

# Song of Increase

*Listening to the  
Wisdom of Honeybees  
for Kinder Beekeeping  
and a Better World*

JACQUELINE FREEMAN



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# Introduction

When the bees speak, I listen.

Strange as it may sound, I do hear bees talk. In my first few years with bees, questions and novel ideas arose and organized themselves in my thoughts, and I found them interesting and useful. Had this continued, I certainly would have imagined myself as having a good connection with the bees.

Then one day, in a moment of reverie, I received eye-opening information about the role bees play in the world, and a whole new understanding of bees emerged. What they had to say encouraged me to make fundamental changes in how I care for my bees.

One becomes a better beekeeper by letting a bee be a bee. If everything is done in service to that, the life force of the colony grows, and the hive thrives. How can we give bees an environment that allows them to have the most advantageous experience of living in harmony with all their purposes? When we satisfy that question, we will have returned to our sacred partnership with honeybees.

## How I Fell in Love with Bees

A friend offered us bees, and it seemed natural to accept, as we did when we were given our first chickens. When our first hives arrived on our farm in early summer 2004, I had no experience with bees. I thought of them as another farm animal—one who gave honey instead of milk or eggs.

Like most people, I was quite fearful about getting stung, so I bought a protective bee suit with hat, veil, jacket, pants, and gloves. The first time I put it on, I wore a long-sleeve shirt and jeans underneath to give me a double layer of protection. I pulled on my knee-high farm boots, and I duct-taped the overalls inside the boots so no bees could burrow inside. I taped the edges of my elbow-length gloves over the long sleeves of the jacket. I put on my bee hat and zipped the bottom of the screened veil into the jacket. I even taped the zipper in case a bee

might try to get in that tiny opening at the top. Looking like an astronaut suited up for a moonwalk, I marched out to see the bees.

As I approached the hive, adrenaline-filled and bee-protected, I was surprised the bees didn't fly out in a cartoon-like tornado to attack. Gingerly, I put a chair next to the hive and sat down to watch, ready to bound away at a moment's notice. It was sweltering outside, and inside the bee suit it was even hotter. Curiosity soon overcame my fearfulness as I watched bees go in and out of the hive. I watched until my clothing was sweaty and the heat was unbearable.

The bees paid no attention to me. I spent days next to the entrance, my face inches from where they landed and took off, and never once did a bee make an aggressive move toward me. Occasionally, one would land on me the way a bee lands on a branch or blade of grass, with no concern for me at all.

Despite the discomforting heat, I felt relaxed, curious, and happy in a caring way. I began to wonder if the reason the bees didn't chase me off was because I felt so calm around them. Might they be mirroring how I felt? Or was I mirroring them? Could it be that we were connected? I pondered this unexpected thought, wondering if the bees themselves actually thought we were mirroring each other, if *they* were paying attention to me, noticing who I was around them—and if they were causing me to feel this emerging joy. I was on the verge of revelation: if this were true, it would mean my bees were more than mere insects.

Over time I realized the bees could tell my emotional or energetic state. When I embodied kindness around them, they treated me with the same. A cloud of exuberance surrounded us, as though the bees were templating euphoria into the air.

I want you to know I didn't just tear off my bee suit one day and "become one with the bees." That took years. But eventually I did retire my bee suit. The first time I walked right up to the hives wearing only a T-shirt and shorts, I felt a bit anxious and self-absorbed, but then I remembered to turn my thoughts away from myself, to open myself to the bees and let them feel me out—which they did. They landed on my bare arms and licked my skin for the salty minerals. When I held a finger next to the entrance, a sweet little bee delicately walked onto my fingertip and faced me. She looked right into my eyes, and for the first time, we saw each other.

And so I became part of bee life.

## Becoming Kin

I soon found myself having more intuition about the hives. One morning in early spring, before the flowers had come into bloom, I suddenly had the idea that I should check one of my hives. I found the bees unexpectedly out of food; so I fed them honey saved from the year before. That call I intuitively heard from the hive likely saved its life. Another time I had the feeling that a distant hive in the east pasture was on the verge of swarming. When I walked up to see, sure enough, they were. Events like this taught me to trust my intuition more, and listening to my intuition continues to bring me into a closer relationship with all the hives.

In my sixth year with bees, something new happened. I had begun a morning practice of contemplation, quieting my mind and opening my heart. I entered this prayerful state, asking for guidance, direction, courage, and truth. Even though I didn't mention honeybees, they immediately began appearing in my thoughts and passing me information I had never read or learned from other sources. I believe the sincerity of my questions opened a door. When the information began coming to me, I listened with attentiveness, respect, and gratitude. The more I listened, the more information they shared.

Since my first intuitive conversation with the bees, I have had many others. At first I didn't know how to explain where the information came from, and that bothered me. I told my husband's friend, Steve Hall, that saying the information just pops into my head sounds strange, even if it is true. Steve is a holistic physician with a broad knowledge of many different sciences. He told me about numerous occurrences in science when revolutionary ideas emerged through similarly curious and intuitive channels. While not common, information that arrives in this way has a solid history of shifting scientific thought forward.

For example, the German chemist Friedrich Kekulé dreamed he saw a snake seize its own tail. Upon waking, he connected this image to a problem he'd been working on and finally identified the elusive ring shape of the benzene molecule. Linus Pauling published the first paper identifying DNA as housed in the shape of intertwined helixes—information that had come in a flash of inspiration. Pauling's ideas so often came to him this way that he set aside daily time to

listen for the knowledge. Pauling received two Nobel Prizes for his discoveries. Nikola Tesla, a brilliant scientist with numerous inventions to his credit, openly said that many of his ideas—including the invention of alternating electrical current—originated from intuitive inspiration.

In a similar way, the bee teachings enter me. For the most part, the information comes to me fully formed, as if I'm reading it out of a book. Occasionally I see images, but mostly I hear full sentences. Sometimes complete essays came forth, needing little more than punctuation. During certain readings I've felt distinct emotional and physical responses, such as when the bees described the quickening during the queen's elation-filled marital flight, the debilitating feeling of sugar in a bee's belly, or the shared jubilation of swarming bees. In each of these experiences, the feeling gave more depth and color to my understanding.

Sometimes what the bees tell me is so far beyond my own intellectual base, I have to stretch to understand their meaning. The bees share information as they feel I can understand it. They often give me a broad overview first; then they explain the underpinnings and details. Sometimes I ask for the answer to a specific question, but they always tell me what I need to know first. When my understanding is sufficient, they address what I initially asked about. For instance, in three consecutive readings, I had asked what they call the worker bees. I thought they had ignored my question. When they finally answered, I realized I had needed to understand how they experience sound before I could rightly hear the vibrational word-song that represents worker bees.

You can label my communications with bees as clairvoyance, higher intelligence, a deeper connection with nature, animal communication, or the ravings of a wild bee fanatic. All I know is that I'm a better friend to bees because of what they've taught me.

### **The Hive Is a Holy Place**

I come to the hive as I would enter a holy place. I come to the bees' presence with reverence, respect, gratitude, and generosity. These are the qualities bees bring to their interactions with each other.

Most people believe the role of the honeybee is to pollinate crops and make honey for humans to eat. Many of the bees kept by humans are pigeonholed into those two roles and are often treated as if indentured servants whose mission is to serve our needs. Conventional beekeeping methods are human-centric, designed to pressure bees to produce more product in less time as they work for us.

Our present attitudes and beekeeping routines have strayed from bee-centric methods and are the root of the problems bees are having these days. These conventional techniques may serve the marketplace, but they aren't always bee friendly, and compromises are often made at the expense of the bees. This narrow thinking has kept us blind to the tremendous depth of knowledge that bees embody and to the generosity they carry forth each day to serve the highest needs of our spiritual development and the evolution of the world. Surely that is a broad statement, but I stand behind it. This requires us to take a second look at how we share this planet with other forms of life.

If we look from the perspective of a bee, we become capable of asking what bees most want and how to care for them in ways that put their needs first. To do so requires an understanding of bees who live with little or no human intervention. If we know what bees do on their own and why they do that, we may be able to provide our honeybees with a similar environment where they can flourish.

Treating bees with reverence and gratitude will do more to help them than you can imagine. As you read about the many profound ways honeybees offer their work to propel humankind's spiritual evolution, I expect you will be inspired by their respectful industry and fellowship. They are living examples of love, of an interdependent community, and of an ever-outflowing story of creation filled with patience, kindness, and compassion. Daily, they live teachings we could benefit from learning.

I have had plenty of opportunities to share this new information with bee folks. For many years I've been teaching bee and agricultural classes at our farm. Every spring I teach people how to work with itinerant swarms and how to care for feral bees in ways that respect their wildness. I've spoken at regional and national conferences, and I appeared as the swarm rescuer in the documentary film *Queen of the Sun*. My work appears alongside that of people I admire, such



as Vandana Shiva, Raj Patel, Gunther Hauk, Michael Pollan, and Michael Joshin Thiele. And, through a stroke of what I consider luck, I'm featured in Chris Korrow's documentary *Dancing with Thoreau* along with the Dalai Lama. Each year my husband and I hold a bee conference with other bee-loving folks who are also waking into a new—or perhaps very ancient—and respectful relationship with bees.

### About This Book

The book is structured so you can learn about the true nature of bees, understand bee behavior, and develop a consciousness that enriches your interactions with and appreciation of them. I've included many stories that show the way I interact with bees. This ongoing bee-human relationship has taught me to understand how the colony imagines itself, how bees direct their activities to their very special place within Nature, and how they carry the world forward each day. In the sections called "In Our Own Words," I provide contextual details so you can fully understand what the bees say through the words they revealed to me.

In all respects, this book has been co-written. The relationship I have with bees isn't with any one hive or a single bee; it's with all bees. Beekeepers sometimes ask me to talk with one of their hives to find out what the bees need, but that's not what I do. This one-on-one relationship is meant to be between the beekeeper and those hives under the beekeeper's care. When I speak to the bees, I am speaking with a knowledgeable presence that embraces all bees, a consciousness that understands and wants us to know and be respectful of the purposeful actions of the bee kingdom. I've done my best to convey what they've taught me.

The framework for the book is the many "songs" the bees sing as they go about their tasks. They use the word *songs* to refer to the different times and tasks within the hive, their activities, and seasons. For example, the time of increase happens from midspring to early summer, when everything within the hive is abundant, fertile, and growing larger each day. The hive is so successfully expansive that its consciousness knows when it is ready to send half of the hive, along with the current queen, out into the world to become a new colony on

its own. It's a time of intensifying excitement. At this joyful time, the bees sing the Song of Increase. It is a celebratory anthem. If you find yourself standing next to a hive as they sing the Song of Increase, you'll feel that song in your bones, an exhilarating upsurge of multiplying joy. Ah!

I call myself a "relational beekeeper." But this book is not about beekeeping methods, treatments, or systems. Instead, the only beekeeping "method" I offer to you is one of kind observation, creating supportive homes for bees and fields for them to live in, and tending the heartfelt relationships that form when we are with them. My hope is that your relationship with bees—as a keeper, a gardener, or simply a caring friend—becomes gloriously rewarding for you and the bees.

As my husband, Joseph, is fond of saying when he hears these stories, "They have the ring of truth to them." I invite you to listen for that ring of truth as I share these insights from the bees. What I've learned at their wings is the most profound education, and I am grateful to the bees for sharing their world with me.

# I

## The Song of Unity

*How Bees See Themselves,  
Their Colony, and the World*



We begin our journey into the world of the honeybees by exploring their largest self first: the colony, the hive. From this vision of their wholeness, we first glimpse the elusive, mysterious wonder of unity. The honeybee is an exemplar of unity consciousness. In fact, the term the bees use to speak of their colony is *the Unity*.

The Unity can also refer to the environs the colony is a part of. As part of their world, we, too, are part of that Unity. When the bees speak about embracing us in the Unity—a theme they return to often—I think of the many times I’ve sat beside my hives and been privy to exactly that. Though I am one of many, I am accepted into the embrace, and I feel myself part of the entire and blessed by nature.

The idea of being in unity with all that surrounds us at first surprised me. I was used to having personal territory that I assumed needed protecting. Being in a place of unity, wherein I am enfolded into a shared life, is curiously different. I feel both supported and protected, which in turn makes me feel more open. As I sit next to a hive, watching bees flying in and out, my mind clears of conscious thought, and I enter a deep state of bee meditation. Many bee stewards, I’m sure, know this

state. We sit next to the hive, and as the sound of the hive enters us, we find ourselves in a deep reverie that opens our hearts. The bees draw us into our opening heart and welcome us there. It is a heart filled with great love and great activity.



### IN OUR OWN WORDS

We wake up to the understanding that we are all one, all the time. Human beings exist connected each to each, but believe that they are not. Honeybees dwell in the full realization of that connection and have done so for eons. The unity we embody is a reflection of the kingdom-wide Unity that dwells in us all.

This is the gift we bring: complete, sacred unity in body and spirit. To be in the presence of Spirit [God], to simply sit and *be* in such presence, offers the opportunity to be transformed by it. This we offer you. Come sit. Be with us. Drink in the Unity as you would fresh rain. We offer our gift with great joy and love!

### **Wholeness: Embedded in the Task**

Bees live in wholeness. They dedicate themselves to working within the hive in a way we humans don't grasp because we have individual personalities. Bees have the hive, and each individual pours love into the care and keeping of the colony.

A typical bee colony is made up of thirty to fifty thousand honeybees living inside a magical, womblike enclosure. Though individuals, every bee within the colony works for the good of the hive to help it function perfectly. Honeybees are interdependent, relying upon each other to create the working hive that allows and encourages them to flourish. They live in a perfected communion most of us lost long ago. The bees help jog our memories of what it is to live a life of devotion, joy, and loving membership in a strong, committed tribe.

Each member of the hive community dedicates 100 percent effort to all interactions. That's quite an interesting idea to me because I was raised with the idea that fifty-fifty is the goal for a two-person relationship and that, in larger human groups, each person giving a little bit is enough to carry a

group forward. The hive model of 100 percent effort given to all tasks by every bee is a wild idea that got me thinking: What if we humans set aside our indomitable nature and put the betterment of all in front? What would that do to our relationships, communities, and the world?

Intrigued by such a brave and generous commitment, Joseph and I decided to give this crazy idea a try in our own household. We've been married a few decades, and as all couples do, we have devoted plenty of time solidifying the cause of our conflicts. An example would be who does the dishes. While we weren't exactly keeping score, if one of us did dishes three times in a row, it certainly would be brought up as a reason for not having to do dishes that fourth time. Being willing to do everything 100 percent instilled a sense of order we hadn't expected. Now, if I do dishes six times in a row—without complaint—chances are my husband has also already stepped up to doing more of the things I don't relish, like making dump runs or keeping our vehicle tanks topped off so I don't get my hands dirty pumping gas. Truthfully, I don't mind doing dishes much anyway, and he doesn't mind digging deep holes to plant trees (something for which I lack talent). While we don't pretend perfection reigns in our marriage, we are pleased with how this idea has changed our behavior. It keeps our marriage focused on true partnership.

Every bee is totally committed to doing whatever the colony requires. When a need comes up, the task is answered without hesitation. I've seen a bee signal to another, "I've got an itch I can't reach" or "The floor is sticky" or "I dropped a pollen pellet," and other bees jump in to help. Once, while working inside the hive, I inadvertently broke a honeycomb, which fell on the hive floor and made a mess. A whole posse of bees quickly started licking up the honey and carrying it off to store. No one said, "I'm busy." Everyone jumped in and cleaned up the mess and then went back to their other tasks. I could tell by their hum there was no blame, frustration, or anxiety, just easygoing cooperation. Each bee does what needs to be done to move the colony forward. How utterly divine that they put the colony first.

Imagine if we did that. Imagine if each day we put our best self forward and did whatever it is our community—local or global—requires to keep the world going in a way that supports all life. Could we be so brave and generous?