

The Impact of Evil in our Time and the Guarding of Childhood Forces Reijo Wilenius, Finland

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Childhood is not merely a preparation for something else; it has a value unto itself. Novalis said,

“The beginning of our humanness is childhood. To the extent that we preserve childhood in ourselves, to that extent do we preserve our humanness.”

There is a long drawn out spring time in Finland, and that is very special. While Dornach is already filled with flowers at this Whitsun time, the southern part of Finland is just getting the first leaves on the birch trees. Further north there is still snow. Every aspect of the spring is to be treasured, and this is like childhood which has a beauty in its own right. Its unfolding takes time. The basis of the Waldorf kindergarten is to strive to understand the meaning of childhood.

At the beginning of this century, the Swedish educator Ellen Key called for a “Century of the Child.” Among other deeds, this century has witnessed the founding of Waldorf education. At the end of the century, however, we see that childhood itself is threatened. The adversarial forces appear to have the upper hand, and the forces of evil and destruction work into the soul landscape of the child.

In his book, *Emotional Intelligence* [Bantam Books, 1995], Daniel Goleman supports this picture with statistical documentation. From 1970 to 1990, aggression and fear were on the rise, yielding a loss of ability to concentrate in later youth and a 300% increase in violence and criminality. There have also been great increases in drug use, most notably among African American youth whose drug use is now 13 times as high as before. Suicide has also increased significantly. These trends we see strongly in the United States, but also in Europe.

If this continues we will have a “storm of violence,” a soul catastrophe which will be an outer disaster and also an inner disaster. Young people who have never had a childhood will not have the inner forces to stand strong against the temptations of drugs, violence and sexuality.

Rudolf Steiner's description of these times is very similar to Goleman's. Steiner described an inner fragmentation of soul forces - a separation of the thinking from the feeling and the willing aspects of life. In Steiner's words, we unconsciously cross the threshold and are unprepared; the soul forces split apart.

In today's education the intellectual forces are stimulated early. The cold intellect is educated, but not the feeling life or the will. Feeling and will then seek stimulation and go wild, turning towards violence, drugs, intensive music and other similar stimulants.

When the will develops without feeling or compassion, then aggression arises. What does Goleman suggest? Even in a slum situation, if a child is brought up with warmth, love and understanding, then the capacity for emotional intelligence will develop in the child. When the children hear stories and fairy tales

told by adults and when the children have the chance to respect this experience, then they can experience their own feelings which develop and mature over time. This is especially true when the people around the child have a true, sincere interest in the life of children.

These suggestions sound remarkably like those of Waldorf education. It is clear that as the need for this inner capacity of emotional maturity become greater, so does the need for an education like Waldorf. Waldorf education operates under the aegis of the Spirit of the Times, the Archangel Michael, who overcomes the dragon so that the Michaelic impulse can have a working place on the earth.

Last summer at the International Waldorf Kindergarten Conference in Järna, Sweden, the whole breadth of the work of the Waldorf kindergarten was revealed. Wilenius lectured there on the importance of the Waldorf kindergarten and wants to reiterate that again. In the last lecture of the *Pedagogical Youth Course*, Rudolf Steiner spoke of Michael's chariot in which he finds the way to enter modern civilization. This chariot is built through the forces alive in a healthy childhood - the capacity for feeling and an ability to empathize, a living imagination in thinking and a healthy will. These need to be nurtured and sustained through a human education.

Imagination and transformation are qualities unique to the child. In earlier stages of humanity, the image of Michael was alive within human beings. They felt the power within themselves to overcome the cold forces of the intellect. Today, however, the dragon approaches us from **outside**, in the form of materialistic science. Although we can have great respect for material science, we need to see that it places obstacles before us as we learn to recognize the **spiritual** human being.

Michael also approaches us as we develop a meditative approach to spiritual science. When we practice meditation, we reawaken living thinking within us. This enables us to truly meet and encounter the human being. In Helsinki, Jürgen Smit, former head of the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum, asked the question, "How can we recognize a true Waldorf teacher?" He answered it by saying, because his thinking is so alive that he can understand even the youngest child.

Today, even the youngest child is threatened by the dragon, by evil from the outside. When Wilenius taught second grade, he told a story of the thunder god. "Yes," said one boy. "It thunders, but that is just an electrical effect." Michael needs a chariot, one woven of childhood forces, living forces brought from pre-earthly life, from the direct, immediate experience of the activity of the Angels, Archangels and Archai. The child brings to the earth a living fantasy, a capacity to live deeply into the processes of transformation, a form of consciousness that can be called a participatory consciousness. For the child all things appear to be alive and in a process of growth and transformation.

When he was a child, Reijo Wilenius was given a small Finnish flag. His mother tells of how he planted this flag in the earth and watered it to help it grow and become a big Finnish flag. Also, the young child does not grasp what is dead. As a child he cut the fur from his teddy bear, feeling certain it would grow back anew.

Rudolf Steiner said there can be no better approach to education than through the arts. An artistic education can care for, nurture and cultivate the forces a child has brought from pre-earthly existence. One needs to develop a deep reverence for this pre-earthly realm. When we can do this, we become co-workers with Michael. Then, when the child becomes an adult, he will retain something of his humanity which will prevent him from being devoured completely by the dragon. No human being can escape the encounters with the dragon, but if one has had true childhood experiences, he is much more capable of meeting the dragon and overcoming it.

Such an individual may not grow up and become a conscious anthroposophist, but he will retain an unconscious relationship to his humanity. A definition of Anthroposophy is to become conscious of one's own humanity in a process of becoming ever more fully human.

According to Rudolf Steiner in the *Pedagogical Youth Course*, whoever is unable to learn from the child what she brings down as a messenger from higher worlds will not be able to offer or teach the child anything about the conditions of earth existence. Only when we accept the child as a teacher, bringing new impulses, can we open the door for the child's understanding of the riddles of earth's existence, of understanding the earth itself.

As Reijo Wilenius prepared this lecture, he asked his wife, "What did you learn from our children while I was away all the time giving lectures?" She answered, "I learned the joy of life, of practice and repetition. When little children use their forces to grow, they have such joy and courage for continuing, as they repeatedly try to learn about what the earth offers."

When his grandson Teiko was five years old, he threw himself into the ocean and exclaimed, "This is Life!" And he learned to swim. There is also spirituality in the child's thinking. When Teiko was four, the beloved rat-catching cat on the island died, and the older children were weeping. Teiko comforted them by saying simply, "The cat went to cat heaven." And when last year, Wilenius' mother died, Teiko said, "Somewhere a baby will be born."

Wilenius focused on Michael and his impulse to bring peace into the world. This effort stands at the center of what we experience today. In this century the forces of the dragon have grown very strong. In the *Pedagogical Youth Course*, Rudolf Steiner was asked why World War I had begun. He replied that human beings fought each other because they did not recognize the true dragon. They went to war on the wrong battlefield.

The same could be said of the latter wars, the small ethnic wars and the massive genocides. Josef Stalin, the greatest of the mass murderers, said he did what he did because he wanted to destroy the evil which dwells in human beings. But he could not see the evil which dwelled in himself.

We see the same processes in our own circles. Can we see the evil in ourselves, or do we only see it in others?

We need to recognize evil as a central phenomenon of this century. To get to know the evil in ourselves is a painful, embarrassing process. Yet only by overcoming the evil in ourselves can international peace be cultivated. By shifting the battleground so that we do battle with the evil in ourselves, we set free the forces of collaboration and cooperation. At the same time, we recognize what Rudolf Steiner indicated - that some institutions and religions have created a pact with the forces of evil.

Here we see a special challenge for the kindergarten movement in this Michaelic Age, for we have children of many religions, ethnic and cultural backgrounds in our groups. There is a true mixture of humanity, which calls for both tolerance and discernment. Evil can work in many ways, including in our own prejudices which we have inherited. Wilenius gave an example of this.

In Finland, as a child, he was taught, as all children were, to hate the Russians. His mother related that as a nine year old boy during the war, he declared very patriotically, "I hope that the Finnish soldiers do not kill **all** the Russians, so that some are left for me to kill."

In the 1980's he was asked to lead a Finnish delegation of peace organizations to Russia and one evening he told this story from his childhood. He wanted to be open. Then a large Russian stood up, and Wilenius

became a bit fearful. The Russian said, "I was wounded three times at the Finnish front - but now we are friends!" And he embraced Wilenius in a great hug. That night they celebrated, for something new had been born between them. Looking back, he can see that the Finnish people have a lot to learn from the Russians, especially warmth of heart.

One challenge of a Waldorf educator is to recognize and know what lives as evil in us. Every human being has a place of hatred and negativity placed in us by Lucifer. Through this we see things in a wrong light. In this way Lucifer enters our soul.

To counteract this, Rudolf Steiner gives a positivity exercise. Through this exercise we do not project positive qualities into the other, but actively **recognize** the positive qualities of the other person or nation. We can develop an interest in what lives as a special quality in an individual or a nation.

This is related to the mission of EFFE, the European Forum for Freedom in Education which brings together educators and parents from different streams of independent education all across Europe. (Eventually they hope to join forces with other continents, as well.) Wilenius has been active in this organization and became its chairman in the fall. At a recent meeting two teachers from Northern Ireland spoke of a new movement for integrating schools to bring together Protestant and Catholic children. Previously, they were always taught in separate schools and each group was taught to hate the other. Another example given was of one of the Waldorf schools in Amsterdam which has consciously chosen to move into a poorer part of the city where many immigrant families live. They want Dutch children and immigrant children to grow and learn together.

In October 1919, in the lectures entitled the *Social Future*, Rudolf Steiner said: "True internationalism can be compared to the feeling we have for the incredible diversity in nature. Wonder, awe, love and reverence arise within us. If we can learn to see the diverse qualities living in humanity with the same love, respect and reverence, then true internationalism will grow and develop in the soul. To learn what is universally human in us is a Michaelic/Christ-filled task."

This is one aspect of the significance of the Mystery of Golgotha - to discover the Universal Human, the unity of humanity not from without, but from **within**. In the carved statue, the Representative of Humanity which stands in the Goetheanum, Rudolf Steiner wanted to show this universal human being standing between the opposing forces of Lucifer and Ahriman.

Annie Heuser, a creative Waldorf teacher who led the pedagogical seminar in Dornach in the 1950's, once said that the most important thing for the child is that a reasonable, sensible human being stand before the child. In a similar vein, Wilenius says to his students at the Snellman College: "First you need to decide, do I want to be a human being? Then you can decide whether to be a teacher, a musician, a doctor, or a eurythmist."

Today we live in a time when the soul forces of thinking, feeling and willing are splitting apart, and we seek a way to bring them back together. The six subsidiary exercises are an important path for the reintegration of the soul forces, for they help to create a new center which holds them together. They help us exercise our control over thinking, feeling and willing, and also positivity, which is so incredibly important in our social life, as well as openness and acceptance of what comes.

Reijo Wilenius concluded by quoting Tshingis Aitmatov: "There is no future for humanity unless each human being develops himself or herself."