

giving of energy, long after another species would have given up. Bach says that, in the Olive state, people 'feel they have no more strength to make any effort'.²³ The Olive remedy finds the resources for renewal. Where does this come from? From the light.

Wild Oat, the last of the Seven Helpers, 'is a remedy that may be needed by anyone'.²⁴ This is an important distinction. Up until now Bach had differentiated according to the individual emotional state or mental outlook of the person—Gorse for the hopeless, Clematis for the dreamy—and here, with the nineteenth remedy in his new range, he settled upon something more general and universal. Wild Oat, he says, is an all-purpose remedy to use 'in cases which do not respond to other herbs [essences] or when it seems difficult to decide which to give . . .'.²⁵ For those at a loss to make a choice among either the Twelve Healers or the other six Helpers then 'in all such cases try the remedy Wild Oat'; it will guide our further choice.²⁶

At the time, Bach probably did not realize he was half way through the discovery of his thirty-eight flower remedies; indeed, he may have thought himself at the end.²⁷ Then Wild Oat would have tidied up any loose ends within the new system of healing. But Wild Oat is pivotal among the 38 as the only remedy which can help to orientate towards a true direction. At one point Dr Bach grouped the remedies in formation and put Wild Oat in pole position (page 280). Another time he set all the remedies in a circle but placed Wild Oat at the centre. If the different remedies discovered up until that time helped people to understand their soul lessons or overcome chronic problems, then Wild Oat was there to help, like a compass, to rediscover the true path in life. Or, like a map it helps to show where we are.

Wild Oat is found throughout Britain and in many parts of Europe. Reference books speak of it as frequent or common. Yet it is almost unrecognized, being only a humble Brome grass: *Bromus ramosus* (or *B. Asper* as it was). Bach must have seen it many times as he walked the lanes of southern England. It is pre-eminently a plant of roadside and track, of hedges, banks and woodland verges. It grew originally, perhaps, inside woodland, persisting after trees had been felled, left behind in the cleared ground, a marker species. Margaret Plues in her *British Grasses* (1867) noted that it grew in 'nearly every hedgerow, especially such as border woods and shady lanes'²⁸—it is as common as . . . grass. She liked Bach's Wild Oat and called it 'lordly . . . the tall stature, large panicle bending

Wild Oat



gracefully, and long branches drooping slightly in flower, and arching more and more as the ripening seed adds weight to the long spikelets . . .²⁹ Other writers note with regret that it is a tall, coarse grass and not recommended for agricultural purposes.³⁰



It is the unusual height of *Bromus ramosus*, up to two metres, which first draws our attention. It gains height, as we might climb a tree to see where we are. But it stands as a fragile and delicate grass, moved by the slightest breeze, with none of the strength of a tree. Since it grows in shade, sheltering amongst other plants, it needs height to get into the light and gain space. But it appears rather as a plant seeking to orientate itself, facing about. The slender, tubular stems extend upwards like an aerial, the nodding heads bend over as if watching and sensing. The stems are held in a sheath which opens out into a narrow ribbon-like leaf that carelessly falls back upon itself. The sheath is covered in hairs which add to the appearance of sensitivity and make the stems shine, silvery, like antennae.

Unusually, Bach gave an indication for the duration of treatment when using Wild Oat: 'try this for at least a week' and 'if the patient does well, continue with it so long as they improve before changing to another remedy'.³¹ It is as if the person needs retuning, needing to resonate with the Wild Oat for 'at least a week' in order to orientate and realize the best path to take—renewing contact with ground control, so as to remember the correct route to follow.

The primary gesture of the Wild Oat is questing, growing upright and upwards. But the strong 'I' form of Impatiens and Vervain is missing as the vertical movement falters and the head bends over and looks back towards the earth. Bach describes this human gesture:

*Those who have ambitions to do something of prominence in life, who wish to have much experience, and to enjoy all that which is possible for them, to take life to the full. [But:] their difficulty is to determine what occupation to follow . . .*³²

Their ambitions falter. They want to do something, having the ambition to make a clear vertical movement, to make a mark in the world, but they lack the firmness of purpose and the sustained will to follow through. 'They have no calling,' said Bach, as if to reinforce this idea of an outside message, 'no calling which appeals to them above all others'.³³

So they fall back within the mundane labyrinth of life, knowing perhaps that they might fly but lacking the initiative of a Daedalus* and the will to develop such soul qualities as are required. How might it be to see our soul's greatness beckon and not know how to move out from the shadows and into the clear light of the sun? It must lead to disappointment, 'delay and dissatisfaction'. The word 'delay' leads again to the thought of a journey: the soul's journey, the journey through life, the journey upon the path of our calling. At various times in a life we all stand at the crossroads and wonder which path to take; Wild Oat is for those who remain there, irresolute and undecided.

Bromus ramosus likes moist ground and will not normally grow in open spaces exposed to the full force of the sun: never on the hilltop or in the thin dry soil of downland where Rock Rose or Gentian are found. Other grasses grow there but not *B. ramosus*. In the sunlight a clear and strong will is needed for survival. This is not the wild oat (*Avena fatua*) seen in cornfields, a weed of cultivation. Bach just borrowed the name. His Oat prefers the dappled shade of ambivalence, the excuse of uncertainty being given as a reason to avoid action. So different to the assertive Vine people 'certain of their own abilities'. Even the flowers are constructed so as to avoid direct light.

Wild Oat flowers towards the end of July, coming late in the season. Two glumes hinge open to reveal yellow stamens (the male, pollen-producing parts) and the white feathery stigmas (the female). These all hang down from the spikelet so that the pollen dusts over the stigmas. But the glumes rarely open fully to expose them since this requires the warmth of strong sunlight. When they do open it is only for a few hours, then, after pollination, the flowering is over. As a result, Wild Oat is a remedy which can be difficult to make, the combination of weather and full flowering being elusive. Pollination often takes place while the



* Daedalus, an inventive Athenian, is said to have constructed the Labyrinth in Crete for King Minos, who then imprisoned him. With his son Icarus he contrived to escape by making wings of feathers and wax. Daedalus flew to Sicily. Icarus went too close to the sun, however: the wax melted and he fell back into the sea.

glumes are only partially open—self-pollination. This points to the Wild Oat problem of self-preoccupation and the lack of involvement in life. Cross-pollination (page 126) indicates a more developed soul potential which can lead to change.



Seeds form within the shelter of the glumes and are only released at the end of summer. They appear as narrow shards weighted at one end by the kernel which remains attached to the 'lemma', a sort of sail (like the flight of a dart or arrow) which guides the seed in the wind. As the seeds fall they turn back towards the earth and spear themselves into the land (like Clematis, page 46). Each seed has short bristly hairs which act as barbs, forcing it into the earth or at least forcing it into the seclusion of the vegetation below. Thus the seeds find a protected place for rapid germination. Wild Oat is an opportunist wriggling into the shelter others create. Chancellor says of Wild Oat people: 'they have the tendency towards drifting into uncongenial environments and occupations and this only increases their sense of frustration'.³⁴ The behaviour of the seed suggests that there is a perverse intention here, as though the Wild Oat person seeks out difficulty just to show the impossible nature of fate.

Nora Weeks' account of what Bach had in mind with Wild Oat focused on the need we have for 'a definite purpose in life'.³⁵ People are often bored, she said, or lack any real interest in their lives. They do uncongenial work, devoid of creativity, and this saps strength leading, inevitably, to ill health. In truth, Bach put it more strongly (as can be read in *Collected Writings*, see particularly *Free Thyself* Chapter 6, pages 97-98) and emphasized the need for every individual to recognize and respond to their life purpose. This is the calling of the soul to fulfil its potential and so to develop those innate qualities each one of us possesses in order to become true human beings. Our challenge, says Bach, is 'that we may realize our Divinity . . . for through that Divine Power all things are possible to us'.³⁶ If the terminology (Divine Power) is an obstruction then substitute 'the power to dream' for what we dream, that we may become.