination was powerful enough to both cause and cure all diseases,<sup>38</sup> Bach took this further by declaring that disturbances of the mind, emotions, and personality opened the door to sickness.<sup>39</sup> Thus, Bach’s flower remedies were designed to heal conditions such as fear, guilt, and loneliness which he viewed as the underlying causes of ill health.<sup>40</sup>

Bach deviated from homeopathy by devising a sun-flotation method which involves placing flowers in a bowl of spring water that is left to stand in direct sunlight for several hours.<sup>41</sup> According to his close companion Nora Weeks, Bach

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32. Loudon, “A Brief,” 607-608; Hahnemann, *Organon of Medicine*, 80-81.

33. Bach, *Twelve Healers*, 11-12.

34. Bradford, *The Life*, 120, 122-23.

35. Hahnemann, *Organon of Medicine*, 309-14; *Organon of the Art*, 227-28.

36. Hahnemann, *Organon of Medicine*, 102-4.

37. Bach, *Heal Thyself*, 8.

38. Hahnemann, *Organon of Medicine*, 102.

39. Bach, *Twelve Healers*, 12.

40. Bach, *Twelve Healers*, 12, 24, 28; *Ye Suffer*, 11-12.

41. Bach, *Twelve Healers*, 38-39.



received a flash of inspiration during an early morning walk when he noticed a heavy dew resting on the flowering plants.<sup>42</sup> Bach theorised the dewdrops had been “magnetised” by the sun to draw out the plants’ healing powers and after experimenting with the dew, he devised the sun-flotation method to his satisfaction.<sup>43</sup> It is possible that Bach drew inspiration from the Renaissance physician and alchemist Paracelsus who reportedly collected “celestial dew” on plates of glass.<sup>44</sup> Bach respected Paracelsus because he also recognised the importance of spiritual and mental harmony in the curing of disease.<sup>45</sup> Although Paracelsus’ approach to celestial dew was based on astrological principles, it is nonetheless widely cited by contemporary New Age sources to legitimise flower remedies and other Vibrational Essences.<sup>46</sup> Bach’s religious ideology is most clearly expressed in his first book *Heal Thyself* which is full of Theosophical concepts such as the “Higher Self,” the “Great White Brotherhood,” the “Children of God” and the “great central sun.”<sup>47</sup> Speaking at a homeopathic society meeting in Lancashire the same year, Bach explained that flower essences elevate the vibrations of the consumer, facilitating union between the mundane and spiritual selves.<sup>48</sup> This perspective reflects Theosophical understandings of spiritual development as the attainment of “higher vibrational” states of being,<sup>49</sup> which is perpetuated in contemporary New Age thinking.<sup>50</sup>

Bach expressed many sentiments that remain central to New Age ideology in the twenty-first century, such as the mandate to focus on positive virtues

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42. Weeks, *Medical*, 49-50.

43. *Ibid.*, 49-52.

44. Hall, *Paracelsus*, 44.

45. Bach, *Ye Suffer*, 6.

46. Hall, *Paracelsus*, 44; Burton, “How to Heal”; Crow, “Dew”; Sorelle, “Flower Essences”; Tresidder, “Nature’s Alchemy”; Ferguson, “Therapy for Horses.”

47. Bach, *Heal Thyself*, 10, 11-12, 21, 43; Hammer, *Claiming*, 79, 382-84, 436; Leadbeater, *The Masters*, ch. 3; Bailey, *Reappearance*, 93.

48. Bach, *Ye Suffer*, 24-25.

49. Hammer, *Claiming*, 238-39.

50. Crockford, *Ripples*, 13-15.

rather than dwelling on negative influences.<sup>51</sup> Bach also described suffering as a valuable opportunity for personal growth and viewed all life experiences as valid expressions of the soul, regardless of personal circumstances or station in life.<sup>52</sup> Almost a century after Bach's early work, these attitudes continue to characterise New Age spirituality today. However, the creation and use of Vibrational Essences has developed in new and significant ways. In the late-1970s, New Age practitioners began creating flower essences in other countries, using Bach's sun-flotation method which was published but not patented and there is now a wide range of specific named brands.<sup>53</sup> In 1979, Dr Richard Katz developed North American flower essences and founded the Flower Essence Society in California, which today connects over 50,000 practitioners around the world.<sup>54</sup> Katz and his wife Kaminski produce their own essences which are described in alchemical language and said to capture the "etheric energy pattern of the flower" which contains the "healing archetype" of the plant.<sup>55</sup> Although the terminology is slightly different, these essences do not represent a significant departure from Bach's work. In contrast, Ian White developed the Australian Bush Flower Essences in the early 1980s, which veer into entirely new territory by offering benefits such as psychic protection, healing of the aura, and clearing of karmic patterns.<sup>56</sup> Whereas Bach's flower remedies were designed to heal emotional and mental disturbances, White's flower essences go much further in their promise to integrate past life experiences and facilitate spiritual channelling of otherworldly entities.<sup>57</sup>

Around the same time, New Age practitioners began developing Vibrational Essences from other natural substances such as gemstones (known as crystals),

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51. Bach, *Heal Thyself*, 21-22; Chen, "Theorizing," 237-38; Crockford, *Ripples*, 15.

52. Bach, *Heal Thyself*, 11-12; Crockford, *Ripples*, 25, 44.

53. The Bach Centre, "Remedies."

54. Flower Essence Society, "About the Society."

55. Flower Essence Services, "What are Essences."

56. Australian Bush Flower Essences.

57. *Ibid.*

fossils, and seashells.<sup>58</sup> The New Age use of crystals can be traced to the early 1980s and is linked to Edgar Cayce's 1920s interpretation of the esoteric legend of Atlantis.<sup>59</sup> These essences are usually prepared through Bach's sun-flotation method where the gemstones or other objects such as flowers or seashells are removed from the water after preparation, reportedly leaving behind an energetic imprint.<sup>60</sup> However, some practitioners incorporate elaborate rituals into their preparation of essences, combining placement under the full moon with medicine wheels, drumming, dancing, and the invocation of spiritual helpers.<sup>61</sup> This syncretism for which New Age is renowned is also evident in practitioners' understandings of how Vibrational Essences work and what they are capable of delivering.<sup>62</sup> New Age essences are commonly described as vibrational in nature and reportedly interact with the human energy field or aura, chakras, meridians, or etheric bodies.<sup>63</sup> These concepts represent New Age reinterpretations of Theosophical, Indian, and Chinese systems of thought.<sup>64</sup> To these, bestselling New Age writer Judy Hall adds astrological correspondences and the Renaissance "doctrine of signatures," controversially associated with homeopathy,<sup>65</sup> claiming for example that a particular form of magnesite that resembles a brain can be used to treat migraines and epilepsy.<sup>66</sup> For Hall, there appears to be no limit to the benefits crystals and their associated essences can deliver and her eclectic repertoire includes psychic protection, negating curses, aiding in past life recall, shielding from geopathic stress, assisting a vision quest, facilitating ascension, and much more.<sup>67</sup>

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58. Alyssum, "Essences"; Hall, *Crystal Bible*, Parker, "Shell Essences"; Davidson, "Gem Elixirs."

59. Hammer, *Claiming*, 92, 107-8; Melton et al., *Almanac*, 287.

60. Hall, *Crystal Bible*.

61. Alyssum, "Essences"; Hall, *Crystal Bible*, 371; Davidson, "Gem Elixirs"; Burton, "How to Heal."

62. Possamai, *In Search*, 39; Hammer, *Claiming*, 163-64.

63. Alyssum, "Essences"; Hall, *Crystal Bible*, Burton, "How to Heal"; Molgaard et al., "Bach's Flower," 73-74.

64. Molgaard et al., "Bach's Flower," 73-74; Hammer, *Claiming*, 183.

65. Rafeeque, "Doctrine."

66. Hall, introduction to *Crystal Prescriptions*.

67. Hall, *Crystal Bible*.

Although crystal and seashell essences demonstrate an ideological expansion of Bach's work in terms of how they reportedly function and their expected benefits, their preparation nonetheless maintains the placement of an object in a bowl of water. However, New Age essences have also been devised to allegedly harness energies from otherworldly beings such as angels, ascended masters, and nature spirits as well as the metaphysical properties of sacred sites.<sup>68</sup> These essences represent a significant development in praxis, since they involve no physical object that can be subjected to the sun-flotation method whatsoever. Several practitioners report they began devising these essences in the mid-1980s or early 1990s,<sup>69</sup> while Hammer observes the mid-1990s witnessed an upsurge of interest in angels within New Age circles.<sup>70</sup> White's range of White Light Essences were created in the late-1990s and include "Angelic," "Devic," and "Higher Self" essences prepared at sacred sites including Machu Picchu, Glastonbury, and an Incan temple in Mexico.<sup>71</sup> These essences are designed to harness the symbolic qualities of the landscape such as purity or earthiness, the mythological power of sacred places, and metaphysical gifts from otherworldly beings.<sup>72</sup> White's essences are created through a solitary act of pilgrimage to prepare the stock or "mother" tincture from spring water mixed with brandy carried onsite.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, individuals who consume these essences are engaging in a kind of remote pilgrimage, or pilgrimage by proxy, and intend to ingest the essence of a sacred site without leaving home. This, along with the notion that the power of sacred places can be captured in a liquid and assimilated into human subtle energy bodies through ingestion, represents a remarkable innovation in New Age praxis.

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68. Angelic Essences; Crystal Herbs, "Crystal Herbs"; White, *White Light*; Brigid's Way, "Essences."

69. Johnson, "About"; Joy, "About"; Crystal Herbs, "Crystal Herbs"; Korte, "Crop"; Mapel, "Message."

70. Hammer, *Claiming*, 511.

71. White, *White Light*, 40-65.

72. *Ibid.*, 40-65.

73. *Ibid.*, 5, 67.

According to the British Association of Flower Essence Producers (BAFEP), a method of preparation that employs human intention, focus, or imagination has become widespread over the last ten years.<sup>74</sup> The BAFEP explains human thoughts and emotions can be imprinted onto water, citing the example of a plant thriving on water delivered by a healer versus water from a person suffering from depression.<sup>75</sup> This idea that human sentiments can effect changes in the structure of water was popularised by Japanese CAM practitioner Masaru Emoto, whose book *The Hidden Messages in Water* was an international bestseller in 2005.<sup>76</sup> Emoto reportedly imprinted bottles of water with various thoughts and feelings by wrapping them in paper bearing either “positive expressions” such as “Love” or “negative” words such as “Fool” to reveal changing patterns in ice crystals.<sup>77</sup> Emoto’s experiments were featured in the popular New Age film *What the Bleep Do We Know?* and it is quite likely the popularity of his work influenced the subsequent availability of essences prepared through human intention.<sup>78</sup> Emoto’s work is cited in the current guidebook produced by the British Flower and Vibrational Essences Association (BFVEA) which is the parent organisation of BAFEP.<sup>79</sup> One example of essences produced via this method is the Element range created by the Scottish brand Findhorn Flower Essences. These seven essences are designed to correlate to the human subtle energy chakras with the “crown” and “ajna” essences created within the Findhorn spiritual community through a process invoking “group consciousness.”<sup>80</sup> Findhorn Flower Essences were created by Marion Leigh in the early 1990s and she is credited with organising the first international flower essence conference at Findhorn in 1997.<sup>81</sup>

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74. BAFEP, “How Essences.”

75. *Ibid.*

76. Garner, “Inside.”

77. Emoto, *Hidden*, 148-59.

78. Garner, “Inside”; The Guardian, “Minds Boggle.”

79. BFVEA, *BFVEA Guide*, 6.

80. Findhorn, “Element Essences.”

81. Findhorn, “About Us”; BFVEA, “History.”

## Hierophagic Transformation and Otherworldly Agency

According to Warren's definition, Vibrational Essences are hierophagic if they originate in an otherworldly place and deliver transformation and knowledge.<sup>82</sup> Of the essences examined here, angel and ascended master essences are the most obviously hierophagic since these are reportedly gifted by otherworldly entities. Although intermediary beings can be understood in New Age circles as metaphoric or imaginary,<sup>83</sup> a British brand of Angel Essences claims that angels live in another "realm" and vibrate at a higher frequency which renders them invisible to ordinary perception.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, these essences were reportedly created at the request of the angels who desired "another medium through which to bring more light into the world."<sup>85</sup> Thus, Angel Essences are otherworldly in origin and promise to connect consumers to this Angelic Realm. They also promise transformation through the release of "karmic patterns" and the transmutation of "lower frequency energies," while delivering a deeper understanding of "Universal Intelligence."<sup>86</sup> When compared with ancient hierophagy, this transformation is rather less dramatic than Lucius's restoration from a donkey into human form in Apuleius's *Metamorphosis*.<sup>87</sup> Consumers of Angel Essences are presumably not tied to the angelic realm in the way Persephone was bound to Hades after eating pomegranate seeds.<sup>88</sup> New Age transformation is usually described as an ongoing process that can take many years, if not lifetimes, to develop.<sup>89</sup> However, ancient hierophagic narratives do not necessarily describe radical transfigurations either. For example, John's consumption of the scroll in the Biblical Revelation facilitates an internalisation of divine knowledge

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82. Warren, *Food and Transformation*, 2-3.

83. Ultriainen, "Doing Things," 244-45.

84. Crystal Herbs, *Angel*.

85. *Ibid.*

86. *Ibid.*

87. Warren, *Food and Transformation*, 101.

88. *Ibid.*, 19-21.

89. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 214.

and reawakens John's gift of prophecy.<sup>90</sup> In this instance, the hierophagic meal opens a doorway to sacred knowledge and the Angel Essences make similar promises of divine realisation.

If New Age Vibrational Essences are considered otherworldly in origin or deliver otherworldly energies then it seems pertinent to ask: How is this otherworldliness captured in the water used to make the mother tincture? The creators of the Angel Essences report they use flowers selected by the angels who advise them of each flower's specific vibrational qualities and also add their own energies to the preparation.<sup>91</sup> This claim is significant because it demonstrates the angels are believed to have the power to enter the mundane world and influence physical reality. This notion of otherworldly agency is supported by Ouapiti Robintree who is the founder of American brand Hummingbird Remedies. Robintree reports channelling messages from her "healing angels" for many years and claims her Angelic essences are made with the "pure essence of non-earthly beings, whose energies are encoded by design into biomagnetic patterns."<sup>92</sup> According to Robintree, these essences are created "solely by cooperation with angelic realms" and contain no "earthly" energies apart from the water and preserving brandy which serve as the "physical mediums" or method of delivery.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, White doesn't report using any objects in his essences, apart from the Bush Flower range, but describes a ritual process of co-creation with angelic and devic energies.<sup>94</sup> White describes "psychically" preparing a ritual space before invoking and "bringing down" the wisdom of intermediary beings, while receiving channelled messages about the purpose and properties of the essences.<sup>95</sup> Although the notion of "co-creating" with the Divine is common

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90. Rev. 10:8-11 NRSV; Warren, *Food and Transformation*, 73.

91. Crystal Herbs, *Angel*.

92. Robintree, "Introduction."

93. Robintree, "Angelic Energies."

94. White, *White Light*, 21, 35.

95. *Ibid.*, 34-35.

in New Age thinking with respect to creating one's own reality,<sup>96</sup> through Vibrational Essences otherworldly beings are credited with significant power to influence material reality, albeit with the assistance of human hands.

Moreover, the construction of otherworldly power is not limited to divine or semi-divine beings in New Age discourse and the physical landscape can also be imbued with metaphysical agency. Environmental essences are prepared by leaving a bowl of water to stand in an outdoor location for a number of hours and the water is understood to absorb desirable qualities from the surrounding landscape. Although some practitioners provide a pragmatic explanation for this process, for example White describes the absorption of energetic vibrations, others suggest the landscape possesses agency.<sup>97</sup> One such example is Ava Zhan of the American brand Pacific Northwest Essences who reports inviting the environment into the essence water which can receive an imprint of a specific time and place.<sup>98</sup> This use of "invitation" is important because it suggests the environment has the agency to accept or refuse her request. Zhan's work is influenced by the teachings of Steve Johnson who founded Alaskan Essences in the mid-1980s.<sup>99</sup> Johnson expresses a metaphysical understanding of the four Aristotelian elements as the fundamental building blocks of life and sees "elemental balance" as the key to wellbeing.<sup>100</sup> According to Johnson, the human body is always engaged in conversation with the natural elements and he claims that by listening to this inner dialogue, individuals can become "conscious co-creators" with the elemental energies.<sup>101</sup> The Alaskan Environmental Essences, which are continued by the late Johnson's wife Judith Poelarends, are designed to harness the power of tidal forces, glacial emergence, erupting volcanos, and

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96. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 204-5.

97. White, *White Light*, 21, 26.

98. Zhan, "Environmental."

99. Zhan, "Philosophy"; Johnson, "About."

100. Alaskan, "Environmental."

101. *Ibid.*



even a typhoon.<sup>102</sup> Although these forces certainly appear to be more this-worldly than otherworldly in origin, Johnson's metaphysical ideology suggests that natural elements are both intelligent and communicative.

While earthly landscapes can possess metaphysical agency in New Age discourse, some practitioners extend this notion to the solar system and beyond. Helen Ward of British brand Guided Essences produces essences "gifted from the cosmos," which offer the energies of planets, stars and faraway galaxies.<sup>103</sup> Ward reports being guided by Star Beings, angels, and spirit guides and calls herself a "channelling medium" who is able to access various levels of consciousness from diverse existential realms.<sup>104</sup> Critically, Ward describes stars as sentient beings, each with its own "unique Consciousness," and claims they are eager to work with humans to share their "luminous power."<sup>105</sup> Her ideology evidences what Hanegraaff has called the "psychologizing" of spirituality and she extends the notion of consciousness to include the essences themselves.<sup>106</sup> Thus, Ward's mediumship reportedly facilitates the otherworldly consciousness arriving in the essence water, which carries not just specific qualities but intelligent agency. Ward reports studying astrophysics at university before moving on to astrology and the influences of these disciplines are evident in her work.<sup>107</sup> For example, the essences designed around our solar system planets reflect contemporary Western astrological principles where Venus represents love and beauty while Pluto bestows empowerment.<sup>108</sup> In contrast, Ward's fascination with astronomy is apparent in her detailed description of a faraway galaxy beyond Abell 2218.<sup>109</sup> Ward's essences are purportedly otherworldly in origin and aim to provide a

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102. Johnson, "About"; "Environmental."

103. Ward, "Helen."

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid.

106. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 227-28; Ward, "The Path."

107. Ward, "Helen."

108. Ward, "Light Connection."

109. Ward, "Solace." Abell 2218 is a cluster of galaxies in the constellation Draco.

vehicle for cosmic intelligence to influence human consciousness, establishing a connection to interstellar or intergalactic realms. Ward also makes hierophagic claims, for example the Solar Fire series proffers ten essences designed to facilitate spiritual awakening through a “complete transformation of identity, from that of limited human to infinite spirit” when taken in sequence.<sup>110</sup>

Around the world, Vibrational Essences are also devised to capture the special energies of temples or natural formations considered sacred to historic or existing cultures. Here, essence producers evidence quite different responses to extant mythologies which are sometimes woven into their notions of sacredness and other times ignored. For example, Sedona resident Aluna Joy offers a range of sacred site essences created in Egypt, Scotland, England, Mexico, and Peru. Joy overlays New Age concepts of star beings, energy portals, and DNA upgrades onto existing cultural artefacts while reinterpreting historical figures like Mary Magdalene and the Arthurian Merlin to fit her narratives.<sup>111</sup> However, sacred site essences are not limited to the mythologies of historical cultures. In a contemporary example, American Katie Hess recounts visiting a sacred tree in India where the Buddha reportedly sat and preparing an essence “among hundreds of monks and nuns doing their practice.”<sup>112</sup> For these essence creators, historical or existing religious traditions are used to legitimise their claims to sacredness by contributing additional fuel to the spiritual energies they aim to harness. Typically, reinterpreted mythologies tend to be highly romanticised in New Age discourse and essence producers often ignore unsavoury details. In a potent example, Dutch practitioner Andreas Korte overlooks historical religious practices in his creation of a pyramid essence at Chichén Itzá in Mexico. Although Korte blithely reports the Mayans engaged in “cruel human sacrifice” at this location, he clearly does not view this history of violence as contradictory to the healing powers of his essence which is designed to provide

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110. Ward, “The Path.”

111. Joy, “Sacred.”

112. Hess, “About.”

“grounding and protection” for consumers.<sup>113</sup> Evidently, although New Age practitioners believe sacred sites possess special energies, the matter of which energies carry power is highly subjective.

Vibrational Essences have also been adopted by Neoshamanic practitioners whose products are designed to harness the spiritual energies of animals. Unlike flower or crystal essences, shamanic essences are not made with animal body parts and their creators report connecting with animal spirits through inner journeys or meditative rituals. American practitioner Ruth Joy explains the use of an animal part would limit the essence to the “evolutionary development” of that specific creature.<sup>114</sup> Instead, she is guided to harness the “group mind” of each animal family along with all its “evolutionary elements” including its future potential.<sup>115</sup> Although some makers of shamanic essences limit their repertoire to local species, like Wildheart Animal Essences in the UK, others are not bounded by geography and Joy has produced over a hundred international animal essences from ant to zebra.<sup>116</sup> Producers of shamanic essences describe a process of co-creation with the guidance of animal helpers, often emphasising that animals give unselfish or unconditional gifts despite their abuse at the hands of humans.<sup>117</sup> This idea that spirits of nature will bestow positive healings without any mutual relationship of exchange is a hallmark of New Age Neoshamanism that differs strikingly from Indigenous traditions.<sup>118</sup> Although animal spirits, like angels, can be viewed as metaphysical agents in New Age discourse, they are also psychologised, and Daniel Mapel from American brand Wild Earth Animal Essences drifts towards monistic anthropocentrism. Mapel quotes transpersonal psychologist Stanislav Grof in

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113. Korte, “Chichenitza.”

114. Joy, “Shamanic.”

115. *Ibid.*

116. Joy, “Animal”; Wildheart, “How And Where.”

117. Joy, “Shamanic”; Korte, “Animal Essences.”

118. Wallis, *Shamans*, 59.

stating every human contains “information about the entire universe” and “in a sense *is the whole* cosmic network” while simultaneously being one individualised aspect.<sup>119</sup> Arguably, the claim that anyone has “potential experiential access” to all parts of existence risks rendering nonhuman agency inferior or irrelevant.<sup>120</sup>

Nonetheless, most creators of Vibrational Essences emphasise a humble and respectful approach to their work and Mapel is certainly no exception. In an excerpt from his book *Into the Heart of the Wild*, he describes a creation ritual where he prays to and “invokes” an animal spirit while offering his services as a facilitator “if it wishes to share its gifts with humankind.”<sup>121</sup> After walking in smaller and smaller circles around a forest clearing, Mapel arrives at the centre where he has placed a bowl of water and reports touching a place inside himself where he and the animal are one. At this moment, Mapel experiences “the energy of the animal finding its newest abode in the bowl of water.”<sup>122</sup> As he walks in reverse circles to complete the ritual, Mapel reports feeling his “everyday state of consciousness and mind returning” which suggests he experiences the centre of the circle in an altered state.<sup>123</sup> Australian Ian White also describes an altered state of consciousness, claiming “time stood still” when he entered into a meditation at the top of Putucusi mountain in Peru.<sup>124</sup> Here, White reports feeling “transported into a realm of incredible clarity” while preparing the Angelic Essence before emerging from a trance-like state to witness an impressive rainbow.<sup>125</sup> Through their solitary rituals, these practitioners recount entering a liminal space where spiritual beings make contact and deliver their energies into a bowl of water used to create the mother tincture. Therefore, these essences are hierophagic to the extent this liminal space and its spiritual inhabitants are understood as

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119. Mapel, “How” (my emphasis).

120. Ibid.

121. Ibid.

122. Ibid.

123. Ibid.

124. White, *White Light*, 61.

125. Ibid., 61-62.

otherworldly, where consumers are expected to receive knowledge in the form of divine realisation or transformative gifts such as enhanced telepathy.

At this point, four broad types of Vibrational Essences have been discussed with respect to their differing modes of production. Essences created from natural objects such as flowers, gemstones, or seashells are made with Bach's original sun-flotation method to reportedly create an energetic imprint in the water. In contrast, Vibrational Essences designed to absorb the energies of natural landscapes and sacred sites are produced by leaving the bowl of water to stand in a desired location for an extended period of time. A third type of Vibrational Essences are allegedly created through connection with otherworldly and nonhuman agents including angels, spirit animals, and celestial consciousness. More recently, Vibrational Essences have also been produced to harness the transference of human intention. There is also potentially a fifth category of essences whose creation is based on the metaphoric interpretation of natural movement and seasonal cycles. This type would include Grant Lambert's Falling Leaf Essences designed to facilitate releasing the past and Humanfest's New Sand Dune essence inspired by the ephemeral life of tidal sand formations and their apparent struggle for survival.<sup>126</sup> Although the Falling Leaf Essences employ leaves in their creation process and the Sand Dune Essence is ostensibly devised through absorption, these essences aim to capture movement and transformation observed in nature rather than properties deemed intrinsic to generic leaves or sand. Therefore, they propose an additional layer of interpretation and expand the scope of how Vibrational Essences are understood in contemporary praxis. The vast number of practitioners producing Vibrational Essences in Europe, the United Kingdom, North America, Australia and New Zealand suggests they have become a popular feature of contemporary spirituality that will only expand and diversify further in years to come.<sup>127</sup>

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126. Lambert, *Falling Leaf*; Humanfest, "New Sand Dune."

127. This geography closely reflects the dissemination of New Age spirituality, for example Frisk et al., "Size"; Tighe and Butler, "Holistic"; Rose, *Transforming*; Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual*; Possamai, *In Search*; Hoo, "New Age"; Pike, *New Age*, Albanese, *America*, Ellwood, *Islands*; Watts, "Politics."

## Conclusion

When Bach devised his flower remedies in the 1930s, he intended to create a system of natural healing that was accessible to everyone. Bach emphasised the importance of simplicity and maintaining the purity of the flower essences, free from science or additional theories.<sup>128</sup> Bach's understanding of nature was grounded in religious principles and he described the plants' healing properties as "Gifts of God," placed in nature by "Providential Means."<sup>129</sup> Moreover, Bach saw the Higher Self, as the individual's divine nature and advocated a life lived in strict obedience to its directives received through the intuition.<sup>130</sup> The subsequent development of Vibrational Essences from the late-1970s is in many ways a continuation of Bach's work. New Age practitioners have copied Bach's sun-flotation method and adapted it to suit new applications while continuing to build on Bach's Theosophical understanding of vibrational ontology. Like Bach, New Age practitioners also report being directed by Spirit, their Higher Self or following a "calling" to prepare essences according to their own spiritual guidance.<sup>131</sup> However, in contrast to Bach's insistence on simplicity, New Age practitioners have added increasing layers of complexity to their creation of essences including pilgrimage to sacred sites, communication with otherworldly beings, complex ritual procedures, and hierophagic claims. The most recent innovation in which essences are reportedly created through human intention to transfer healing properties into a bowl of water is far removed from Bach's original flower remedies. These increasing stages of innovation in how New Age practitioners theorise and produce Vibrational Essences provide a striking example of how religious ideas can evolve over time.

This article aims to present an historical overview of the development of New Age Vibrational Essences and introduce hierophagy as a useful hermeneutic approach to the study of contemporary spiritualities. Although

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128. Bach, *Twelve Healers*, 11.

129. *Ibid.*, 12.

130. Bach, *Heal Thyself*, 10, 13.

131. White, *White Light*, 34, 42; Joy, "Shamanic Essences"; Humanfest, "New Sand Dune."

Warren's research into hierophagy focuses on ancient Mediterranean literature, she emphasises its importance as a cross-cultural phenomenon frequently located in modern narratives.<sup>132</sup> Consequently, this research aims to contribute new material that expands the study of hierophagy in contemporary culture. Returning to Warren's definition, an hierophagic meal consists of a substance that is otherworldly in origin and binds the eater to that place; the eater is transformed by the hierophagic consumption; and the hierophagic meal transmits knowledge.<sup>133</sup> This overview of Vibrational Essences demonstrates New Age practitioners articulate otherworldliness and transformation in a variety of ways. In their solitary rituals, they create liminal spaces where they allegedly contact otherworldly entities such as angels who deliver transformative gifts. Moreover, this evidence highlights the way New Age metaphysics also ascribes 'otherworldly' agency to natural landscapes, elemental energies, animal archetypes, and stars beyond our solar system. Since New Age narratives featuring Vibrational Essences are directed towards daily social action beyond the literary form, they naturally do not describe radical physical transfigurations such as those found in ancient texts. Nonetheless, hierophagic transformation in the New Age context addresses a range of accomplishments including divine realisation, the cultivation of psychic abilities, channelling of otherworldly beings, healing of past lives, and connecting to one's Higher Self. These claims illustrate strong parallels to Biblical narratives of prophecy and initiation into divine mysteries delivered through hierophagy.<sup>134</sup>

Although spiritual growth is central to many New Age preoccupations, Vibrational Essences represent a unique praxis where personal transformation and sacred knowledge are promised through the ingestion of liquids with metaphysical ascriptions. In contrast to entheogens, Vibrational Essences contain no active ingredients that can be determined through scientific methods. It is

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132. Warren, "Food and Transformation in Ancient Mediterranean Literature."

133. Warren, *Food and Transformation*, 1-2.

134. Warren, "Food and Transformation in Ancient Mediterranean Literature."

this benign nature along with their association with homeopathy that has led to a certain degree of acceptance within mainstream medical establishments. While numerous studies have questioned the efficacy of flower essences and homeopathic remedies which have been likened to placebos in clinical trials, they have nonetheless been embraced in some therapeutic settings.<sup>135</sup> Understood as a form of complementary and alternative medicine, Vibrational Essences are valued for their effectiveness in treating pain, menopausal symptoms, emotional trauma, and functional decline in elderly persons.<sup>136</sup> In these contexts, Vibrational Essences are promoted as natural healing remedies with significantly less emphasis on metaphysical claims and this usage could not be described as hierophagic. Since Vibrational Essences are subject to vastly different interpretations, it is the discourse surrounding their creation and usage that determines their place in research and their status as hierophagic agents. This article details Vibrational Essences as an evolving New Age praxis that sits alongside other sensory modalities such as crystal healing, aromatherapy, and Reiki.<sup>137</sup> In this context, the scope of Vibrational Essences continues to expand with new innovations that are worthy of further investigation. Moving forward, New Age narratives of hierophagic consumption may furnish substantial resources for future research into contemporary secularised esoteric practices.

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135. Howard, "Do Bach Flower"; Walach et al., "Efficacy"; Halberstein et al., "When Less is Better."

136. Balinski, "Use of Western"; Arruda et al., "Patient with a History"; Siegler et al., "Menopausal Symptoms."

137. Barcan, "Aromatherapy"; Teidearu, "Practice"; MacPherson, *Women*.



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