

## What Is It that Makes Waldorf Education Come Alive?

Waldorf education is not a collection of recipes, rather it is a constant creative process. First, Waldorf teachers must be well-grounded and balanced and possess a quest for self-renewal. Second, the preparation of the inner-self accomplished outside of the classroom allows the teacher to trust in imaginative creativity in the moment.

Every school and every teacher researches the foundation upon which Waldorf education is based. Fundamentally, Steiner was interested in the evolution of the human being. He brought to western civilization a pathway to train human thinking. He recognized the human being as a spiritual being as well as a physical being, and he saw that the power of the spirit permeated the world. His published works on spiritual science provide exercises and active tasks that an individual can practice, out of freedom, to gain higher perception. This higher consciousness and its resultant loss of egoism allow them to serve others. Behind and within every subject in a Waldorf school is the image of the evolving human being. This makes every subject relevant to the unique character of each child as he/she passes through his/her developmental stages.

In 1924 Steiner founded the Anthroposophical Society in Dornach, Switzerland. It is a karmic event when one takes on the study of spiritual science (or anthroposophy, as Steiner also called it) and when one makes the decision to become a member of the Anthroposophical Society. The word anthroposophy can be loosely translated from its Greek roots to mean the “wisdom within the human being.”

The following is a brief roadmap of life-exercises based on spiritual science:

- a disciplining of the thinking through exercises in strengthening concentration (see Steiner’s *Practical Training in Thought*)
- a nourishing of the feeling life through exercises supporting compassion; studies of art, and/or music, drama, poetry, eurythmy, and so forth (see Steiner’s “Six Basic Exercises”)
- guidance of the will life through painting, through will-exercises including modeling, wood and stone carving, knitting, and so forth (see Steiner’s basic exercises in *How to Know the Higher Worlds*)
- attention to one’s own moral development (also called life guidance)—the taking on of oneself to develop moral intuitions (see Steiner’s *The Philosophy of Freedom*)
- interest in the social life—to see the striving forces in other people, to become aware of the spiritual essence in the other person (see the *Mysteries of Social Encounter* by Dieter Bruell and the “Social Ethic” by Steiner)

- a cultivation of real interest and love for the world and nature
- regular meditative activity (see Steiner's *How to Know the Higher Worlds* and Jorgen Smit's *the Steps Toward Knowledge Which the Seeker of the Spirit Must Take*)
- the study to understand the seven-fold nature of the human beings. Each human being has the following realms:

physical ñ the substances and forms of our body  
 etheric ñ the formative or growth forces  
 astral ñ the emotional/sensory soul forces  
 ego ñ the sense of self  
 spirit self ñ the urge to do things better  
 life spirit ñ the recognition of one's own destiny  
 spirit man ñ the attainment of a complete and pure form

The teacher must speak to each of the above in the children (see Steiner's *Foundations of Human Experience*)

- the study to understand what Rudolf Steiner refers to as "The Pedagogical Law." During childhood the children are sculpting their inner organs.

The *etheric body* of the teacher (through order and regulation) works on the *physical body* of the child.

The *astral body* of the teacher (through expressions of joy, sorrow, art, tragedy) works on the *etheric body* of the child and balances the life forces.

The *ego* of the teacher (the bearer of *ideals*) works on the *astral body* of the child. The teacher must fire the imaginations of the children.

- a sense of joy in teaching which comes from the discovery of the core essence that rules our lives
- an understanding of esoteric Christianity (see Steiner's *Christianity as Mystical Fact*)

Behind the striving of a successful Waldorf teacher is the commitment to "school oneself" and, through the activities described above, to strive towards self-transformation. This activity makes us valid as teachers for our students. The following basic books by Rudolf Steiner act as guides on this pathway:

*The Philosophy of Freedom*

*Theosophy*

*The Foundations of Human Experience* (formerly called *The Study of Man*)

*How to Know Higher Worlds* (formerly called *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*)

*Christianity as Mystical Fact*

– David Mitchell