

*Anthroposophy Studies on Campus  
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*The encounter with the other*



*At the beginning*

It's a bright Sunday in May. I'm walking through a small Swiss town when a little girl, about three years old, comes up to me, smiles, gives me a dandelion puff, and walks away. That brief but magical encounter was like the opening musical note needed to start singing a song: it was the impulse that convinced me to begin writing this little project...

### ***How can I meet the other with respect and love?***

### ***How can I meet with love and respect the parts of myself that awaken in encountering the other?***

This is the question that has accompanied me for some time now, but which became the central focus of this gap year I decided to take before starting University. The aim of this project is not to find an answer, although theoretically, one certainly could, but to keep this question alive within me when I meet others and myself, allowing it to act in the physical world, not just as an ideal.

This question arose this year out of a practical need. I was in Germany working as an au pair, and my role was to care for the daughter of the family I was living with. For the first few weeks, the little girl wouldn't greet me when she came home from school and didn't want to spend time with me. This went on for a while, and I began to wonder how I could build communication with her based on respect and love so that she would feel she could trust me. It was four months of working and dialoguing not only with that little girl but also with the part of me that could be described as my inner child, the one who feels inadequate, rejected, who doesn't recognize her own greatness. Inevitably, I started asking myself how to meet the other with love and respect, and I realized that in order to do so, I needed to nourish that feeling of love even toward myself and the parts of me that need it most.

### ***The part of me that chose to do this project***

I've always been fascinated by everything that wasn't me, especially other people. I was a child with big green eyes who examined everything happening around her. My eyes were like X-rays, carefully scanning every detail of this world. But I was also a child deeply afraid of coming into contact with all those new things; I felt very small, as if everything around me was too overwhelming. Now I've grown up, and somehow that child is still there: a child very observant and sensitive, but also very afraid to show herself, to meet others with love. Often, when that part of me feels hurt, I arm myself with words and judgments toward the other to remind myself of how I am a better person. But behind all that lies a deep insecurity about myself and my light. Through this project, I aim to explore the encounter with the other, through my own experience, through inspiration from the outside, from the thoughts of those who came before me, through words, and through others.

### ***The encounter with children***

Children are the ones who teach us to seek this feeling of love to nourish towards others and ourselves. This year I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with them, both individually and in classrooms. And among them all, I spent a lot of time with the little girl from the German family called Mailinou, who taught me to look at myself and others with more love. Mailinou is a six-year-old girl, an only child in her first year of elementary school. She has brown eyes and hair and so much strength in her hands and feet, a round face, a flexible, agile body. She's choleric, full of energy, always moving, very rooted in her body. She has a powerful creative force, is mentally sharp, extremely sensitive, aware of the emotional currents around her, clear about what she wants or doesn't want, cautious of new things, inwardly fragile, in need of love, order, and care, and like every child, capable of infinite love for others.

She showed me the part of my inner child that I need to connect with before engaging with any child. She was a mirror for me, because when I was a child, I was very much similar to her. She invited me to reconnect with that part of myself I had neglected in recent years, the part I hadn't reassured or loved. When I manage to see that part of myself more vulnerable with love, I can meet the other (adults, peers, or children) with more love and vice versa.

Rudolf Steiner speaks of children as profoundly religious beings, each of them carrying an all-encompassing moral intuition. Even though they are unconscious of it, they live with a deep sense of gratitude for everything around them. Through their spiritual nature, children teach us how to give love, but they also need an educational environment that nurtures them and helps them express their capacity to love.

Steiner speaks of "interest" as a necessary prerequisite for anyone working in relationships, whether in education or therapy. Interest, from the Latin *inter esse*, meaning "to be involved in things," is described as a cosmic, religious attitude capable of creating a true connection with the world's reality, truly understanding the essence of things or of the person in front of us.

Those who meet children must therefore create an inner spiritual relationship with them, developing from the depths of their own soul an ever-growing interest in the mystery that lies within each one. The proof of this, for Steiner, lies in his encounter with Otto Specht, a child suffering from serious physical and mental illnesses, defined "uneducable" by doctors. He was entrusted to Dr. Steiner, who described him as having a "sleeping soul" and helped awaken it through an educational approach based on love and respect. Otto Specht eventually learned to think independently, to read and write, completing his studies and becoming a doctor. For Steiner, the boy was a pedagogical and spiritual revelation, a tangible demonstration of the link between education and spiritual development.

Forty years after his therapeutic work with Otto Specht, Steiner said:

*"I can truly say how much I owe to the fact that no person was ever 'uninteresting' to me. Even as a child, no one was ever 'uninteresting.' And I know I would never have been able to educate that boy if all men had not been truly interesting to me."*

*(Everything I wrote about what he thought about children and this last sentence I took from a book of Peter Selg called "The Therapeutic Eye: How Rudolf Steiner observed Children")*

## ***I and Thou***

*"Whoever says You does not have something; he has nothing, but he stands in relation.*

*Relation is reciprocity. Our students teach us, our works form us. The "wicked" become a revelation when they are touched by the sacred basic word. How are we educated by children, by animals! Inscrutably involved, we live in the currents of universal reciprocity."*

*(from the book "I and Thou" of Martin Buber)*

These are the words of Martin Buber in his book *I and Thou*, which speak precisely about this dialogue with the other and about how much we learn from our encounters, with children, animals, and all living beings. He describes an exchange that is not one-sided, but reciprocal. This book deeply fascinated me for the way it speaks of encountering the other in such an evocative manner.

Martin Buber describes the two fundamental ways in which human beings relate to the world, which he defines through two basic word pairs: I-It/He/She and I-You. The first refers to a relationship with the other seen as an object to be known and used. The second refers to the relationship with the other as a subject, not an object; it is therefore a living relationship, because it does not reduce the vital essence of whom or what we encounter into concepts or judgments.

*"The world as experience belongs to the basic word I-It. The basic word I-You establishes the world of relation."*

In both cases, the "I" cannot exist alone; it requires the "You" to be, becoming an "I" in the act of saying "You." Therefore, the human being is a being who fulfills themselves through encounter and dialogue with the other. And that's precisely how it is: how much our connections with nature, with other people, or with ideals bring our lives to life. Each one of us is, in a sense, both teacher and student at the same time, as long as we are exchanging something that brings the other to life.

But how can one avoid transforming the I-You relationship into an I-It relationship?

Often, I find myself listening to others when they talk about themselves. At that moment, I am open and can avoid forming a judgment about them. Then, later on, I find myself thinking

back to them and to what they said, and that's when I begin to see them as objects, because I fix their essence into simple concepts and judgments. What Martin Buber suggests is that the living I-You relationship can only happen in the present moment. It is only temporary. One can pass through it, then recall it, transform it, and internalize it. In this way, it becomes eternal.

*"The It-world coheres in space and time.*

*The You-world does not cohere in either.*

*It coheres in the center in which the extended lines of relationships intersect: in the eternal You. For as soon as we touch a You, we are touched by a breath of eternal life."*

According to Buber, every authentic encounter with a human "You" is a reflection of an encounter with an eternal "You", the You with whom one can enter into a living, direct, personal, and purely loving relationship.

"Feelings dwell in man, but man dwells in his love. This is no metaphor but actuality: love doesn't cling to an I, as if the You were merely its "content" or object, it is between I and You. Whoever doesn't know this, know this with his being, doesn't know love, even if he should ascribe to it the feelings that he lives through, experiences, enjoys, and expresses. Love is a cosmic force."

Love, then, is not an emotion to be possessed, but an act of openness and mutual encounter. And it is there that God manifests in the world, in the encounter with the other, made of dialogue, presence, and love. True spirituality is not an escape from this world, but the encounter with it in its fullness, with love and sincerity. The divine resounds when human beings meet in authenticity, vitality, respect, and love.

Reading this book by Martin Buber, I tried to immerse myself as much as possible in his evocative words. Each sentence needs to be contemplated and felt rather than merely understood intellectually; it must be allowed to act through the night and then be revisited the next day. It must be digested and allowed to take effect in everyday life. It is a book that leaves impressions more than thoughts, a book that makes you ask yourself: How do I relate to others, both human and non-human, in my daily life?

What I've realized is that very often the relationships I weave with others tend to take the shape of the I-It relationship, where judgments about the other prevail, rather than a genuine gaze of love, something increasingly needed today.

Thinking about this feeling of love with which we can choose to look at others, I was reminded of the biography of Saint Paul.

***Saul of Tarsus, Saint Paul***

Saint Paul, originally called Saul or Paul of Tarsus, was born between 5 and 10 a.C in Tarsus, in Cilicia, present-day Turkey. He was raised in a very religious Jewish family and educated in Jerusalem under the renowned rabbi Gamaliel, through whom he began an in-depth study of the Torah and Hebrew Scriptures.

What fascinates me most about his story is that he began his career as a persecutor of Christians: he viewed Christianity as a sect that could harm the purity of Judaism. He participated in the killing of Saint Stephen, the first Christian martyr, and set out for Damascus to arrest and persecute the Christians living there and bring them to Jerusalem as prisoners.

*"As he was approaching Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him."* (New Testament, specifically in the Book of Acts 9:1-19, Acts 22:1-21, and Acts 26:1-23). At that moment, the light causes him to fall from his horse, and a voice speaks: *"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"*. Paul asks who is speaking, and the voice replies: *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up, go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."* Paul is brought into Damascus, and for three days he can neither see, eat, nor drink. At the end of this time, a disciple named Ananias is sent by the Lord to Paul and enables him to regain his sight. (Acts of the Apostles, chapter 9, verses 10-19)

It is at this point that Paul's conversion takes place: he becomes Saint Paul. From a persecutor of men, he becomes a witness to the risen Christ. He became an apostle who had no direct contact with Jesus during His life, but who had a living, spiritual experience of Him. Within Paul, a boundless love for humanity is ignited, the awakening of a soul that, until just moments before, had chosen to persecute and kill others, but that now, on the road to Damascus, encounters within itself the Christ-light that purifies and transforms it into a new self.

Rudolf Steiner sees the event on the road to Damascus as a crucial moment in human history, because Paul's is the first encounter of a human being with the Etheric Christ, that is Christ not incarnated physically but present in the spiritual world. Therefore, Paul's conversion marks the beginning of an era in which humanity no longer encounters the divine through the senses, but through what could be called spiritual intuition.

Steiner also states that in the future, every person who develops the appropriate spiritual capacities will be able to experience the Etheric Christ, that is, to have an inner experience of Christ. (information taken from the book whose name I only know in Italian "Sulla via di Damasco: il nuovo avvento" of Rudolf Steiner)

Paul is the archetype of inner transformation, the abandonment of material certainties to enter a spiritual reality where love reigns.

Love is the driving force behind this inner transformation that divinizes the human being; it is not merely a feeling but a divine force working within man. Paul is the first to have such an experience in this sense: the purpose of his life changes, and from a persecutor of Christians, he becomes a Christian apostle, discovering the love of Christ within himself.

*“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20)*

*(below is the thirteenth letter that St.Paul wrote to the Corinthians, about love)*

***Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians (13): The Hymn to Love***

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels,  
but have not love,  
I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.  
If I have the gift of prophecy  
and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge,  
and if I have a faith that can move mountains,  
but do not have love, I am nothing.  
If I give all I possess to the poor  
and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,  
but do not have love,  
I gain nothing.  
Love is patient, love is kind.  
It does not envy,  
it does not boast,  
it is not proud.  
It does not dishonor others,  
it is not self-seeking,  
it is not easily angered,  
it keeps no record of wrongs.  
Love does not delight in evil  
but rejoices with the truth.  
It always protects,  
always trusts,  
always hopes,  
always perseveres.  
Love never fails.  
But where there are prophecies, they will cease;  
where there are tongues, they will be stilled;  
where there is knowledge, it will pass away.  
For we know in part and we prophesy in part,  
but when completeness comes,  
what is in part disappears.  
When I was a child, I talked like a child,  
I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.  
When I became a man,  
I put the ways of childhood behind me.

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror;  
then we shall see face to face.  
Now I know in part; then I shall know fully,  
even as I am fully known.  
And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.  
But the greatest of these is love.

### **In the end...**

Reflecting on the biography of Saint Paul made me think about human life, about how we as human beings are constantly evolving, about the new paths that can suddenly open up and reveal something new for us to strive toward, and about the feeling of love that comes from the possibility of changing aspects of ourselves. We are all part of a process that urges us to see ourselves with loving eyes, that invites us to look at our abilities and our vulnerabilities with deep compassion, that calls us to love ourselves and to fulfill our purpose here on earth. To do this, it takes an act of love toward ourselves, toward others, and toward life itself. Looking at myself, I also feel like I'm in this process of discovering my own gifts and capacities that I can offer to the world, while at the same time realizing that I must embrace and understand my shortcomings. I don't always feel like I'm on the right path. Sometimes, I feel that I use my abilities not for good, but to protect myself or to strike at others.

In this sense, I feel that the character of Lily, that I'm playing in the fairytale by Goethe that we are doing in the theater class, has many similarities with who I have been and who I am in this moment.

Often, I find myself entering certain environments bringing with me a disruptive energy, an energy that shakes things up and transforms dynamics with a new light. Other times, I struggle to channel the force that comes from within me, and that's when my words and actions become sharp, lacking true love, and begin to hurt others, and in a way, myself too, because in doing so, I encounter only pain.

Likewise, Lily has the gift of bringing life to what is dead, but also the power to kill with her touch. In the beginning, she is young and possesses great creative strength, but she has not yet developed full control over her inner forces. She cannot channel them in a loving way that brings light and life into the world. In fact, with her touch, she kills both her beloved little bird and the Prince.

At first, she is alone, isolated, and in a way imprisoned by her nature. Then, thanks to the Man with the Lamp, who guides her in awakening the young man, who is resurrected through the sacrifice of the serpent, she loses her deadly touch and becomes capable of meeting love through the Prince, of living and loving in the world without destroying it.

Just like Saint Paul, Lily rediscovers within herself a great capacity for love, toward others, toward herself, and toward her purpose on earth. As both stories show us, there will always be someone along the way who can guide us and help us find direction.

My own personal journey is still long, but I hope to be able to connect with myself and others with more and more love.

I wish for myself to continue developing the forces of the heart, without which the life of the world becomes a battlefield.

*“Wherever love and compassion are active in life, we can perceive the magic breath of the spirit blowing through the sensory world.”*

*(Rudolf Steiner, *The Threshold of the Spiritual World*)*

### *Bibliography*

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