

Teachers' Self Development as a Mirror of Children's Incarnation¹

Renate Long-Breisohl

Part II

In part one (*Research Bulletin XIV, 1, Spring 2009*), I looked at four signs of the zodiac that are related to the process of human incarnation, and I will now look at four signs that Rudolf Steiner relates to will activity of human beings.² When we look at our life of will, our earthly endeavors, we may turn to the images contained in the signs of Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces.³

In order to approach our life of will in respect to self-education, we may remind ourselves that Steiner speaks of living with an openness to what life brings and with a gesture of gratitude and acceptance toward destiny. This openness is present in young children when they play freely, without preconception or plan. The process is important, not the outcome. Children surrender to the flow of play. In the same way, we adults may stand in the stream of life, open to what approaches us.

Because we live in a time that has a tendency to one-sidedness, to regulation and restriction, we may be tempted to educate according to a fixed plan rather than drawing upon life and its activities. We may divide education into specialized areas, or we may become fettered by guidelines, government regulations, and accreditation requirements. In a kindergarten, a teacher may prefer certain kinds of play and restrict others, regulating what should not be regulated. Children's play may appear unsettled to us but it may not be so in the children's own experience. We may be imprisoned by our own good intentions even in such areas as guiding children's play, and we may reflect on our work frequently, alone or with colleagues, to assist us in overcoming our prejudices in this area.

Steiner often describes the one-sidedness of materialistic thought and a conventionally scien-

tific approach to understanding human beings. As a result of the restrictions and limits of these points of view, children may sense something like a feeling of deprivation. The truly human may appear inaccessible, which in turn may lead to melancholy.⁴ Children then come to school as if they are carrying a heavy load, joyless, burdened, and tired.

One of the remedies for this melancholy is an experience of adults at work. If we welcome children into the stream of our activities and if we are present in what we do, then the children may experience us as complete human beings. They will find what they are looking for. Through our activity, we

also build up what we may call a field of warmth in which children may rest and in which they may experience closeness to another human soul. Work creates a warm, active closeness, without burdening the children prematurely with emotional sentiment.

Steiner speaks about what will happen if we take children into our sphere of will activity:

But this living interest, devotion, and sympathy will be there if at the right age we permeate all branches of our teaching and education with the principle of imitation.... What is lacking is the power to enter into the spirit of nature, the spirit of the cosmos, into the universe as a mighty whole. This power must be regained.⁵

Signs of Will

We return now to the image of the zodiac and the four "will signs" of Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces. Interestingly, Steiner claims that these signs do not directly influence our

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30 · Teachers' Self Development as a Mirror of Children's Incarnation

deeds. According to Steiner, we may picture human beings standing on the earth with the zodiac signs from Aries to Scorpio in a semicircular arch above us. But the signs from Sagittarius to Pisces have to be envisaged as if below our feet, going through the earth to the other side of it. The earth sphere thus separates the human being from these zodiac signs. Their influence is indirect and weaker than the influence of other signs, and this weakness leaves us free for activity of will. Through the willed activity of our limbs we may create something new; in the activity of our heads, by contrast, in thinking, cosmic influences are active.⁶

Steiner describes the qualities of Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces as related to archetypal forms of human activity. Often, however, we no longer directly see or participate in these archetypal forms. We turn to older civilizations in order to discover these activities: hunting, animal breeding, tilling the soil, trading and traveling.

To the stars down there on the opposite side, which are covered by the earth, human beings owe their existence as hunters (Archer), animal breeders (Goat), tillers of the soil walking across the field carrying urns to water the fields (Water Carrier); and we are traders thanks to the part of the starry heavens that takes us across the seas—in far distant times boats were built to look similar to fish, and two ships side by side that have sailed the seas in pursuit of trade are the symbol for trade. . . . In the past, people really had a feeling for the way the human being is connected with the universe and the earth.⁷

Over time, we have evolved many more occupations than these, but it is not our task to relate what we do now as adults directly with these archetypal endeavors. Steiner says that in moving into the age of the fishes (Pisces), the age in which modern industrialized civilization has developed, the “four honest occupations” have been somewhat modified. Children's consciousness does not

yet correspond to our modern consciousness, however, so it seems appropriate to turn to these archetypal activities in kindergarten work.

Sagittarius: The Archer, the Hunter

The image of Sagittarius consists of a human head and torso melded with the body of an animal, a horse. We know this figure as the centaur, a being half man, half animal. The centaur reminds us of the lower nature of a human being, as yet untransformed.

The activity of Sagittarius, according to Steiner and to the myriad images in art and literature, is hunting. I would like to add “gathering” as well, as it may be seen as a hunting of plants.

Hunting and gathering are early occupations, but they live on to this day. A business person, for example, is a hunter and gatherer who seeks out good markets, gathers, and resells. Even those of us who are not business persons may enjoy “bargain hunting.”

As teachers and caregivers we may demonstrate hunting and gathering during the walks and outings on which we take children. We may demonstrate genuine interest in our surroundings, gratitude for what we find, and joy in the beauty and richness of the world. We may also cultivate gathering in harvesting fruits and vegetables.

Gathering what the earth gives us and finding or hunting for treasures are important activities for young children. We may take children to places where valuable things can be found in nature. But we also see children gathering toys and piling them up in a classroom. Hunting and gathering are part of children's archetypal play. Some children hunt for treasures, some for specific toys, and some may even snatch what others have. This last is an unrefined hunting gesture.

A hunter and gatherer may be tempted by his lower instincts, acting for his own advantage. The activity of hunting, however, may also be honest and it may become ennobled. The virtue related to Sagittarius, in fact, is truthfulness—truthfulness in conducting business, for example, and truthfulness in words, thoughts, and deeds. Children may cheat and lie. Deep within all children, however, is a great longing to experience truth in the deeds and words of those around

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them. Children look for truthfulness in our actions, for truthfulness in the materials we offer them, and for truthfulness in how we think and speak. As adults we may examine unrefined aspects of our souls and learn to better know ourselves. Truthfulness, in this respect, means that we do not delude ourselves as to the quality of our work, as to who we are, or as to our progress in spiritual learning.⁸

Capricorn: The Goat-Fish

The image of Capricorn is the goat-fish. It has the head and torso of a goat and the tail of a fish. Capricorn is an expression of the activity of animal breeding, which followed, historically, the stage of hunting and gathering.⁹ The goat-fish looks like a mis-bred creature; its appearance may make us uncomfortable. It reminds us of the difficulties of animal breeding, and, especially today, of genetic engineering and cloning. We take great risks in breeding plants and animals. We change nature on a deep level and, therefore, require a highly developed sense of responsibility and courage to enter these unknown realms. This was as true in the past as it is in the present; although life in the past was simpler, the immediate consequences of breeding could include famine and disease.

A direct and positive aspect of breeding is that we have to provide care for what we have bred. Animal breeding as an archetypal activity serves the purpose of developing human qualities of caring, looking after one another, providing comfort, and nursing those who are sick. It embraces the entire range of care-giving and social professions. This is an archetypal human gesture, and it is intrinsically connected with the breeding of animals. We could say that the caring professions are derived from the work of animal breeders. Education belongs here, clearly. Breeding can be, then, for good or ill. We may, for example, try to model children to suit our own intentions, or we may facilitate children's development without trying to determine the outcome in advance.

Some children, at a young age, engage in acts of caring and, also, act out caring for others in their play. Such role-play as mother and child, or doctor or nurse and patient, demonstrates an archetypal quality. Maria Luisa Nüesch describes such play and shows how she models caring for others by participating with her students:

Nine children play together, the teacher is sitting close by, sewing.

Three girls live in a house made from cloths. One is cooking and distributes "coffee and soup." One is shopping. This girl buys so many things that the house becomes very full and at last there is no room left "to be" in the house. This girl is ceaselessly busy. She has two hunting dogs, two boys who wanted to play as well, but did not dare to offer themselves as father or children. These dogs soon became ill, one of them seriously. One dog's paws were limp; the other dog had a broken leg. The owner remained detached in the face of this suffering, still shopping busily. "You can look after them," she said.

Then the teacher started to nurse the sick animals, put cream on their limbs and bandages. More and more animals came, all very ill. Some died and the teacher covered them with a cloth. But luckily new puppies came forth from under the cloths. The dog owner now quickly became a little kitten herself, newly born. The kitten was blind and roamed about for a long time. Then the blind kitten came very close to the teacher who had resumed the sewing. The kitten wanted to sleep very close by. The kitten slept very restlessly and needed to be caressed and calmed down again and again.¹⁰

We may ask whether or not it is appropriate for a teacher to become so involved in children's play. In this example, the children expressed their need for special loving attention and care through their play, and Nüesch sensed that behind a rough outer façade was a needy child. Individual moral intuition guides such actions and determines the way we act for the sake of a child or a group of children.

The virtue related to the sign of Capricorn is courage, not necessarily in the sense of bravery or heroism, but in the sense of accepting mistakes, accepting the truth even if it hurts, enduring blows of destiny, and never giving up. Courage is the determination not to go backward or "drop out," but to remain engaged even when a situation is difficult. This courage to go forward and learn from mistakes is important for a teacher because children may, at times, stagnate in their

32 · Teachers' Self Development as a Mirror of Children's Incarnation

development or even appear to regress.

Kindergarten offers teachers many opportunities to practice courage. Often the nearly overwhelming amount of selflessness required to educate young children makes it hard to keep going. This is true of all caring professions. The inner strength to keep going is the practice of the virtue of courage.

Aquarius: The Water Carrier

In respect to the image and activity of Aquarius, Steiner says:

Agriculture is represented by the Water Carrier. There is a certain spiritual justification for thinking in terms of water, but what matters is the way he walks across the field. He holds an urn in each hand and pours water from these. This is the gardener and the tiller of the soil.¹¹

Cultivating the land involves activity of will. In our time we have rediscovered the importance of caring for the land. Today's environmental movement reminds us of our responsibility for the well-being of the earth. The image of the water carrier may also induce us to think about nurturing the etheric forces of human beings and of nature. In early childhood, this work often takes the form of a teacher gardening at playtime, watering plants, digging soil, weeding, and planting, often with the help of some children.

I remember a strongly built boy in my kindergarten whose grandfather ran a nursery. During a home visit, this child took me into the nursery and proudly and precisely explained the working of the watering system. He was totally at home there and his grandfather had been the model of the gardener for him. This had gone deeply into the child's body. When we watered plants in the kindergarten, he was immediately present. Watering was not a chore for him; it was "in his blood," a natural activity. In other activities and in his conduct, this boy was phlegmatic, and it was otherwise difficult to motivate him to do any-

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thing that demanded effort. Through this boy, I learned how deeply the work of an adult sinks into the unconscious, bodily responses of a child and how this "slipping into" the adult through imitation brings about an intense activity of will, one that we may not reach through mere instruction.

The virtue of Aquarius is the virtue of silence and discretion, the virtue of pausing, observing, waiting, and then judging wisely. From silence, in discernment, correct decisions may be found.¹² A gardener knows the value of waiting and the danger of premature action. By waiting, he improves his ability to make the right judgments regarding the plants in his care. He ensures fertile soil, a good yield, and seeds for the following seasons.

Kindergarten teachers and caregivers are well advised to do the same, not to step in too quickly to resolve conflict, not to react too quickly when a child has done something wrong. We may step back for a brief moment of inner silence and then act when our immediate emotional reactions will not blur recognition of what has happened and what is needed. We learn to wait so that we do not fall into superficial educational activism.

The practice of silence and discernment may develop into the practice of meditation. Looking quietly at a leaf becomes part of an understanding of all that is behind the happenings in nature. If we are silent and discerning, we will be better equipped to calm a noisy, restless group of children. To become still in the middle of chaos is a challenge for an adult. When we can do this, children can connect with us more easily because they sense our effort to understand.

Pisces: The Fishes

Steiner explains the sign of the fishes as the image of two boats sailing together across the sea. This expansive picture conveys a mood of opening our soul to the world, embracing not only what is nearby but also what is far away.

The activity of Pisces is trading: “We are traders thanks to the part of the starry heavens that takes us across the seas.”¹³ Traders are travelers, they roam the world. They are also adventurers and risk takers. Risks are always present when we widen our field of activity. In Pisces it is not so much trading that concerns us, but traveling, widening our consciousness. Young people travel a lot these days. We live, after all, in the age of Pisces.

Children may be drawn to traveling in their play: creating means of transportation and traveling in various kinds of vehicles, including boats, trains, airplanes, rockets, trucks, cranes, and front end loaders. Here is an example from an early childhood center in Bangkok:

A group of six boys had turned a table upside down, attached cords to it, and pulled the table across the floor as a carriage. The work was hard. The tabletop dragged on the floor and the carriage was heavy with children sitting in it. The boys managed to get a blanket underneath it so the carriage was easier to pull. After many rides, the carriage became a car, pushed along by one child. A child playing a parking lot guard with a whistle stopped the car and waved it professionally into a parking slot. The child imitated this perfectly.

In another part of the room an upside-down table became a moving truck and was loaded with big furniture—three freestanding shelves used to hold toys were loaded onto it, as were other, smaller things. The load was secured with lots of ropes. Next to the truck, three girls set up a food shop. The truck started moving, endangering the shop, so the shopkeepers packed up quickly and moved to a big table farther away. The shop was re-established on top of the table, but soon moved under the table, where it stayed until the end of playtime. The children did not complain of having been disturbed in their play by the moving truck.

The virtue related to Pisces is magnanimity. Steiner describes magnanimity as moving beyond oneself and out into the world. It includes going beyond our personal wishes, feelings, and attachments. Children need to experience adults who can open their souls widely and embrace the children, their parents, and the school community. Steiner suggested that we read the news and hold events inwardly, even if this is difficult and painful. The practice of magnanimity, of a wide-open heart, increases our ability to love. Steiner speaks, too,

about not passing by our fellow human beings without bothering to know them.¹⁴ Love cannot be demanded or forced. It has to grow and be given freely. But magnanimity and developing interest in other human beings can be practiced for the sake of our fellows.

Conclusion

This completes the picture of the four spiritual virtues of our will: truthfulness, courage, discretion, and magnanimity. They have in common the gesture of inner openness, and openness to the spiritual world, a practice of devotion, is part of the gesture of Aries. Openness and magnanimity are the beginning of the practice of love in the face of the needs of the earth. Aries and Pisces: these two belong together as the beginning and end of a journey through landscapes of the thinking-feeling soul and the working fields of will.

Endnotes

1. This article also appears, in a slightly different form, in the proceedings of the 2008 International Waldorf Early Childhood Conference, published by the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America (WECAN), copyright 2009, in association with the International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE). Full proceedings may be ordered from WECAN at <http://www.waldorfearlychildhood.org>.
2. Leo, Virgo, Libra, and Scorpio will not appear in these lectures because they have little to do with the young child. They have to do with how we unfold our relationship to other adults. The virtues related to these signs are important for teachers in working with parents and in communities.
3. For Rudolf Steiner on the zodiac, see: *The Human Soul in Relation to World Evolution and Human and Cosmic Thought*. For references regarding the zodiac and eurythmy, see Hedwig Erasmý, *Cosmic and Human Evolution*; for references to the senses see Gilbert Childs, *5+7=12 Senses*.
4. Rudolf Steiner, *Polarities in Human Evolution*, Lecture 10.

34 · Teachers' Self Development as a Mirror of Children's Incarnation

5. Rudolf Steiner, *The Roots of Education*, p. 94.
6. Rudolf Steiner, *Cosmosophy*, p. 70ff.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 72ff.
8. Robert Sardello's *The Power of Soul* provides a wealth of wisdom related to a deeper understanding of the human soul and the practice of virtues in the self-development of adults.
9. Steiner, *Cosmosophy*, p. 74.
10. Maria Luisa Nüesch, *Spiel aus der Tiefe (Play from the Depths)*, p. 73, author's translation.
11. Steiner, *Cosmosophy*, p. 75.
12. Robert Sardello has pointed to the special connection between silence and discernment. *The Power of Soul*, p. 181.
13. Steiner, *Cosmosophy*, p. 72.
14. Steiner, *Polarities in Human Evolution*, p. 183.

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Renate Long-Breipohl, PhD, has been a Waldorf kindergarten teacher in Australia, where she leads the kindergarten training at Parsifal College in Sydney. She represents Australia on the Council of the International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE) and has guided the development of Waldorf kindergarten training programs in the Philippines, Thailand, and China. She is currently engaged in research on fostering healthy children's play and was a keynote speaker at the World Waldorf Early Childhood Conference held in August 2008 in Wilton, New Hampshire.