
Unbornness: Pre-existence and the Journey Toward Birth by Peter Selg
(SteinerBooks, 2010).

Peter Selg's *Unbornness* is a seed-like gift to all of us as early childhood teachers. It is as if he has responded to Rudolf Steiner's admonition in the first lecture of *Study of Man (Foundations of Human Experience)* in which he offers that "We must become more and more conscious of the other end of man's development on earth, namely birth" (p. 17).

Selg has deeply devoted himself to elucidating Steiner's insights regarding this crucial aspect of the human journey, and he brings it to us with artistic reverence. In truth, this little book is a meditation. The broadest picture of the human being, brought together with the clarity of the description of the most minute spiritual processes, enable each of us a path of study to understand what stands before us in the individual child in our care.

Initially this little book was a lecture offered in 2009 to midwives at the Ita Wegman Klinik in Arlesheim, Switzerland. As those who protect and prepare the threshold of birth more than any of us, the midwives' presence enables one to feel the nearness of their work with the threshold of birth. For those in our own educational work who meet expectant mothers and fathers as well as parents with very young children, the background in this book brings us essential pictures to strengthen our awe—and support—for the courageous journey that each incarnating child coming to birth in our times must take.

Selg begins with Raphael's Sistine Madonna to frame his own content, with moving detail of those who observed this painting over the years. He then leads the reader to the contemplation of life before conception. Poet, painter, and spiritual scientist offer their gifts to us. I was moved deeply by these lines from Christian Morgenstern:

*Present longing shall grow to will,
And present will to strength will return
After the quiet so rich and still.
Strength creating what is willed,
Will that out of this creating
Gives us new momentum, bears us on.*

From this welcome, through our immersion in the realm of Raphael's painting, we are led on a journey to the world of the individuality between death and a new birth: the human soul enters the great cosmos. We each find our own biography in these contemplations, of course, in addition to our possibility for gaining insight into the journey of the children who come to us. Now in my sixties, I personally found myself newly engaged in relationship with the reality of the short time we spend in the freedom of the earth sphere in contrast to the centuries of reflection and preparation in worlds of spirit beyond. A feeling of wanting to be as conscious as possible of this earthly time, to enter into the sphere of its possibilities within my own biography, became ever more tangible!

In the third section of his monograph, Selg leads us from the cosmos back toward the life, in the intricate and delicate processes that accompany the soul's re-engagement with the earthly side of its existence. Steiner himself acknowledges that the soul-spiritual processes involved here are complicated ones: how does spirit become matter in the instance of ourselves as human beings? When we stop to contemplate, it will surely be that once again we recognize that we stand before primal mysteries.

I would like to quote directly from Peter Selg to reinforce the tasks of those working with the child in the first seven years, and most particularly in the first three years.

*In his anthroposophical and pedagogical lectures
Rudolf Steiner repeatedly described how the*

experiences before conception and the life-processes of the human spirit-soul still reverberate during early child development when the child learns to stand upright and acquires the skills of walking, speaking, and thinking.

Each step we take in understanding and *standing for* these processes of the *full* human journey enables the child before us to feel seen in his fullness and wholeness. These processes are still very much present: the child has only just begun his or her descent into matter: life before birth is much closer than we can easily see. It may sometimes feel difficult for the teacher to recognize, acknowledge, and embrace the wholeness of the child who struggles in his or her path of incarnation into the physical body. But to the degree that

we can do so, we become teachers truly working out of the spirit in a highly practical way. Answers to our questions around the children's daily needs will come to us.

I do feel that we cannot educate children toward freedom without a full view of the purpose of the individual's journey round the cycle of birth and death, birth and death. For me, this means to enable the children to connect with their pre-earthly intentions, to integrate their soul-spiritual beings into their life-bodies with adequate strength and capacities to bring these intentions into being. If we bring to life within ourselves the contents of this lecture / monograph, we will gain newfound strength for this task.

—*Review by Susan Weber*
