

# Praise for Authority

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Amy Chua's book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, is a book of instruction on mishandling the souls of children. Nevertheless it played out as a top media event. Now throughout the nation, people discuss seriously whether it might not be a good idea, after all, to garner a bit of "inspiration" from the conditions of Far Eastern dictatorships.

Bernhard Bueb, author of the bestseller, *Praise of Discipline*, is definitely in favor of this. He is of the opinion that the Chinese are ready to take on Western values. Chua, a daughter of Chinese immigrants, was, to be sure, raised in the United States. Her main argument is that children need to be hardened for the fight for survival in the capitalism of globalization. That sounds at least as American as it does Chinese. And one must admit, such thoughts are not infrequently heard here [in Germany]. Many would say, yes, Chua might exaggerate a bit, but she is not entirely wrong, for our children really do lack respect for authority. Really? Is that the crucial point? Three cheers for authority!

It is a wonderful experience for children when they are able to look up to one or another adult with trust and admiration. In this, Rudolf Steiner was correct. But what did he say, exactly? "Being rightfully, inwardly inclined to venerate," the child would like to turn towards a "natural authority." However, "it may not be an authority that has been commanded. At least, if it must be so for outer social reasons, the child must not know anything about it. The child must feel that through his own feelings he is rightfully inclined to look up to the appropriate authority." A "tender authoritative relationship" could take place. Tender! And what can the adult contribute, that such a "tender" relationship would be possible? "We should be humble. The lack of humility comes from pride. Pride humiliates, even when it is expressed politely," writes the pedagogue Wolfgang Bergmann. Mahatma Gandhi said, "Believe me, if we would humbly bow ourselves down, we could learn the most important lessons in life, not so much from the learned, but from so-called ignorant children."

What if the crucial point were that adults lack respect for the authority that enters their lives with their children, an authority to be approached “with modesty” (Gandhi)\*? Steiner knew that no wise person is so clever that he could not learn something from an infant (!). Relating to the school years, he added that the teacher must actually “learn how to teach” from the children. Humility, modesty, and readiness to learn from children—these are attributes of true authority!

Nowadays one hears such things only once in awhile. There lies the main problem today. One might like to call out to Amy Chua and those who think like her, and say: You have not succeeded in opening your hearts. Perhaps some painful experiences lie in the background, but do not make an ideology out of your trouble!

\*This is the German sentence: “Wie, wenn der springende Punkt wäre, dass es den Erwachsenen an Respekt mangelte vor der ›Autorität‹ dessen, was mit den Kindern in ihr Leben eintritt als etwas, dem man sich nur »in Bescheidenheit« (Gandhi) nähern kann?”