

Climate Crisis and Waldorf Education

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From the pictures given by Rudolf Steiner in *Occult Science*, enlivened and deepened in the lessons of the School of Spiritual Science, our concepts gradually expand of what a human being is and how we are connected on all levels of existence with the world around us. Our relationship with the animals changes, with the plants and all that the earth holds and represents. Sun, moon and planets, even the stars themselves, become part of what, as a human being, I conceive myself to be.

In Rudolf Steiner's *Karmic Relationships* lectures of 1924 we are given one example after another of the working of karma in human evolution and history. Time and space disappear in the unfolding growth and drama of the soul's journey. Not only are we shown how the thoughts, feelings and actions of one life become transformed in a subsequent one; even volcanoes reveal themselves as effects of human activity in the past.¹ What is within inexorably reveals itself without and what is without continuously becomes the teacher of what is within.

Is it hard to see our current climate crisis in the same light? Though some maintain that global warming is due to changes in the sun and has nothing to do with human beings, increasing numbers of people recognize our industrial lifestyle as the major cause. Others again, basing their conclusion on indications given by Steiner, point to Beings of the Third Hierarchy as the motive powers behind the changes in ozone,

carbon dioxide and warmth.² Whichever point of view one focuses on – even the one about the sun - if one receives it within the context of the awesome network of interconnections between human beings and the universe revealed in Anthroposophy, there is no avoiding our responsibility for what is happening. Such is the price one pays for becoming an anthroposophist!

When life-threatening illness reaches the level of the physical body, one can no longer ignore it. Karma, hitherto beyond the realm of sense experience, becomes manifest in the flesh. In one direction lies a path of further decline; in another, a renewal of the human spirit and the possibility of a wholly new energy and sense of purpose. The first results from procrastination and the submission to fear, denial and doubt; the second invariably involves going into the darkness of the unknown, alone but with a flame called courage.

How different our climate crisis becomes if one sees it as a symptom of something confronting the human soul itself, the same Human Soul that is addressed on three different levels in the Foundation Stone Meditation, each time in a way that transcends personality! It is one of many symptoms, it is true, but with the difference that its consequences are likely to affect everyone, regardless of location or politics, culture or religion.

Just as illness can be seen as a blessing, so can this, for it confronts us with

ourselves. In the manner of a true mystery drama, we stand at an abyss of self-knowledge. If we seek only physical solutions or try to sidestep our part in it, we miss the point. It is to us that the world is speaking and it is we who are in the centre of the stage. Is it not a symptom of the call from the cosmos so often reiterated by Steiner in the words, Human Being, Know Yourself?

Since seeing Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* last year, I have been living with a question. So much of the positive action around the world to address this world crisis seems to originate with groups and individuals who have nothing to do with Anthroposophy. If this is so, then what is the unique contribution that those many people can make whom karma has enabled to find through Anthroposophy a force of resurrection in their lives?

To attempt an answer let us ask another question: Is it by chance that the growing world awareness of the consequences of our deeds is taking place during an Age of Michael? Of course not! Michael, Steiner tells us, works with the consequences of deeds, actively supporting what can be of benefit to the future of the cosmos and rejecting what cannot. Can one imaginatively conceive of the layers of pollution surrounding our atmosphere as human deeds thrust back by Michael, the same Being who previously hurled the Dragon down into our midst on earth? Isn't our industrial pollution, after all, the out-breath of that

same Dragon, which is now part of us?

As Sergei Prokofieff (2007) has so incisively clarified in a recent publication, what Michael works with are the free deeds of human beings inspired by thoughts such as Steiner has crystallized out of his seeing in the spirit.³ Not free deeds alone, but ones which have their source in a genuine, modern, spiritual understanding of existence.

How might this translate into deeds in for example a Waldorf school? Consider those words which we have probably all read many times in Rudolf Steiner's *Study of Man*:

The main difference in the effectiveness of teaching [by one teacher or another] comes from the thoughts the teacher has had during the entire time of his or her existence and brings into the classroom. A teacher concerned with developing human beings affects the students quite differently from a teacher who never thinks about such things.⁴

One of our essential tasks as Waldorf teachers is to empower young people to carry out the resolves they made in the spiritual world before coming to birth. How many children there must be today who know in their depths the extent of today's soul-spiritual crisis in humanity which reveals itself as global warming! And out of these, how many are truly empowered by their education to remember and act upon this knowing later in their lives?

It is not a question of awakening their heads at an early age for that will almost certainly foster fear and weaken their will. What matters is the awareness that our souls create an environment within which children can either feel deeply

understood and comforted or somehow cast out. It is in the inner world of our thoughts and feelings as adults that the difference originates. Our words can be wise, our actions skillful and professional, but without that magical element of deeds revitalized daily through free decisions born out of spiritual understanding, they may not receive the fire of Michael's support. They may be kind and caring but still lack the seed power of resurrection which we are being challenged to discover and wisely use today.

How many good deeds are being done today by people who have no spiritual leaning or knowledge! This shows us the power for the good that works through the human soul. But it does more than that. Does it not also stir the conscience of those whose lives have been enriched by the world paradigm which Steiner has created? Outer deeds can address the symptoms of the crisis we are in (and need to do so), but only deeds done freely out of the dedication that comes from spiritual knowledge can address the inner causes, for only through that knowledge can one be aware of what is taking place behind the scenes of world history.

Some have insight into that dimension without knowledge of Anthroposophy; but what an advantage one has if one does have it! It may be that more depends on the free thoughts and deeds of Anthroposophists in our times than any of us can imagine. What new treasures of the spirit is this call from the cosmos challenging us as teachers in Waldorf schools around the world to discover and create for the sake of future generations?

References

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“ Dear readers ,

Thank you to all those who contributed so generously to the appeal in our last Journal 10.2 for rebuilding funds for the Chengdu Waldorf School, following the disasterous earthquake on 12th May last year .

In all we raised NZ\$2,672.00 towards their rebuilding programme. Hary Wong and the teachers send warm wishes and their appreciation to you all. “

Neil Carter