

Balance In Teaching, Balance In Working, Balance In Living

By Roberto Trostli

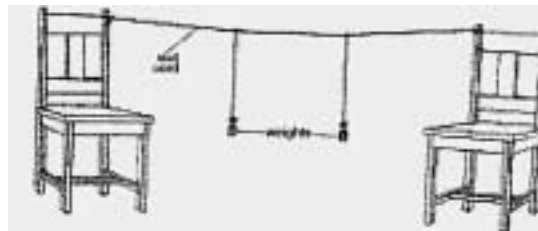
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Balance in teaching, balance in working, and balance in living-what could possibly qualify me to speak about this subject? I am certainly not a paragon of balance-quite the contrary! Yet those who suffer from an affliction are sometimes especially qualified to speak about it because they have first-hand experience of something others have only observed.

During the past years, as I have reflected on my teaching, my work, and my life, I have struggled to develop a vocabulary to describe my experiences more accurately. My life as a teacher swung between the extremes of selfishness and self-sacrifice. Is there a balance between these two? Is there a middle realm where we are at the same time self-less-in other words, less our everyday lower self-and self-more-more our eternal Self.

The word “balance” comes from the Latin name for the double-pan scale. It is derived from bi and lanix, which mean “two metal trays.” The trays of a scale move up and down with linear motion, indicating the relative weight of the objects in the trays. The scale also has another part-the bar that holds and links the trays. This connecting bar pivots in a circular motion around the balance point. The scale functions as a balance because the connecting bar mediates the polarity of the trays. When the trays are “in balance,” activity ceases and the opposites are held in dynamic equilibrium.

The resonance pendulum demonstrates another kind of balance. It consists of two chairs with a cord stretched taut between them. From the cord hang two weights from strings of equal length. When the weight on the right is lifted and released, it swings in a wide arc. During the second full swing, the weight on the left begins to swing slightly. With each swing of the right-hand weight, the left-hand weight gains momentum until it is finally swinging with an arc almost as wide as the one originally made by the right-hand weight. Meanwhile, the right-hand weight's swings have been decreasing, and at the point when the left-hand weight reaches its widest arc, the right-hand weight hangs totally still. The cycle continues until the right-hand weight is swinging again in a wide arc and the left-hand weight is hanging still.



From Physics is Fun, by Roberto Trostli, Octavo Editions, New York, 1995. Used by permission.

In this balance, the impulse of motion is transmitted from one weight to the other. In the midst of the cycle, there is a brief moment when one of the weights hangs still. Just as the trays in a scale are brought into balance by the central beam, the weights of the resonance pendulum are brought into balance by the cord that connects the weights. Although we tend to focus on the movement of the weights, we should be aware that the connecting cord determines how the system works. It transmits the impulse from one weight to the other, and it allows one of the weights to achieve its moment of stillness when the other weight is swinging most actively. This physics demonstration, which might be done in the seventh grade as part of the study of mechanics, can serve as a metaphor or parable of the kind of dynamic balance teachers must strive to achieve.

Balance In Teaching

One of the major challenges confronting the Waldorf teacher is time. There is simply not enough time to prepare, to spend with family or friends, to meditate, to experience the natural world, or to attend a concert or play. Waldorf teachers have too much to do and too little time to do it. Unless they are careful, they end up sacrificing themselves on the altar of their work.

One of the reasons that teachers have so little time is because they spend so much of it preparing. In teaching, as in any artistic endeavor, adequate preparation is a *sine qua non*. If we are to transform education into an art, we must master the subjects we teach in order to bring them to life. Rudolf Steiner set a high standard for teachers when he said that they would have to spend at least two or three hours of concentrated preparation in order to teach for about half an hour. In the original Waldorf school, class teachers were supposed to be assigned only two hours of teaching per day so that they could spend an additional six hours in preparation. This ideal schedule was never realized because teachers had too many other classes and responsibilities, not to mention the faculty and committee meetings that they had to attend. During the past eighty years, teachers' schedules have become even fuller and more demanding. Most teachers spend at least eight-and sometimes ten or twelve-hours per day at school. Under these circumstances how can they possibly prepare adequately?

The amount of time we need for preparation depends on how we go about preparing. If we think of preparation as a process of gathering information, we will probably spend a great deal of time trying to become well-informed, and we will probably never feel sufficiently prepared. If, however, we think of preparation as a process of becoming, a learning process that engenders interest and enthusiasm for what we will be teaching, we may not feel sufficiently prepared, but the qualities that we develop through our preparation will allow us to nourish our students.

The best food for a newborn child is mother's milk, for this milk is composed of earthly substances that have been entirely transmuted into an ideal form of nourishment. As teachers, our task is to give the children "soul milk" and "spiritual milk" - educational substance that has been so fully transmuted that the children are thoroughly nourished in soul and spirit.

In order to provide our students with this kind of soul or spiritual milk, we need to make the material our own so that the students can ultimately make it their own. Thoroughly penetrating the material takes time, but not time measured in a linear manner. One might think that the more time spent preparing, the more one will know; the more one knows, the more the students will learn. Education doesn't work that way; it doesn't follow such logic. To truly master a subject, a long enough span of time must pass to allow us to separate the essential from the non-essential, the wheat from the chaff. When we don't allow such time and try to cram ourselves with information, the material remains undigested in our souls, and we give the students stones instead of bread. Because we have been unable to transform the material, we tend to present it as a set of abstract concepts instead of living pictures.

Since the Middle Ages, colleges and universities have determined educational values. These values are transmitted through the educational system to secondary schools, elementary schools, and even to preschools. The curriculum of lower schools typically consists of a diluted form of the subjects that are taught in secondary schools and in universities. The curriculum addresses what academics think children ought to know, not what children need to learn in order to develop their soul capacities.

How can a subject be used to develop soul capacities? In the Waldorf School, fifth graders learn about the plants in relation to the earth. They study this subject in order to strengthen their connection to the natural world, to deepen their innate sense of wonder for the beauty of nature, but mostly they learn about plants in order to learn to think in new ways. Learning about plants helps students to recognize the principles of metamorphosis; it helps them to understand the nature of time; it helps them to think more imaginatively and analytically. Only after learning about the life cycle of the plant can a student truly begin to understand the course of history and the transformations of human culture and human consciousness through the ages. As Waldorf teachers we must remember that we are trying to do more than impart knowledge; otherwise we will unwittingly fall into the “content trap,” pulling our students into a pit awash with useless information.

Unless a subject has been digested and become a part of us, it cannot be transmuted into a form that can be absorbed by the children. This kind of “soul digestion” requires time for reflection - not a great deal of time, but a sacrosanct time set aside for that purpose. This kind of time is not measured in conventional units, for “time loses its significance when it is a case of calling the supersensible to life. The spirit simply has other laws. Just as in dreams everything contracts, so all that flows from the spirit becomes extended.”¹ A moment for reflection is like the moment when one of the weights of the resonance pendulum is not receiving the impulse from the other but hangs still and poised, full of potential. These moments, which are so vulnerable to the pressures of daily life, are the moments that yield the greatest spiritual results. The resonance pendulum only has two moments of stillness in each cycle. This should remind us that it is not the quantity, but the quality of time that we spend in preparation that will determine whether we develop the human qualities that will nourish our students. In those moments of stillness, a special seed can germinate and grow-the seed of our higher Self.

When the prophet Elijah climbed Mount Horeb to stand in the presence of God, the Lord passed by, and a great strong wind rent the mountains and broke rocks in pieces, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind came an earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire came a still small voice. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle, for that was where God was-in that still small voice. That still small voice can tell us a great deal of what we need to prepare ourselves for our teaching, but we must commit ourselves to creating the space and the time to listen.

Once we begin to listen to that voice, we gain confidence in the reality of the spiritual world and in the sources of divine inspiration. When the Homeric bard said, “Sing to me, Muse, of the wrath of Achilles,” he was not just following poetic convention; he was expressing the reality of creating a place in his soul where the voice of the Muse could be heard. I too have been fortunate enough to hear the voice of the Muse-how else to explain the plays, stories, and verses I have been inspired to write? I have also occasionally been graced by the guiding hand of the spiritual world. I have often wrestled with profound questions that have no clear answer, and when I have asked the spiritual world for help, I have usually received it, though not always in the way I expected. The spiritual world doesn’t usually reveal itself to us in grand visions; it reveals itself in a still small voice that comes to us when we least expect it. If we are always busy-and each of us can find countless ways to stay busy-we will not hear that voice that helps us to know our Selves and gives us the strength, the courage, and the wisdom to teach.

One of my students taught me to listen more closely to the voice of the spirit. He was a boy of extraordinary qualities and extraordinary needs, and during the years I taught him, I often felt unequal to

the challenge. Working with him brought great gifts, however, and some were bestowed directly by the spiritual world. For instance, before his seventh birthday, I was struggling to find the right images and words for his birthday verse. Nothing I considered seemed right; I didn't know what he needed, what would bring him solace. One morning, about two weeks before his birthday, I woke up and heard this verse sounding in my heart:

The Light of the World
Came down to Earth
To shine for all Mankind.
I carry that Light
Within my Self,
In my will,
In my heart,
And my mind.

When I ponder how this verse came to me, I feel humble and grateful, for it demonstrates that when we ask for help, it will be given. If we listen for the word of the spirit and heed its call, we will receive the help we need to develop greater balance in our teaching.

Balance in Working

Another challenge for Waldorf teachers is to find a balance between the polarities inherent in our work. Life is full of polarities, and unless we experience the extremes, we cannot fully appreciate the midpoint between them. One of the polarities in our work is expressed by the opposition between the realms of warmth and light and the realms of cold and darkness. We live in both these realms, dwelling at times more in one or the other.

Warmth and light lead us towards the cosmos; cold and darkness towards the earth. The former is the domain of art; the latter of science. In warmth we experience our will; in coldness, our thinking. In one realm we feel free to express ourselves; in the other we feel stifled, compelled to conform. This polarity is created by spiritual beings that express themselves through natural forces, through cultural developments, and through our bodies and souls. The beings who dwell in the light and the warmth and are active in the realms of art, religion, and self-expression are the followers and helpers of a spiritual being whom Rudolf Steiner called Lucifer, who had an earthly incarnation about 5,000 years ago. The beings who dwell in the cold and the darkness and are active in the realm of science, materialistic thinking, and conventional expression are the followers and helpers of a spiritual being whom Rudolf Steiner called Ahriman, who will have his earthly incarnation in the near future, if not already. Between these two beings stands another who helps to hold them in balance in us and in the world.

According to Rudolf Steiner, Lucifer influenced and inspired all the pagan cultures and religions, all the great mythologies, all pre-Christian art. Whatever lived in image or in religious ritual in ancient times was under his guidance. The only culture that resisted and was protected from Lucifer's influence was that of the Hebrews, whose God forbade the creation or worship of graven images.

Because class teachers work so intensively in the artistic realm, transforming the mundane into the extraordinary, infusing the material with the spiritual, they are subject to the influence of Luciferic beings who work through the imagination, inspiring flights of creativity and fantasy, bringing warmth and light to the art of teaching. Although some of our work takes place in Lucifer's domain, we must be careful not to succumb to his temptations, and we must take active steps to combat his influence.

One of the ways we can counteract Lucifer's influence is to spend more time working in the Ahrimanic sphere. Ahriman lends form and structure to life; he works in the physical realm and in everything that can be expressed through reason or numbers. To a certain extent, the work of the administrative staff and the Board of Trustees is subject to Ahriman's influence. When we do such work, we have to be accountable, we need to be objective rather than subjective, we must use our thinking rather than being swept away by our enthusiasm. Those whose work brings them into a relationship with Ahriman must also remain vigilant in order not to fall prey to his influence; they must strive to redeem Ahriman's gifts by using them for the highest human purposes.

As teachers, we can balance our inclination to become too immersed in the artistic realm by taking responsibility for some of the school's administrative work. When we have to write clear letters or well-organized reports, when we have to form policies or allocate funds, when we have to follow through and make decisions in a timely manner-all somewhat Ahrimanic activities-we achieve greater balance.

When teachers participate in school administration, they can also bring greater balance to that kind of work, which tends to become too functional or pragmatic. Teachers cannot and should not perform all of a school's administrative tasks-our schools are far too complex for that-but if teachers only teach, because that is where their talents lie, then the faculty can become too Luciferic. If the administrative staff and the Board have all the responsibility for running the school, because that is the area of their expertise, they can become too Ahrimanic. If the polarity between the faculty and the administration becomes too extreme, a school begins to crack under the strain, but when the faculty has the opportunity to infuse idealism into the administrative realm and the administration and the Board are able to instill realism into the daily work of the teachers, then a school thrives.

Lucifer wants to draw human beings away from the earth so that they will live an entirely spiritual existence as moral automatons. This state of automatic goodness would be at the expense of our freedom. Ahriman wants to tie human beings to the earth and to convince us to think of ourselves as nothing more than higher animals. Ahriman tempts us to use technology to fulfill our material needs and to satisfy our desires. If he succeeds, human beings will forget their divine origin.²

Between these two beings stands the Christ Being, who holds Lucifer and Ahriman in a dynamic balance. Rudolf Steiner represented the relationship between the Christ and humanity's great adversaries in a huge carved wooden statue. It shows the Christ reaching upward with one hand, holding Lucifer at bay. With the other hand, he is reaching downward, keeping Ahriman in his place. The Christ doesn't destroy his adversaries; he resists them, holding them at arms' length, allowing them to do their necessary work while he continues to stride forward towards his distant goal. This statue expresses an important lesson: We must not allow the battle against Lucifer and Ahriman to become the focus of our lives-that would give our adversaries too much power. We must be able to keep Lucifer and Ahriman in their place while continuing to move ever forward towards our goal: to become truly human.

The Christ allows us to connect to our Self, our true Self, our higher Self. Rudolf Steiner encouraged teachers to put their lower self aside so that the higher Self could manifest itself in them. "For people in general there may be many kinds of prayers," he said,

Over and above these is this special prayer for the teacher: "Dear God, cause that I - inasmuch as my personal ambitions are concerned - negate myself. And Christ make true in me the Pauline words, 'Not I, but the Christ in me.'... so that the Holy Spirit may hold sway in the teacher."³

It is beyond the scope of this article to describe Rudolf Steiner's views of "cosmic Christianity," but it should be noted that when Rudolf Steiner speaks of the Christ, he is referring to a cosmic being, who

incarnated briefly in human form so that He could bestow a gift on all of humanity for all time, not just on those who consider themselves Christians. The gift the Sun-or Son-God bestowed on humanity was the possibility for human beings to become aware of themselves as individuals, with an “I” or ego. The Christ epitomizes and embodies what is universally human, what is essentially human, supremely human. He is known by many names in many cultures. One of his names is the ‘I am.’

When one prays, “And Christ make true in me the Pauline word, ‘Not I, but the Christ in me’,” one is really saying: “Allow the highest Self - that which is divine in me and which I share with all other human beings - to become ever more a part of me, to permeate the essence of who I am.” By becoming self-less—less our lower selves—we become the vessels of our higher Self, where the spirit manifests itself.

Rudolf Steiner also spoke about the relationship of the teachers to the Christ in several of his talks to the teachers, students, and parents at school assemblies and seasonal festivals. On one occasion he asked the students,

Do you know where your teachers get all the strength and ability they need so that they can teach you to grow up to be good and capable people? They get it from the Christ”⁴

At another assembly he referred to the spirit that permeated the Waldorf School:

There is a spirit that is always meant to prevail here, a spirit that your teachers bring to this place. From the spirit of the cosmos, they learn to bring this spirit in to you; they take in what St. Paul said with all of their souls. The spirit of Christ prevails throughout our school; whether we are doing arithmetic, reading, writing, or whatever we do, we do it with the attitude that the Christ has awakened in us.⁵

At an Easter festival, Rudolf Steiner spoke about the relationship of the teachers to the Christ.

Now, you are all coming here after a time... when you could remember this great benefactor of the earth and of humanity, the Christ by looking up to Him, by feeling what the Christ is, we learn what other benefactors can be. And you see, the reason why your teachers will be such good teachers for you is that they have tried hard to get to know the Christ; they have tried hard to turn their feelings toward the Christ in the right way at Easter, in the spring. But that is what you should have in mind right from the very beginning - that your teachers are filled with the strength that comes from this greatest of all humanity’s benefactors. Dear teachers, I know that I do not need to say this in any demanding way, but only as a fact: How you raise and instruct these children will really make them feel throughout their lives that the strength that enters your hearts through the Mystery of Golgotha makes it possible for you to be their benefactors.⁶

Why did Rudolf Steiner speak so openly about the Christ on these occasions? I think that the clue may be found in the question that Rudolf Steiner asked the students whenever he visited the Waldorf school: “Children,” he would say, “do you love your teachers?” The students would always answer resoundingly, “Yes, we love our teachers!” He also posed this question when all the students were gathered together at the monthly assemblies, and the hall would reverberate with their joyous answer. I think that Rudolf Steiner spoke about the Christ so explicitly because he was implicitly asking the teachers, “Teachers, do you love your Teacher?” By naming Christ as the Spirit of the Waldorf school, as the teachers’ Teacher, Rudolf Steiner was revealing the “open secret” that the Christ stands behind each teacher as he or she strives to become fully human, and He helps the teachers in their efforts to create a community based on spiritual ideals.

We can realize our full humanity only in community with other human beings. A community is an organism that follows its own laws of growth and development. Just as all human beings have the potential to develop their soul capacities and their spiritual nature, members of a community can work consciously to develop the soul and spirit of the being of the community.

One way we can work together to develop a community's soul and spirit is by engaging in the "reverse ritual." According to Rudolf Steiner, all true rituals are physical expressions of what we experienced in the spiritual world before our birth. A ritual such as the celebration of a sacrament brings down the gifts of the spiritual world to the earthly plane. In the reverse ritual we offer earthly gifts to the spiritual world, by spiritualizing our perceptions, our interactions, and our deeds. This allows spiritual beings to become involved in the work of our community. The reverse ritual can occur when sufficient spiritual idealism is cultivated in a community. When this idealism lives strongly enough in a group, its members can begin to perceive each other as beings of soul and spirit.⁷

The College of Teachers in a Waldorf school—the group of teachers that holds the spiritual responsibility for running the school—endeavors to create the conditions for the reverse ritual to occur so that spiritual beings can help to guide the school in matters of the greatest weight. Through their attitude and their manner of deliberation, the teachers on the College offer a prayer from the depths, in the hope that it will be answered from the heights. By working on their own self-development, by striving together in true appreciation of the other, and by forging a spiritual community, teachers seek to establish a connection with the beings of the third hierarchy.

The beings of the third hierarchy are drawn to the meetings of the College of Teachers because the teachers' idealism, striving, and willingness to work together engages the interest of the spiritual world. When a meeting achieves the reverse ritual, spiritual beings receive an offering of spiritualized earthly substance that is akin to the blessing that we receive when we partake of a sacrament. When the reverse ritual occurs, the Being of the school may be heard in the listening heart. What is finally voiced aloud by one or another member of the group goes far beyond the sum of the individual opinions or perspectives that have been expressed. In those moments, one feels humbled by the recognition that one is participating in something rare and holy: the transmutation of earthly thoughts, words, and deeds into spiritual substance.

Balance in Living

Most Waldorf teachers have little time and little support for leading a balanced life. This is the result of the vast demands placed on Waldorf teachers, but it is also a reflection of what I would term "the culture of the Waldorf school."

Every school has its individual coloring, its tone, its mood. We experience it when we walk down the halls, when we attend meetings or events, when we speak with the teachers, parents, or students. An unhealthy school has a certain prickly quality that is immediately perceptible. A healthy school exudes embracing warmth that makes a visitor feel welcome and at home. The fundamental nature, temperament, or character of the school is a manifestation of the Being of the school, but the culture of the school is not an intrinsic aspect of that Being. The culture of a school is created by the community of teachers and parents, and if that culture is unhealthy or unbalanced, they have the opportunity and the responsibility to change it.

Organizations, like individuals, can suffer from a multitude of maladies. If a school has a culture where the teachers secretly vie to outdo each other; if they are trying too hard to prove to the parents that they

are holding their students to the most rigorous academic and artistic standards; if they do not feel sufficient trust in their colleagues to delegate responsibility and must therefore attend an excessive number of meetings—then it is likely that the teachers in this school will not have the time for anything else in their lives but work.

Work can be a wonderful escape. It can prevent us from having relationships—we won't have occasions for intimacy in our lives; it can prevent us from having time for ourselves—there won't be moments for introspection or self-appraisal; it can allow us to neglect our health—we won't be able to pay attention to our suffering in body or soul. Work can function like a drug, and a Waldorf teacher can easily become addicted to this drug in spite of the purest motives and the best intentions. How ironic that in the very act of self-sacrifice and service, one can, unwittingly, become self-destructive!

If the culture of a Waldorf school engenders ambition, pride, or distrust, time for everything else can get sucked out of the teachers' lives. We have to become conscious of this condition and change it by encouraging each other to do less and to live more. An individual cannot change the culture of the school; that requires the group's awareness and the group's commitment to change.

The Waldorf teacher walks a thin line between the appearance of selfishness and the reality of self-sacrifice. If the culture of a school demands that the school come first, then we will be branded as selfish when we put ourselves, our families, or our friends first. If the culture of the school demands that the teachers sacrifice themselves for the sake of their vocation, then teachers will ultimately not have anything left of themselves to give to their students, their families, or their friends, to themselves or to the world.

The word sacrifice comes from the roots *sacer* and *facere*, which mean “to make sacred” or “to make holy.” As Waldorf teachers we do perform sacrifices—we help that which once lived in a spiritual form and is now earthly to become spiritualized again. For this we are born: to do on earth what was not possible to do in the spiritual world. In that sense, living is a sacrifice, working is a sacrifice; being married, being a parent, being a friend—all are sacrifices, for through these means we make something holy. There is a difference between sacrifice—an act that enhances our Self—and self-sacrifice through which we negate ourselves.

Self-sacrifice is the counter image of selfishness, for both derive from our relationship to our everyday lower self. When we are selfish, we dwell too deeply in that self; when we sacrifice ourselves, we extinguish it. Our task as Waldorf teachers is to find the dynamic balance between these extremes. In that central balance point resides the Self that contains a drop of the divinity of the Self of the World.

When a well is running dry, it can be hydrofractured by pumping water into it at great pressure in order to shatter the rock and to force open the seams to increase the flow. When our souls are dried up, instead of increasing the pressure to work harder and do more, we must go to the well where the living water wells forth and allow ourselves to drink of it. Sometimes this means that we must spend some of our time *not* teaching, *not* working, but living.

Waldorf communities need to help teachers develop new ways of thinking about their teaching, their work, and their lives, to counter the prevailing unhealthy and unbalanced ideas of their vocation. When we see each other falling out of balance, we need to rescue one another. We need to become like Parsifal, asking the question: “What ails thee?” As partners in the service of the highest, we need to free ourselves from the tyranny of preconceived ideas so that we can help each other to realize the ideal of teaching, working and living in the dynamic center where we find the higher Self.

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¹ Rudolf Steiner. *Balance in Teaching*, p. 42

² Rudolf Steiner. *The Work of the Angels in Man's Astral Body*, p. 15-16

³ Rudolf Steiner. *The Child's Changing Consciousness as the Basis of Pedagogical Practice*, p. 142

⁴ Rudolf Steiner. *Rudolf Steiner in the Waldorf School*, p. 29

⁵ Ibid. p.37

⁶ Ibid. p. 171-172

⁷ Rudolf Steiner. *Awakening to Community* pp. 95-99