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Nourishing Ourselves



Nourishing Ourselves

An invitation to reconnect with the
joy and playfulness at the heart of
your creativity beyond the pressures
of productivity, profit, or 'impact'



A zine by Alaa Alsaraji and
Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan

Commissioned by Dr Suhraiya Jivraj,
Reader in Law & Social Justice

Supported by Naima Khan

Out of sight is the city

In the stillness,

The sound of birds,

The wind swaying

and moving

clouds and things and people.

Zahra Ahmad



A photograph of a dense forest. Sunlight filters through the thick canopy of green leaves, creating a dappled light effect. The trees are tall and slender, with many branches visible. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

In the slow rustle of leaves,

An unseen foot steps on a tree branch.

A car passes behind a wall of green,

Behind branch and bush,

Out of sight is the city,

Out of sight is the struggle

The journey,

Movement - Motion - Progress.



In this quiet space,

Where you can find breath

And sight,

Focus on the intricacies

Of leaf and bark and twig -

The rest seems so small.


The heaviness, the insurmountable grief,

It dissolves under the canopy.

And surrounded by strangers,

You feel seen,

And at ease.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands working with clay. The right hand holds a small, light-colored tool, possibly a needle or a small sculpting tool, and is using it to shape a piece of dark, wet clay held in the left hand. The person is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and a silver chain bracelet on their left wrist. The background is dark and out of focus.

You feel the rhythm
and meandering of their stories,
Soft spoken imaginings
Of a world unshackled.
Each soul searching for rest,
A slowing down.
An alignment - work and play,
Output and
Outliving stress.
Bringing life to clay,
Moulding our deep energies into the texture,
Our legacies hung on a thread,
Kissed by the fractured sunlight of the afternoon

ABOUT THIS ZINE



Nourishing Ourselves is a publication exploring the importance of using creativity as a way to re-connect with ourselves and our wellbeing.

Many artists and creative practitioners of colour carry the responsibility of using our visual, oral, written or other stories to produce counter-narratives, to 'shed light on', or to 'represent'.

As a result, the open-ended play and joy which brought many of us to love creativity in the first place, is sacrificed to the need to 'produce' work under conditions of capitalism which demand constant output.

This zine asks what would happen if we had the time to be creative for the sake of tending to ourselves and each other? What would happen if we reconnected to the love and playfulness which makes

creative expression possible, without forcing it to become something with utility? What opportunities, ideas and ways of being might that make possible?

This zine invites you to explore such questions, and to play and think about using your creativity for your own wellbeing. Some of the words, art and feeling in this publication come from a one-day workshop curated by Alaa Alsaraji and Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan upon these themes.

Let these pages gently remind you that we are our most valuable resource, and that our wellbeing is the soil in which the futures we wish to build must take root. For anything to grow, the soil itself needs tending to, not just once, but over and over.



Maki Arianne



I would say silence but what of the wind and the birch,
the birdsong, busy bees.

I would say stillness but what of the paw prints making
tracks in leaves, spiders weaving, buds unfurling.

I would say slow and calm but what of the deep bonds
made with beautiful strangers, laughter, tears, a joy
that buzzes from our eyelashes to our fingertips.

So I say *nourishing*.

I say: us.



Introduction to Clay

Playing with clay can be a fascinating, hands-on tool used for self-expression and reflection. Being able to use play and your body in a creative process activates different parts of your brain and emotions than using speech or writing does. This can lead to new and meaningful encounters.

In the Nourishing Ourselves workshop, we started the day by giving everyone a piece of air-dry clay and asked them to create two models: one that represented how they felt

about their creative practice/ expression currently; and the second model of how they wish it was instead. We used the models as the way each person introduced themselves to the group.

We found ourselves mirroring each other in many ways - with the first model often reflecting feelings of over-stretchedness, overwhelm and burn-out; and the second model symbolising a hope for holistic ways of existing, balance, playfulness, and growth.





“It felt good to be surrounded by encouraging people and the tools to make both individually and together and to have the space to share what we’ve made. **I played with clay for the first time because of the resources and time being readily available for me to do so- it felt so caring that... we could experiment... and that they gave us the time and space to do what we wanted... It’s so often that I have to be the one doing this for other people and it felt great to just receive.”**

- Sheyamali



Tulika Jha

They modelled clay
Transitional objects of where they are
and where they wish to be

A rose, coils, steps, spheres,
Frayed and smooth ends
Polished and rough diamonds

Under the canopy
they unfurled their hearts

A pond around which school children sit
Girls wearing hijabs
Giggling, at ease
Teacher from Bangladesh
Talking about ponds back home
Grounding us to this land 7 seas across
But water is water
And soil is Earth

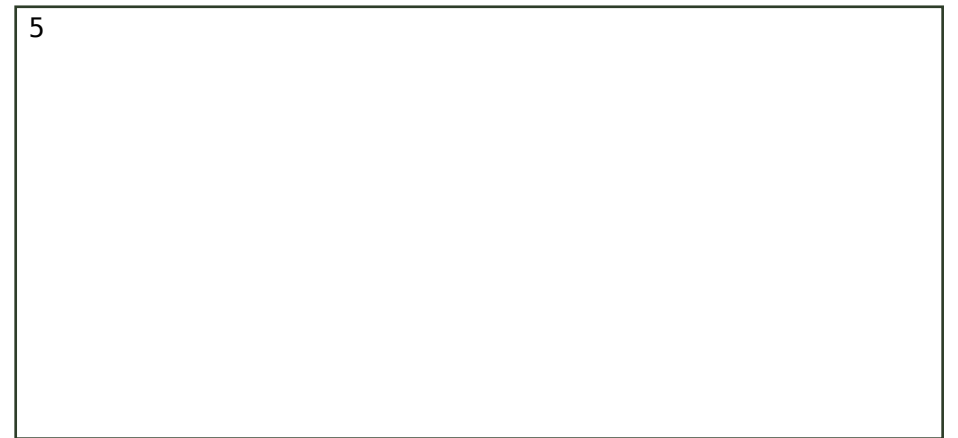
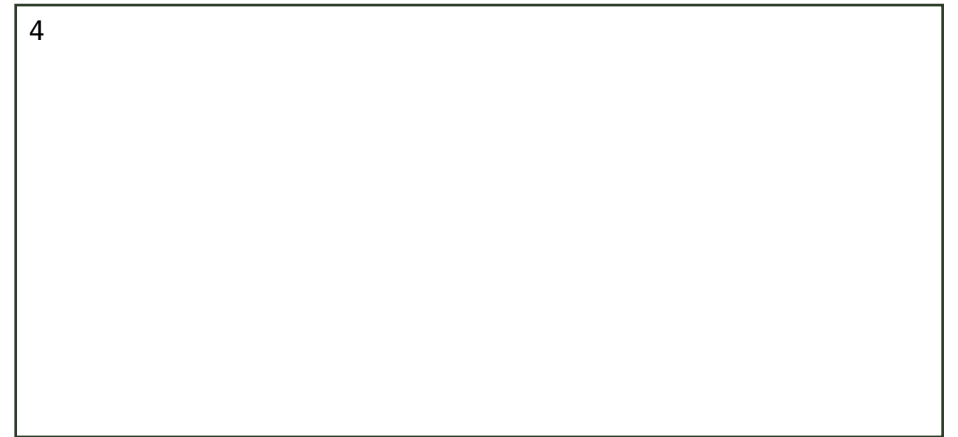
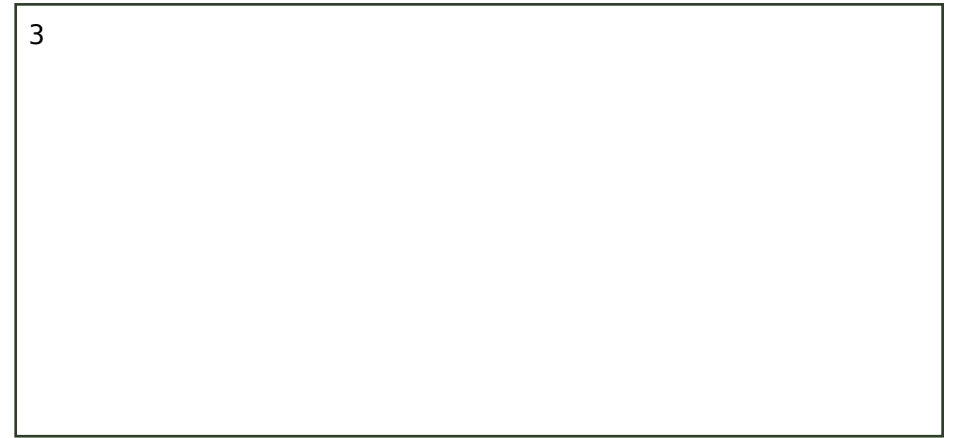
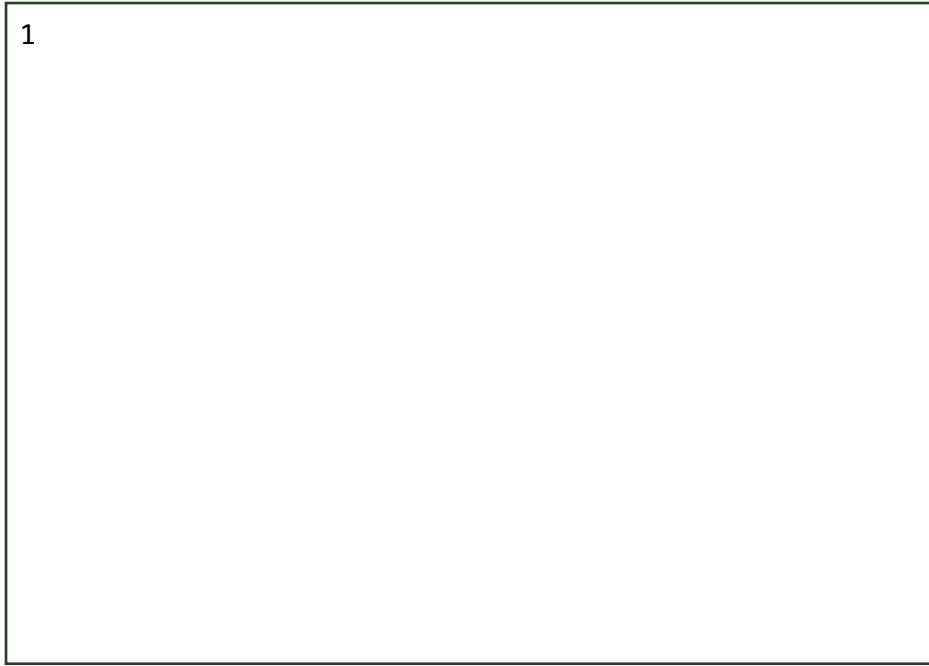


5 Minute Presencing Technique

1. Find a spot of 'wild' that speaks to you. You can look out the window, spot in your garden,...
2. Spend 1 minute to draw what you're looking at
3. Repeat until you have 5 x 1-minute drawings

You can focus on different angles, details etc. each time
This activity helps with presencing and grounding, it allows us to really focus and zoom into one thing, and really observe it
You can find space to draw on the next page.





Learning from/in/with nature

Nature is not external to us.

We are it, and it is us.

Many people and histories remind us of the importance of learning from the living organisms around us and not treating them as separate to us, objects to be used, or property to be owned.

For example, in her book, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Penguin, 2020), Dr Robin Wall Kimmerer writes that indigenous American people understood land as: 'identity, the connection to our ancestors, the home of our nonhuman kinfolk, our pharmacy, our library, the source of all that sustained us'.

So what happens when we look in
nature through non-objectifying eyes?

Kimmerer takes lessons from all organisms. Writing about how pecan trees do not fruit seasonally but according to the collective conditions of the trees and ecosystems, she says

'they act not as individuals, but somehow as a collective.... What happens to one happens to us all. We can starve together or feast together. All flourishing is mutual.'

This learning is at odds with what capitalism, exploitation and colonialism teach us: that we must compete for resources and not everybody can flourish.

So whether it is lessons about the cyclic nature of life; reminders to allow ourselves to go through personal autumns and winters in order to reach springs and summers; or even reminders to ponder that if an acorn can become a tree, we should not put limitations on who we might yet become - learnings in nature help us in so many ways.

In the latter part of the Nourishing Ourselves workshop we invited participants to approach their surroundings as one would approach scholars and teachers. **To observe, listen and learn.**



Learning in nature

15 minute writing activity

1. Get amongst nature: go outside, sit amidst your plants, or even just look out of the window. Get comfortable.

2. Write down what surrounds you. Be as detailed as possible: describe the colours, textures, sounds, smells, tastes. Write in whatever form you feel comfortable - a simple bullet point list is fine.

3. Consider that every part of what you have described is trying to teach you something: from the grass stalks, to the birds in the sky, to the sunlight itself, and the sound of the rain.

4. Review what you have written now considering that everything has wisdom in it. Listen, observe, write.

5. Keep writing for as long as you like, reflect on the wisdoms, build on them, connect them to your own life and story.

6. Make a commitment to yourself to honour these lessons in your everyday life.

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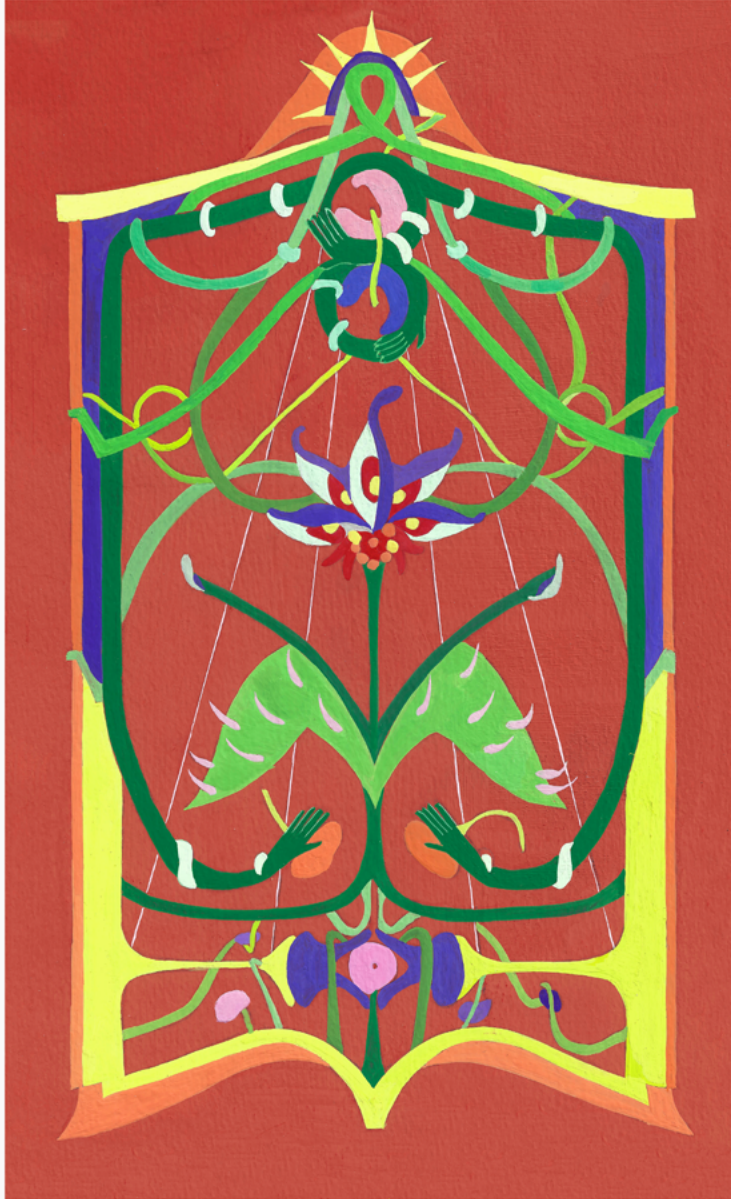
Munira Mutaher

anikun:

In sinhala this means others or other beings, human & non-human. The word is a point of departure, the faces overlap and merge into one with a central eye.

We aren't complete without the other(s). This is an invitation to come together to share in a vision.





Iman Dattoo

"The plant people have taught me to be generous and not be shy about blossoming, that it is our nature. I think when others see us, it can inspire them to open up and blossom too and we can be a field ablaze with dignity and beauty together"

Brenda Salgado

The Nourisher

Al-Muqeet

I've been leading a nightly reflective group on Allah's names on zoom for over a year, connecting to Him in this way to try and make sense of who we are and can be. So the session being centred around nourishment really reminded me that I was ultimately being nourished by Him (Al-Muqeet) in a way I haven't been before because He knew I really needed it and I'm grateful He put it on my path

- Uzma Ahmed

In Islam 99 names are attributed to God, each demonstrating a different quality or capacity. Al-Muqeet comes from Arabic root letters which relate to feeding, nourishing, sustaining, preserving, observing and watching-over.



Layla Madanat

*"I expected nourishment,
but also gained such a
sense of calm, connection
and hope - and a new love
for collaging!"*

*It was so clear the level
of care and thought that
had gone into the planning
and I was really grateful
to have been able to make
it. It came for me at a very
necessary time for sure."*

- Layla



What is Nourishment

Nature

feeling full of comfort
and peace

Safety

Being near water

Being part of a
community

Eating well

able to give/commit
creatively

Peace

creativity

lots of tea

cosiness

feeling content

great company

feeling inspired

Allowing myself to heal both internally
and externally through the company
I keep, the food I eat and improving
my relationship with Allah

yielding into the
earth

Being surrounded by
like-minded creative
individuals

warm inside

Belonging

hearing other
people sharing
their journey

Do nothing

food

balance

Being grateful

community

family

expression

good night's sleep

feeling fulfilled

rest jog

making time
for yourself

Being able to switch off
my 'head' and feel/
think through my body

Reflections on holding and designing the space

Alaa Alsaraji & Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan:

As artists who frequently design and facilitate workshops, our experience facilitating Nourishing Ourselves was notably different. Being members of the same community the workshop aimed to serve, we were in the unique position of being able to centre our own needs in planning the day.

In fact, we began by asking ourselves what nourishing meant to us. This differs greatly from the way workshop facilitators are often encouraged to 'co-produce' content with the communities they work with. Such a drive

sometimes reveals more about the transactional and somewhat extractive way communities are worked with - with workshop outcomes often being pre-imagined and cliché.

Contrastingly, with Nourishing Ourselves, we were able to lean into the possibility of planning in an altogether different way. We could be guided by the expertise of our own lived experience, as well as instinctual knowledge of what would feel replenishing for us. This enabled a rare experience in which we facilitated the day with no

prior expectation about what the 'end-product' should be, nor were we approaching participants voyeuristically or extractively. The line between 'us' as facilitators, and 'them' as participants was not so clear cut.

Even in the preparation of the workshop we centred care and play. Taking time, for example, to experiment with clay ourselves, or preparing and grilling vegetables for a wholesome lunch on the day. In such a situation where we could build a space that was intentionally nourishing for all present....

After the workshop we both recall a sense of rejuvenation despite the exertion and familiar tiredness of facilitating. Clearly, care had woven its way into the space and was mirrored by those who came. We hope to build this way of working into much more of our future work

[illegible]

- Iman



**Thank you to all
our participants**



Intro to facilitators

Alaa Alsaraji @alaa_alsaraji

Alaa is a visual artist, designer and creative facilitator. Through her creative practice she aims to explore themes such as belonging, reimagining space and community, predominantly using the medium of digital illustration. Alaa is also the arts editor of Khidr Collective, a multidisciplinary artist collective creating platforms and spaces for young Muslim creatives through the annual Khidr Zine and online platform. www.alsarajialaa.co.uk

Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan @thebrownhijabi

Suhaiymah is a writer, poet, playwright and educator. She is the author of Postcolonial Banter and Tangled in Terror: Uprooting Islamophobia, and her poems have millions of views online. Suhaiymah is also a writer in residence at Leeds Playhouse, a Visiting Research Fellow in the School of Geography at Queen Mary University of London and co-founder of The Nejma Collective, working in solidarity with Muslims in prison. www.suhaiymah.com



Thank you to Phytology for allowing us to share the space for the workshop

Phytology is a cultural institute based at the Bethnal Green Nature Reserve in Tower Hamlets, East London. The space is a WW2 bombsite that has been cared for since 1977 by local residents, volunteers, staff, trustees and its non-human inhabitants. The Nature Reserve has a delicate and complex ecosystem of plants, bats, birds, trees, soil, fungi, amphibians, insects, invertebrates and mammals (including people). Phytology collectively want this space to exist and nurture a diverse urban ecosystem for many years to come.

They host an annual residency for researchers working across the arts, architecture, science and humanities and their public programme actively engages with the environmental and social complexities of the surrounding urban landscape. To get involved, site care can take many forms, including: keeping paths, litter picking, watering the medicine garden, composting, and more. If you are interested in volunteering or finding out more, contact info@nomad.org.uk.

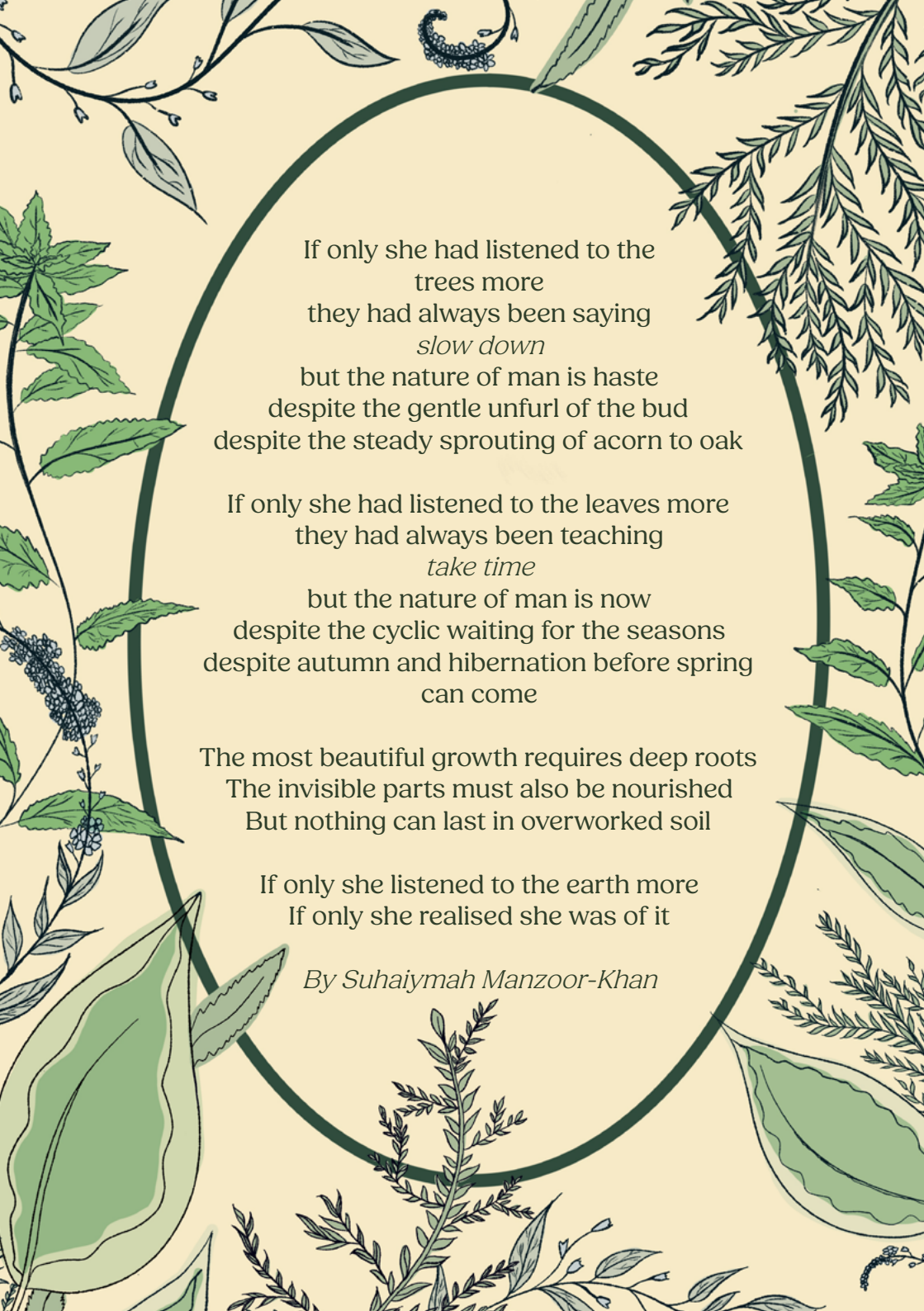
www.phytology.org.uk

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**Thank you to
our funders**



If only she had listened to the
trees more
they had always been saying
slow down
but the nature of man is haste
despite the gentle unfurl of the bud
despite the steady sprouting of acorn to oak

If only she had listened to the leaves more
they had always been teaching
take time
but the nature of man is now
despite the cyclic waiting for the seasons
despite autumn and hibernation before spring
can come

The most beautiful growth requires deep roots
The invisible parts must also be nourished
But nothing can last in overworked soil

If only she listened to the earth more
If only she realised she was of it

By Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan