CHAPTER 17

How Can We Work Together? The Challenges of Individualism and the Need for Truthfulness

Before we consider specific ways to take practical steps to develop Waldorf education into the social force it was meant to be, there is another social aspect of Waldorf education that needs to be taken into consideration and that is the human relations within the school communities. On two different occasions Rudolf Steiner described that there are both social and antisocial forces working in every person and explained why the antisocial forces are becoming ever stronger as human evolution progresses.[91] He maintained that these antisocial forces, which are a by-product of the development of the human individuality, must be counterbalanced with ever stronger social forces, or else the antisocial element will gain the upper hand in human relations and in societal forms, including marriages, schools, businesses, and political organizations. In the past, human relations were more intuitive and part of the natural order of things, guided by the religious life or the ties of heredity. With the development of individuality, it is essential that we gain an understanding of the true nature of the human being and the forces that are at work within the soul. Then we can consciously work on the development of human relations in a way appropriate for modern times. This requires greater self-control and tolerance, intensified efforts to cultivate understanding of and interest in other people, and the development of morality out of one's inner life rather than through laws, dogma, or compulsory behavior modification mechanisms.

Steiner suggests that there are three practical ways to strengthen the social forces in the individual and social life in the face of ever-growing individualism. The first way is through the education of children. The strengthening of social forces in each child is an important aspect of the mission of Waldorf education. Through the curriculum the teachers in a Waldorf school strive to develop social understanding, sensitivity, and skills.

Social understanding is fostered, for instance, through the teaching of two foreign languages throughout the elementary school years, which enables young students to gain an understanding and appreciation of other cultures. *Social sensitivity* is enhanced by developing artistic ability and sensitivity in all course work including mathematics and science. *Social skills* are developed through drama, orchestra, community service, choral speech and singing, and group projects such as house building, cooking, gardening, and animal care.[92]

A second way to develop and strengthen social capacities, specifically in adults, is through inner exercises. One such exercise recommended by Steiner aims at strengthening our capacity to take objective interest in all people that we meet. He suggested looking back at the contributions that people have made in our lives when we were much younger, say ten or twelve years old. By consciously developing an appreciation for what people have contributed to our development in the past, we can gradually acquire the will forces to develop a real human interest in people who are a part of our lives now and for each new person who will cross our path in the future.

A third way to foster the social forces and to curb the antisocial forces is through establishing appropriate outer arrangements for cultural, political, and economic activities—in other words, by creating outer arrangements that are in harmony with the threefold nature of social life.

Consequently, as adults we have two possibilities of strengthening Waldorf communities socially. Firstly, we can develop an under-

standing of the social and antisocial forces that are a part of each one of us, and consciously and assiduously work to foster the social forces within us through inner exercises. Secondly, we can develop an understanding of the fundamental principles of a threefold social organism and work constructively to provide the proper social basis not only for the Waldorf school that we are connected to, but for *all* Waldorf schools and *all* children. Some ideas for the latter will be given in the following chapter.

Paradoxically, many people who are a part of Waldorf school communities observe that sometimes there appears to be even more antisocial behavior in them than in less idealistic endeavors. Why is this so? There are a number of contributing factors. One is the high degree of individual initiative needed in a Waldorf school. This applies not only to teachers but also to staff and legions of volunteers, including board members. A certain amount of egoism and the attendant antisocial forces are always present when individuals take initiative. Also, in a close-knit Waldorf school community, a large number of perspectives and strong opinions need to be taken into consideration before doing anything. This is a time-consuming process that outer circumstances often constrict. Another significant factor is that people in a close-knit community, consciously working on their inner development while outwardly striving with a mixture of self-interest and idealism, face otherwise dormant or deeply hidden aspects of their souls that unexpectedly come to the surface. If these unresolved, latent soul tendencies are not addressed in a right way, they can work into the community fabric through the personalities of its members and become magnified particularly through gossip and rumors. Hallway and parking-lot gossiping and rumor-making are infamous in their own right for their destructive nature.

And then, there is the challenging fact that a Waldorf school is trying to introduce an entirely unique approach to education, which requires new and evolving administration and governance forms.

There are many groupings or aspects of a school in which individual or group egoism can manifest in an unhealthy way. If there is not a common imagination or vision with which all participants can unite, the tendency to become more strongly attached to one facet of the school can and will take hold. This book is an effort to help Waldorf school supporters understand that the social goals of the Waldorf school movement are part of an overarching vision in which everyone in every school can unite.

The tendency toward separatism is an understandable and a natural consequence of the development of the human individuality. But it can develop into a social illness for the being of the school if conscious efforts are not made by the leadership and eventually by all Waldorf school supporters to go beyond their own personal attachment and standpoint to balance their individual perspectives with a sense for the whole school community and its underlying spiritual purpose.

Listed below are twelve potential fracture points that can occur *within* a Waldorf school community. Breakdowns can occur between:

Teachers
Teachers and parents
Teachers and administrative staff
Teachers and board of directors
Kindergarten, lower school, and high school
Full time and part time faculty/staff
Class teachers and specialty teachers
Anthroposophists and non-Anthroposophists
Members and non-members of the college of teachers
Teachers and students
Paid staff and volunteers
Mandated committees and everyone else

Rather than going into any detail explaining how divisiveness can manifest in the above groupings, we will focus on some aspects of human relations that affect all of these areas. This includes *human speech.* We each need to develop for ourselves a standard of conduct in relation to *right speech.* The typical verses expressing thoughts or ideals that are read aloud or referred to at the beginning of gatherings or meetings, but are not taken seriously, are in no way sufficient. Such spoken thoughts need to enter the soul life of every individual that takes initiative in a Waldorf school setting and become guidelines or standards for day-to-day conduct.

The ideals connected to right speech include how we speak to each other and about each other, in addition to developing a sense of when, and when not, to say certain things. In a close-knit community any form of gossip or rumor-mongering is social toxin. Right speech begins with developing a sense for absolute truthfulness. Rudolf Steiner required of students in the esoteric school within the Anthroposophical Society that above all else they make themselves responsible for feeling that they can seriously stand by every word they speak as being absolutely truthful. He maintained that untruthful statements, even when they come from good intentions, are destructive. Intentions are not what matter. It is objective truth that matters. This also needs to be a guiding principle for right speech in a Waldorf school community. This means that the leadership of the school, all those who take responsibility or initiative in any way, including the many parent volunteers, needs to exemplify this principle.

The quality of truthfulness is intimately connected to the quality of courage. It takes inner strength and courage to be truthful in what we say. In following the path of truthfulness we must steer our way through sentimentality or conventional political correctness, on the one hand, and tactlessness, rudeness, and lack of civility on the other. Critical comments should never be of the nature of a personal attack or directed at the individual worth of a person, but stay limited to their actions and behavior. Truthfulness and cour-

age need to be cultivated and strengthened to a greater degree in a Waldorf community than what is normally deemed to be acceptable in the home or other community settings in order to achieve even basic civility and respect amongst the adults.

Withholding valid perspectives for fear of offending someone can rob a group of valuable insights that are necessary to make a fully informed decision. Even worse is the situation when a person withholds strongly held opinions on a particular issue in a group discussion or meeting but privately expresses them here and there afterward. This can have a particularly pernicious effect. Rudolf Steiner considered this type of behavior a terrible breach of rights amongst colleagues.[93]

In summary, antisocial tendencies in Waldorf school communities need to be overcome by developing counterbalancing soul virtues, particularly those of truthfulness and courage, working inwardly to strengthen the social forces that lie within us, and developing the right social forms within our schools so that they can assume their proper role in society as a whole.