

Finding the Realm of the Spirit of Humanity

By Nancy Foster

The following is a report on two of the three lectures by Michaela Glockler at the 2006 WECAN East Coast Early Childhood Conference on “The Spirit of Humanity in Early Childhood Education.” The conference took place in February in Spring Valley, New York, and was attended by three hundred Waldorf early childhood educators.

On Friday evening and Saturday morning, Dr. Michaela Glöckler read to us a quotation from Gandhi:

*There are times
when you have to obey
a call which is
the highest of all,
that is, the voice of conscience
even though such obedience
may cost many a bitter tear,
and even more,
separation from friends,
from family,
from the state
to which you may belong,
from all that you have held
as dear as life itself.
For this obedience
is the law of our being. (1919)*

This quotation was the keynote for her theme of becoming peacemakers, following our conscience as we establish a new identity with our higher Self in the realm of the Spirit of Humanity.

Through the Goethean approach to the young child, we can observe the developmental steps toward the awakening of the “I.” Trust is the underlying necessity for these three steps.

1. *Self-initiation* into the mystery of space: In this sacred ground of self-teaching, the child orients the self in the three dimensions and comes into the upright.
2. *Self-initiation* in speaking: The child enters into soul-to-soul communication through the vehicle of language, by means of three components: genetics, environment, and the Self. Initially the child is open to whatever language(s) are offered in the environment.
3. *Self-initiation in thinking*: There is no imitation involved in thinking; rather, the child “wakes up” to realize he has thoughts and learns to express them. To say “I” to the Self is the awakening of thinking. This “I” indicates the spiritual reality that is in all of us; I share the ability to say “I” with all of humanity. The “I am” is the Spirit of Humanity, and the child finds it out of his own striving.

The Spirit of Humanity is the crown of nature, but it is still in its infancy. Animals are wiser: they cannot be evil. Only human beings disturb the ecological balance.

We call nature divine because it is so complete. Only the human being has the possibility and the need to develop, to improve. What the human being has to learn is beyond nature; it is from the spiritual realm. For example, the infant has a walking reflex, but true walking does not arise from this reflex. The baby must overcome this reflex and develop his own walking through sensory-motor learning – that is, he must bring nature under his own will-control. As human beings, we are not the slave of our instincts.

This first experience of overcoming instinct gives us self-trust, the realization, “I can learn; I can develop.” Thus the steps of development above are humanizing principles, with trust as the prerequisite.

As developing human beings, we must learn to be homeless in order to find our higher Self. In his 1911 lecture cycle on the Folk Souls, Rudolf Steiner describes the necessity of entering consciously into our Folk Soul identity to see what it can contribute to humanity, thus also learning to see the mission of other Folk Souls. We must strengthen our ego and establish a new identity independent of the Folk.

Dr. Glöckler pointed out that babies are truly “homeless” in this sense: the younger the child, the more open and the less bound to a particular Folk Soul. Therefore, we do not want to offer a “museum of religions” in the kindergarten by celebrating festivals of every family’s religion. Instead, in early childhood education we can lay the basis for an independent self-identity through keeping the realm of common humanity alive in the young child and developing a strong sense of the Spirit of Humanity. The ideal in the kindergarten is that all festivals meet the challenge to address the common Spirit of Humanity.

The elements of such festivals might be the following:

1. admiration of nature; a spiritual relationship to the laws of nature;
2. the magic of the social aspect – the joy of preparing a festival for one another;
3. living with threshold experiences, making thresholds conscious, in a manner appropriate for specific developmental stages.

Without the spiritual in education, children would be cut off from the source of their humanity, yet religion is a private matter. What we bring into the early childhood classroom must be that which is beyond a personal religion. Rudolf Steiner said that Christianity began as a religion but has become something more. By bringing it into the thought realm, it transcends the sectarian. In *How to Know Higher Worlds*, we find concepts from many religions, because Rudolf Steiner was seeking to formulate a universally human path of development so that nearly any human being could participate. “There slumber in every human being faculties by means of which he can acquire for himself a knowledge of higher worlds.” This idea that each human being can find the spirit is also found in the Gospels. (Religious traditions often don’t reflect this; we have to go to the source.)

Dr. Glöckler ended by giving a picture of human nature in the context of the challenge of the adversarial beings. In the Old Testament, there are two creation stories. In the first, the human being is portrayed as a spiritual being, encompassing all realms, and is declared by God to be “very good.” In the second, the human being is portrayed as a physical being, with each kingdom of nature placed beside the others. Here, there is the possibility of evil. The very young child belongs with the first picture. Once ego consciousness has dawned, the second picture is added, and so we have both possible views of our humanity.

The Anthroposophical understanding of this paradox is found in the qualities of Lucifer and Ahriman. Lucifer represents the ancient paradigm of fanaticism: “You will know what is good and what is evil.” This ignores the reality that good and evil are in all of us, and denies the possibility of development, of becoming.

Ahriman intends that we forget good and evil, and view the human being as an animal which can be formed and directed. This is the modern paradigm, in which freedom is seen to cause trouble and human beings are treated as automatons.

Our challenge is to develop moral intuition, the ability to discern in the moment what is good or evil. We must not fall into either of the above paradigms, but find our way forward as human beings on a path of development to the realm of the Spirit of Humanity. A verse from Gandhi speaks to us of strength of heart and the power of everlasting spirit:

*Power invariably elects to go
into the hands of the strong.
That strength may be physical
or of the heart
Or, if we do not fight shy
of the word, of the spirit.*

*Strength of the heart
connotes soul force.
Let it be remembered that
physical force is transitory.
But the power of the spirit
Is permanent even as
the spirit is everlasting. (1942)*

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