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The Cosmopolitan Impulse of Waldorf Pedagogy

Just before the opening of the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart on September 7th in 1919 Rudolf Steiner said:

"This Waldorf School must be a success! A lot depends on it being a success! If we succeed this will be a proof for many things concerning the spiritual development of which we are standing for."

Today, nearly a hundred years later, across the world and on every continent over a thousand of Waldorf schools now exist.

Why, in fact, does the Waldorf pedagogy succeed all over the world irrespective of religion, questions as to skin color or nationality and independent of any cultural, social or political conditions?

At a world teachers' conference in the free high school called the "Goetheanum" in Dornach (Switzerland) in April 2012 about a 1000 teachers from all continents and 50 different lands came together for a common work.

When Rudolf Steiner said that a success of the Waldorf School – this means a success of Waldorf pedagogy – would be a kind of proof for many things which he was talking about for years, this statement is very near to the basic question of this conference. This was the question:

How the "Self" of a human being does find his way in life? Or either: What can pedagogy do to facilitate the way of this "Self" in life?

This question, in fact, corresponds to the fundamental question which distinguished the spiritual research of Steiner from the beginning:
How the "Self" of a human being does develop himself in relation to the development of the human beings on earth? And there you can add another question:
What is finally the meaning of this "Self"? The question of the "Self" is not resumed by the fact that you can say "Me" to yourself.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whose name refers to the name of the «Goetheanum», was not only a poet but also a scientist. One of his most important discoveries was the famous "original plant" (the "Urpflanze") and with her the principle of every animated development on earth. Goethe said:

"Everything which enters in the appearance must, only to appear, separate itself ….Light and darkness…body and soul…the spirit and the material…the ideal things and the real things. What is separated researches itself and can found itself again to unite…This union can occur in a superior meaning if the two sides who are separated are increasing before…The union of the two increased sides can produce a third thing, something new, something superior, something unexpected…"

Goethe called this principle of the animated development the principle of polarity and intensified development.

But what's about the "self" in this context? If Goethe says: Everything which enters in the appearance must separate itself…what happens then with the "self", with the individuality of every man? Doesn't it also appear on earth and isn't it – how does say his name – indivisible, in-dividual?

If you have a look at all kind of appearances of man, indeed, you can remark kind of separation. At first they are separated in men and women, but also in left and right, in up and down, in a within and a without, in young and old, in birth and death.

If you have a look at the world you see many different kinds of man. This diversity already says, in the sense of Goethe, that the individuality of a human being must be more than a seizable material appearance.

The « Self » must dispose of a spiritual or transpersonal part. This "self" is not only an imaginary product built of material factors you can measure as genes, cells, atoms and so on. It participates in a spiritual world in which the law of separation is not valid.

Every terrestrial human being has also a superior or spiritual part. Only in this sense you can speak about of the "self" of a human being, of his real individuality.

The Waldorf movement who has its roots in the Waldorf pedagogy is based in the conception that every human being, already every child, disposes of a superior or spiritual "self" and that every school who wants to represent the Waldorf pedagogy has to respect this idea and this even in his structures and his organization.

This does already begin in the fact that a real Waldorf School only can start up from a local initiative. The creation of a Waldorf cannot be ordered from any center. It only can result in having the sense of "Waldorf" if there are local individualities who want this school in this place.

Another sign that shows the influence of a superior self in the development of Waldorf Schools is the life of the regional culture who dominates the place where a new Waldorf School is forming itself. The great cultural diversity who is characterizing the Waldorf movement indicates very clearly that at its base there's something superior, unitary or in other words: something spiritual.

If the self disposes of a spiritual part it could not be linked here on earth to a certain place, a certain country or a certain city. His expression on earth can only have a cosmopolite nature.

"Cosmopolite" means in the exact sense of the word, that a certain *"polis*" (the Greek word for city) knows himself being linked to *the cosmos*, that is to say to the place where the superior or spiritual beings live.

The Waldorf pedagogy wasn't, in fact, never limited to his first foundation place, to Stuttgart in Germany. Very quickly she found other places and countries to live. So in the middle of the thirties of past century there have been already Waldorf Schools in Berlin, Hamburg, Hanover, Cassel, Breslau (Wroclaw), Dresden, Basel, Zurich, The Hague, London, Oslo and New York.

Freedom as the external sign of an impact of the « self » can be seen in the principle of self-administration who's belonging to each real Waldorf School. It could be seen in the colleagueship who allows each teacher to act in his courses as a free individuality.

This freedom, however, can not be taken as a matter of course. Nearly all over the world, even in Europe, the Waldorf Schools have to resist to the efforts of the state to take control to guard their identity as a Waldorf School.

The Freedom in pedagogy forms the background for the teachers that you can educate towards liberty.

To educate towards liberty means that you give the "self" of a human being – even if this human being is actually still a child – the possibility to seize this terrestrial man, which he has become, now in the best way.

During this conference in April 2012 at the Goetheanum an elementary principle of Waldorf pedagogy has been regarded from many different points of view. This principle is to not only address yourself in pedagogy at the intellect, as to say the imaginary forces of the children but also and with the same intensity at their will. This means to get them into a practical and artistic work. More clearly than ever before, this conference placed so its accent on the bipolar nucleus of this pedagogy.

Always in the sense of Goethe the Waldorf pedagogy tries to intensify on one side the will and on the other side the imagination, so that something new can pour in or can be generated.

Using the words of Goethe you can say:

« If the separated things [- in this case: the will and the imagination -] is at first intensifying itself, the union of this two increased sides can create something new, something superior, something unexpected.

This new which we mean in what concerns the Waldorf pedagogy and the whole spiritual development of man is, according to Rudolf Steiner, the development of the "self" and the realization of this spiritual "self".

"Eternity is in us or nowhere."

"The supreme task of education is

the realization of one's "transcendental self"."

Novalis – German poet (1772 – 1801)

Of course this pedagogical demand has to address itself also to the teachers and, in this way, to the perpetual education of the teachers themselves.

If we talk here about the "education of the teachers" this means that already the students of Waldorf pedagogy have to get themselves clear that with their profession they will start a never ending way of practice and of development of their human being.

What did Rudolf Steiner exactly meant, when he said that a success of the Waldorf School would constitute a kind of proof for what he was talking about for years in view of the spiritual development of man.

Actually there's a lot of talk in the world about the coming up of a new age. In popular representations often they evoke an imminent material destruction of our earth. But this, of course, is only a picture of the end of materialism that, indeed, is coming up. In the beginning of 20th century Rudolf Steiner already was often making allusions in this direction. So he said for instance in 1913:

"Indeed we are living in the beginning of a new age. New influences and new impulsions are entering out of a transcendental into our sensual world. (...) The human beings of a future time which don't want to oversleep the continual development will have to observe attentively how more and more transcendent wisdom and knowledge will be pouring in to us from this extrasensory world into our terrestrial and sensual development."

The dynamism of the foundation of new Waldorf schools has been increasing during the last decades. It looks like as if the world would want this new kind of pedagogy. It looks like as if the spiritual development of which Rudolf Steiner talked about 100 years ago is going to get realized.

The foundation of always new Waldorf schools in always new countries of the world can be taken as the externally seizable sign of a new openness towards de spiritual world.

In spite of much opposition and a lot of other tendencies who predominate in the world, since a certain time – increasing since the beginning of the new millennium – a cosmopolite conscience is forming itself in humanity. That's for instance the conscience that we all belong together and that we are more than only terrestrial or material persons.

The Waldorf School started already about 100 years ago in this conscience his way on earth and it looks like as if this way only just began.

A mystery is what purely arises. Neither
The chant may reveal it. For
How you started you will remain
As much as are acting misery
And constraints. The most, for sure
Can create birth
And the ray of light
That meets the new born.

Hölderlin, German poet (1770-1843) out of the poem "The Rhine"

Translated into English by Moira Löbert