

Getting underway with enthusiasm

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My hearty thanks to Peter Bauer, for this halt on the march, this opportunity to be together with you all, with Mariella Corbo, José Garcia Morales, with Eva Benedikt Lüönd and Marco Donnicola, Gabriela Santa and Beat Zibulski. I cannot congratulate you all individually on your success, otherwise I would run out of time, but I would like to offer a special hearty welcome to two of you in particular: Nadine Staub and Beat Gysin. I am delighted that our paths cross again, especially on this occasion of such importance to you.

Today I would like to tell you about my learning experiences and about my teachers.

Being underway

I begin with one of my last intensive learning experiences, my pilgrimage from Basel to Bethlehem. Let's go together. Come with me, step by step.

I see the St. Alban Rheinweg, feel the shade of the chestnut trees in the glowing heat of this June day, one year ago, underway with friends, who accompany me as far Rheinfelden. A passer-by calls to me "Your journey is great. When you get back, come to visit me in the Paper Mill for coffee and chocolate cake!" I see the light on the fir-needle-soft path along the Rhine before Koblenz, the glistening on the quietly rushing river, with its partly rocky and partly wooded banks. Even softer is the ground in the swamp area at Arlberg – cotton grass, daisies, chervil sway gently in the wind; red gleaming wild orchids; mountain peaks and deep blue sky are reflected in the little mountain lake. I hear the gurgling and rushing of the fresh water in the Innersbach gorge. A narrow path leads through this deep ravine, and now and again, there is a clear view to the turquoise-green water basin. I see the beach trees of the Vienna woods arch above me, with their powerful, densely standing trunks, the resonance of a cathedral. In the middle of the wood, I climb a view-tower and see Vienna in the distance, with St Stephan's Cathedral. On the next day, I enter the cathedral as the priest is holding high service. The people greet one another, and in the cathedral square many happy men, women, children, musicians and street entertainers, enjoy the warm glowing evening, with ice-lollies, hot chocolate topped with whipped cream and Sacher cake. I experience the immense sky over the Hungarian plain. The clouds form themselves into staggered rows, as I know it from the sea. At the edge of the road, near to Saray, I see a group of four ants, which with united force, try to steer a sunflower seed as winter food supply, into the walled, funnel-shaped nest, and which quickly disappear into the hole with their loot, as I lend them a helping hand by pushing with a twig. I gaze over the park landscape of Istanbul, over the Bosphorus blazing in the evening light. Like snails, the ships creep through the strait, and the sun sets in the windows of Asia Minor. I am overwhelmed by the beauty of the yellow, gold, red, orange, turquoise-blue of the evening sky after the threatening stormy day before Ankara. I am awed by the bizarre rock formations in Kappadokia, which are reminiscent of a moon-landscape. The early Christians have buried their cave churches in the soft stone of the rock indentations. A flock of pigeons circle in the evening sky above Antakya, Antiochia. I lean against a thousand year old cedar trunk surrounded by other ancient cedar trees, above Bscharre, birthplace and burial place of Khalil Gibran. I feel the power of the tree and look up to Qornet es Saouda, where at 3000 m above sea-level, the snow is gleaming in the afternoon light. The beach between Caesarea and Tel Aviv, three days long to the right the sea, to the left the steep coast, and under the feet sea shells and stones which have been smoothed by the sea. What a

world! What miracle has developed here! We can sit, breathe, listen, talk, and play music. What an inconceivable idea of creation, which allows the Earth to become a living sphere. If we walk for months on the earth's surface, we get a feeling for the curvature, for the complete shape.

Learning whilst walking

Why do I talk of this pilgrimage as a learning experience? Indeed, what have I not learned!

Knowledge of languages – in “suggestopedic” tuition, a Turkish friend managed to teach me some Turkish. I am also learning the most important everyday expressions in Hungarian, Rumanian, Bulgarian and Arabic. Also something from history: for example, how we came within a cat's whisker of never having known the works of the great composer, Joseph Haydn. His grandfather, by hiding in a large chimney, was one of only six Hainburgers to survive the Turkish storming of Vienna. I have learned, the multitude of uses for the hazel stick my friend Bruno Manser cut for me: protection against Anatolian sheep dogs, relief from your backache when you have backache, as a clothes horse, for support on paths with many puddles, for pulling down ripe fruits from the trees, as a flag to waft away swarms of flies and as a wind sock, to select the exhaust-free side of the road. For the first time in my life, I have filmed, used a mobile phone, sent an SMS. I have also learned how to get rid of a member of the Libyan secret police by bombarding him with Basel dialect, when he wanted to confiscate my camera – I had unknowingly filmed a military policeman with vehicle. I have experienced, how a whistle, which should have saved me from dangerous situations, actually got me into a dangerous situation, as I ended up in a Turkish army manoeuvre, and the soldiers confused my whistle with their signal. I have experienced, that gypsies, who had stolen my camera, were so moved by my heart-wrenching howls, that they gave me back the stolen goods. I have learned, how capable our body is of performance and regeneration, when we use it in a natural way – how happy, for once, over a long period, to be physically and spiritually stretched to one's full potential – and to experience, that most minor complaints disappear again of their own accord, when I relax and carry on my way regardless.

I have learned: I come a long way, even without fossil fuels, when I allow myself sufficient time; and how my senses are richly rewarded thereby. But the most beautiful learning experiences were the encounters with people. Marianne Bauer from Innsbruck gets off her bicycle on the cycle path and asks: “Where are you spending the night? There is room with us.” Ahmed Basar, the chief in the Turkish mountain village Sarayçik, and his wife Saniye open their door to me and show me to the cushions in their warm living room. A cloth is spread out, covered with delicious food. They clear out their bedroom and offer me their bed. They make a fire, and soon I am slumbering in the warm down beside the singing oven, whilst outside it is freezing cold. I encounter the graphic arts student Hagai, near Nazareth. He comes towards me on his mountain bike wearing a bicycle helmet. I ask him, if there is a hotel in the area. “Yes, there is; but you don't need a hotel.” In his apartment in Balfourya he cooks me spaghetti with fine spiced vegetable sauce and sorts me out a comfortable place to sleep on the sofa in his living room. Three encounters, which stand for hundreds. I have learned: the vast majority of people are helpful and hospitable. The lies, deception and murder which dominate the newspapers, give a distorted picture of mankind. I must think often of Bertold Brecht and his poem “An die Nachgeborenen” (To those born after): “You however, once the time has come, when people will help other people, think of us with leniency.” I have often experienced it like this. This time has dawned.

Learning and Enthusiasm

Why am I telling you all this? I found out how effortless all this learning was. It had to do with me, my way, my life. All the learning served my heart's desire – after all, I was walking under the motto “there is enough sun for us all”. All the learning was nourished by my enthusiasm. I had never before been so enthusiastic and for such a long time. Why was I so enthusiastic? I had fulfilled a dream – a dream that was about me, my way, my life. Fulfil your dreams and encourage your pupils to realise their dreams. The learning will be effortless.

Getting underway

I have got myself on the way and I have opened myself. To get on the way – leave everything behind, walk a path, have a target; and thereby take up contact with mother Earth and let go again, with every step. To open oneself – the sky, food, hunger, drinking when thirsty, warmth and cold, smells, sounds, colours, the natural wonders, the encounters, all the sensual experiences in their completeness, which, if perceived, blow away the question about the point of life; “look, hear, smell, feel”. As we were still on the bank of the river Wiese, to protest against the project of a highway that would cut through that marvellous landscape, school classes would come past occasionally. I received various different reactions to my question, why in this area so many rare species of birds could be found. For example, 14-year old children from a high school class considered the question, but remained silent. When I asked the children individually, they shrugged their shoulders and said “I don't know”. On the same day, a class with 11-year olds from a free school in Lörrach, reacted with curiosity. The children looked around and described what they saw: “There is a river, water,” “There are trees, a copse,” “The trees reach to the riverbank, the branches reach out over the water,” “It's peaceful here, there is no traffic, also not many people walking on the other side. Surely the birds feel safe here.” “There is a hill. Could it be, that this area is protected from the weather?” Also the gardens with all the old fruit trees, which provide excellent nesting sites, were mentioned.

To look, hear, smell, feel – for us, directly, not only something prepared, filmed, written, copied. To look in all tranquillity, to give us enough space and time to look, hear, smell and feel. Often sensual experiences are so diluted or totally excluded, when we sit contentedly in a vehicle or behind a machine.

Christian Morgenstern once wrote in his aphorisms: “Enthusiasm is the most beautiful word on the Earth”. Enthusiasm comes from the Greek "*En theo einai*" – i.e. “to be in God, to be united with God, to be enthusiastic, to be filled with spirit”. Yes, that is it: to open oneself to the divine.

Setting an Example

Many of you will be teachers. You will set an example to and be a role model for your pupils.

What is a role model? You are on the way, on your way. The entrusted pupils are also on the way. What distinguishes the people who have become my role models? On their way, they have developed something, unfolded something, which is still dormant in me. In this way we are bound – through our way, through togetherness in different stages of development.

Which teachers left the deepest impression on me, which men and women became my role models? Those who were filled with enthusiasm, those who were always enthusiastic about what they taught and could infect us with this enthusiasm.

Enthusiastic, inspiring teachers

I think of the zoologist and philosopher Adolf Portmann. In the Bernoullianum lecture theatre, he drew the entire evolution of the vertebrates on the board with a practiced hand – he could use the chalk with both hands simultaneously and independently of each other. We listened and copied his drawings, were deeply moved by his emotion concerning the wonders of nature. He passed on his knowledge; that was his way, to teach us the marvel, the respect for life.

I think of Arthur von Hochstetter, a Viennese anatomist – also a master of chalk. He made perfect drawings of the position of the human organs on the board. He danced in front of the board and accompanied this dance with unforgettable cries of muscle and other names: “Musculus stylohyoideus, mylohyoideus, sternocleidomastoideus!” He brought us near not only to anatomy, but also to Goethe, thanks to his enthusiasm for this universal person.

I think of the priest Paul Vogt, who during WW II engaged himself with all his energy for the persecuted, fighting for the refugees. I got to know him at a convention at communal prayers. It was the first time, that I have really been able to capture someone’s deeply-felt, sincere enthusiasm for God.

I think of my friend and teacher, Bruno Manser, of his enthusiasm for the variety of nature, which he observed, drew, tried to understand, of his unquenchable thirst for knowledge. On our walks, I learned more in a short time with him, than in all my years of biology lessons. Now and then in the mountains, he would move a stone to one side, to show me the alp salamander, the delicate spider’s web, the nest of ants, before carefully repositioning the stone. Once in Tuscany, we saw a fluorescent blue shimmer in a stream. Immediately, chemical pollution sprang into my mind, but Manser investigated the matter thoroughly, and found that the colour-effect came from ethereal oil that was seeping from the bark of an injured branch that reached into the water.

I also think of Paul Tournier, the doctor from Geneva and founder of Médecine de la personne, who already in the 1930s had the sick brought to the fireplace, in order to talk with them about the existential meaning of their illness. When he talked of “flash”, suddenly being filled with the spirit in an encounter, an enlightening moment or a creative inspiration, he meant this enthusiasm, this “being with God”.

I think of Carl Rogers, one of the founders of humanistic psychology. Where he lived on the Seneca Street in La Jolla, were many beautiful estates, protected by alarm systems and guard dogs. Somewhere was even written: "No Trespassing - Self Shooting Mechanism!" There is nothing like this at Carl Rogers home. The front door stood wide open, and he greeted me in his overgrown courtyard. On this occasion and in a later course given by him, I experienced what he meant with the loving-acceptance relationship, which stood in the centre of his works. Whoever was together with him, felt completely accepted, recognised, in their individuality, with all characteristics and peculiarities, not judged or sentenced, simply accepted, loved; and this allows the freedom for self-actualisation.

I think of the 90-year old Ruth Cohn, the psychologist, who built up the TCI concept – theme centred interaction – her infectious zest for life and enthusiasm, if a concrete action in favour of her psychotherapy-integrated protection of creation resulted from the group work. Thereby, the earth comes to mind again, which I felt as a complete living globe whilst walking – the beauty, but also the vulnerability. On my pilgrimage, I was aware how thin the life-supporting layer of our troposphere is, this 8000 m thin layer of air, that allows us to breathe, 8000 m, which can be walked in a couple of hours, whilst to walk through the earth with a diameter of 12,000 km would take at least 1 ½ years. Into this valuable, thin living “skin” of the earth we pump daily 100 million tonnes of carbon dioxide and large quantities of other toxic gases, with our vehicles, heating systems and factories. Ruth Cohn has coined the phrase: “Die Störung hat Priorität”. It brings to mind the difficulty of the teaching profession in this modern day and age of change. We all know that it will take a monumental communal effort, to keep our planet inhabitable. It needs the energy-change – the move away from oil, gas, coal, nuclear power, to renewable sources of energy and optimal energy usage. It needs the retention of the earth’s fertility. It needs the replacement of all toxins with earth-compatible substances. We all feel that – pupils and teachers. How to create a teaching plan that lives up to the necessary priority - without suppression, without numbing?

I trust, that this topic will become the focus of interest in our community and also even in our schools. Then, the preparation for the future, the preservation of creation, will be tackled with much fantasy, with new ideas and with relish, also thanks to you.

I wish you and your pupils from my heart, much time and leisure to look, hear, smell and feel, and the enthusiasm, that makes teaching and learning and the preservation of creation a divine experience.