

## Some Reflections

by Torin Finser

Some time ago I was sorting out old files in a box of long-forgotten materials when I came across a Christmas card received from Lisa Monges perhaps 35 years ago. On the right side was her Christmas greeting signed simply *L.D. Monges*, and on the left was a portrait of Rudolf Steiner standing behind a sofa. In addition to the well known black outfit and white collar, one cannot but help notice his strong hands and expressive fingers, the serious, well formed facial contours that are filled with light, and of course the eyes that look both outward and inward at the same time. On the top left hand corner one finds a four-line verse followed by Rudolf Steiner's signature and date: 17, February, 1924 and the two words "am Goetheanum."

Of course one always has to wonder why such a card finds its way into the reader's hands just at this time when the leadership of the Anthroposophical Society at the Goetheanum has introduced a very particular theme for the year ahead (see [anthroposophy.org/theme](http://anthroposophy.org/theme) or *Anthroposophy Worldwide* for more on the theme of the year). So I decided that since very few things in life are really an accident, it was the right time to take up this gift from Lisa Monges and work with the verse in a renewed way. (Lisa was a pioneer eurythmist in the U.S., helped start the Spring Valley School of Eurythmy, and taught eurythmy to a group of community children in her living room once a week. I was one of them. Later, after years of mowing her lawn as a teenager, I turned to Lisa Monges when, at age 18, I heard about an exciting conference for members and I asked her to sponsor me.)

So here in my hands was the Christmas card with her signature, and a verse in Rudolf Steiner's own hand. It begins with the line:

*"Suche in der Welt nach allen Seiten..."*  
*To seek in the world on all sides, in all dimensions...* What a challenge these days. I have met more people

recently than ever before who have deliberately decided to tune out, to turn off the radio, CNN, internet news feeds, newspapers, etc., because the current events are so "depressing"—and they are. How many stories of ISIL can one read? When will the random acts of violence in schools and places of work stop? How many natural catastrophes can one ingest? I understand this point of view, and yet I continue to read parts of the *Wall Street Journal* most days, occasionally catch the evening news, and have given some thought-time to world events. I respect those who need to create islands of sanity, but I feel an inner obligation as yet to stay engaged in world events. Why?

In another context—the founding of the first Goetheanum—Rudolf Steiner used the word "*Weltbejahung*," one of his terms that is almost impossible to translate. The

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closest I have come to it is "affirmation of the world," a willingness to say "yes" and not reject what the world has to offer. This is a high order. How can one do that? It may be only part of the story, but my approach is to see it not as agreement with all that is happening, but rather a "living in presence" or awareness of what the world offers us today. It is possible to witness, to be aware, and not immediately to rush to judgment, acceptance (or rejection) as so many are apt to do these days. There are times, yes even months when it is terribly cold in New Hampshire, and there are the warm summer days, and of course we all have preferences. But can I learn to practice *Weltbejahung* to all kinds of weather, as well as the news stories that enter our consciousness?

Some might ask: what is the point of doing this? After all, along with being overwhelmed, many feel totally helpless in the face of world events. What can I do as one solitary person?

The second line of the verse has a clue that helps us with this riddle:

*"Und du findest dich"* — *You will find yourself.* What, I can find myself in another atrocious story on CNN? Is that not the last place I would want to find myself? Well, on one level, of course. But if one actually takes a few minutes to think (something that we cannot take for granted these days), the percepts from the world phenom-



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ena start to work on the soul, concepts start to arise. For instance, after a series of stories from the Middle East recently, I spent some time thinking about the root causes of fundamentalism. What makes people fanatics? Why do those who outwardly seem to be on a religious path (with all the teachings of peace) turn a corner and become fundamentalists? There are many in our circles who could help with this question (Christopher Bamford comes to mind) but I am not attempting to answer it here. I just want to point out a series of steps:

- ◊ We seek to know the world in all dimensions.
- ◊ That gives rise to new experiences which can take shape in new thoughts.
- ◊ And if we have done some thinking, we have to own our own concepts.
- ◊ And in owning our thoughts, and the soul depths from which they arise, we can experience ourselves in a new way.
- ◊ Thus the world leads to self.

Then we move to the third and fourth lines of the verse:

*“Suche in dir nach allen Tiefen  
Und du findest die Welt.”*

Here we have the reverse process! If we are willing to *seek in the depth of the soul, delve into our innermost being*, we can *find the world in a new way*. There are many ways in which this can happen, but one has to do with meditation and reflective practices in general. When we do the inner work, we find our center, our essential Self. One can emerge from strenuous inner work with a heightened sense of integrity, authenticity, groundedness. Like the violinist who practices for hours before giving a concert, when one has done the inner work then one meets the world/audience on a different level. What a difference it makes if one has prepared a presentation or simply tries to “wing it”! When one is rooted in the depth of soul experience, one can then stand in a different relation to the theme or task at hand. And when one does so, one meets others and the world in a new way. So again we have a sequence:

- ◊ Seek within in all possible depths of inner experience.
- ◊ Let the research and soul exploration give rise to new experiences.
- ◊ These experiences become the ground of authenticity.
- ◊ When we are authentic in relation to others and the world, we will re-discover the “world” on a new basis.

So this little verse actually contains all of anthroposophy! We have the meditative path, self-knowledge, etc., as well as all the initiatives, schools, farms, etc., that have grown out of authentic deeds of sacrifice. And if there is

need of any final proof, one has only to talk with a long-time biodynamic farmer, a seasoned Camphill co-worker, a veteran Waldorf teacher, or learned anthroposophical doctor. Nowhere could one find such depth, insight, and wisdom as one does from these people. They know the world not only from having worked in the world, but by virtue of having worked on themselves. And their inner work has led to new achievements in their respective fields and professional life.

In my travels I have had the honor of meeting many such people who have spent a lifetime working out of anthroposophy in this way. There is in reality no better evidence of the fruitfulness of anthroposophy than to experience such remarkable people. They are successful in an outer sense, but one finds after only a few minutes that at the same time they are also remarkable human beings. And their humanity and work success seem to go hand in hand.

Finally, one footnote: the inscription on the card ends with the two words “*am Goetheanum*”—at the Goetheanum. These words should not be overlooked. It is not just about Rudolf Steiner the historical person, but also about the Goetheanum impulse that continues to work around the world in so many ways. We need to be willing, as he was, to identify ourselves and our work as coming out of this impulse. Our future success will depend on the authenticity of the inner work and the integrity that arises from compassionate engagement with the world. We do not reject, we embrace. We do not criticize, we suggest. We are here not to judge but to help, servants of all that is good, kind and just.

Our Anthroposophical Society is dedicated to these goals. May we find the strength and the friends to help us realize our aims.

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