

An excerpt from:
MALE AND FEMALE: DEVELOPING HUMAN EMPATHY
Chapter 8: The Gift of Empathy
by Baruch Urielli

In a civilization the wheels of which are tending to crush any lasting human relationships, new buds of hope have begun to come forth. At the beginning of the twentieth century a growing number of people started to realize they possessed a faculty which enabled them not only to imagine by introspection what their fellow men and women were feeling and experiencing but actually to enter directly into the other person's feelings and experiences. They had made the step from sympathy to empathy. Instead of imaginatively identifying with the other person and thus entering into his feelings together with him in sympathy ('syn' or 'sym' = together), it became possible to achieve the actual identification of entering right into the other person by dint of a selfless urge to understand, co-experience and help. This led to an experience of indwelling which, however, could only take place in sleep consciousness, for it meant entering the holiest of holies of a fellow human being.

It was at this point that the trial of selflessness took place. Only in so far as the urge to enter into the other person was selfless could the experience of empathy ('em' = in; 'pathy' = feeling), the experience of indwelling, be carried out of the 'empathetee' and, in entering into the 'empathor', become conscious in him or her.² It was possible for an after-image of the indwelling to arise which was virtual reality in its true sense and not in the sham sense in which this expression has come to be used in the latter part of the twentieth century.

We can be truly amazed at this phenomenon which began to open up for a few individuals at the beginning of the century. At a meeting of the British Academy in London in 1912 this made it possible for a German philosopher and psychologist, Theodor Lipps (1851-1914), to coin the word 'empathy'. Only as the century progressed and the circle of those who had the new empathic gift increased did the word advance from being considered a poetic expression to a concept. By the 1960s, 70s and 80s it denoted the concept of that real momentary experience of indwelling, parts of which could be brought back into the consciousness of the empathor.

How is it possible for the innermost soul realm, the full depths of the soul of another individual, to become accessible to an outsider? To the author's knowledge there is only one possible explanation for this phenomenon. In January 1909 Rudolf Steiner began to speak about what he called 'the reappearance of the Christ in the etheric realm'.³ What do these unusual words mean? The etheric realm is that realm of the divine-spiritual world which is nearest to our physical world. Seen outwardly it is the realm of life forces and their processes and rhythms which are at work throughout the physical world. Organic processes and rhythms—as well as disturbances in those rhythms—indicate the world of the etheric forces. This world was well known to the early Celts and the Druids who were still able to depict in weaving patterns carved into wood or stone the organic rhythms which they saw through their ancient clairvoyance. It is a real world to which, however, human beings eventually became blind.

Now, however, for those who strive selflessly to reach out to their fellow men and women, it is possible to regain that world. The key word in this process is selflessness. Human beings are now asked to take a new step. To the experience of 'Not I but Christ in me' (which was opened up to humanity by the deed of Christ at Golgotha) the time has come to add the experience of 'Not I but Christ in you' (in which the relationship with Christ is again decisive). Through the fact that the Christ united with the being of Jesus of Nazareth and walked on earth, the spiritual dimension of the earth and earthly life began to open up to humanity. In the twentieth

century another deed of Christ took place whereby the spiritual reality of the living processes that weave and interweave in nature, and also in and between human beings, has now become accessible to mankind as a whole.

The deed of Christ on Golgotha made it possible for human beings to unite ever more with the being of the earth, to know it and to cherish it. Gradually they became able to enter into the minutest details of earth existence so that they could transform it in the light of a Christian attitude to the earth, making it possible for the full potential of health and beauty, wealth and strength of the earth to become apparent. This development can still be traced in the landscapes of Europe, especially Central Europe. There, the houses of a village clustered around the church. The houses were in turn surrounded by gardens and orchards. Beyond the orchards came the fields and finally the forest. And this forest adjoined the forest of the next village. Within that forest were the fields, then the orchards and gardens which surrounded the houses, and finally the houses clustering around another village church. Thus did humanity imbue and humanize the earth to the full.

Later, however, the villages began to grow together at central points to form towns. Then the crafts and trades, and indeed trade itself, which had thus far served the villages and the earth which these villages transformed and humanized, began to develop a life of their own, which became ever more independent of Mother Earth. Craftsmen's workshops grew into factories, trades grew into industries, and bartering and trading turned into commerce. The consequence of this growth was that everything in these new realms eventually had been rationalized.

First it was the craftsman's handiwork that had to be adjusted to the conveyor belt and to industrial practices, to the mechanical laws of modern transport, warehousing and supermarkets. Imperceptibly human beings became the servants of the machinery that was serving them. Later on, human feelings and the human mind itself had to adjust to the new world of mechanical communication. This began with the hand-operated telephone and led eventually to the world of automatic exchanges, faxes, computer networks, intercoms and the internet. The human being and the human touch became more and more superfluous in a mechanical and electronic world.

The mechanized world produced a superabundance of goods which needed customers, and this in turn called for an adjustment of human feelings. Advertising had to be used to turn feelings and desires towards the overproduced goods, to bring about attitudes of waste and neglect and the ideal of 'shop till you drop'. As technologies replaced large parts of unskilled and later also of skilled labor, millions of people became unemployed or partially employed. This called for an entertainment industry to fill the empty hours and provide an illusion of activity.

This development led some people to conclude that parts of the world's population were obsolete, thus necessitating increased efforts to control the birth rate and to devise means of increasing the death rate, be it by war, by unalleviated famine or illness, or by subtler means of extinction such as the forces of light and sound mentioned above. It is surely obvious by now that the spirits who have been called up by the industrial revolution have brought with them a sub-earthly and a sub-human world which has no interest in and no place for true humanity.

Out of this second Golgotha has arisen a second Resurrection. Ways have begun to open up to enable striving human beings to feel the suffering of nature and mankind, to experience them in such intensity that the impulse to help has begun to overcome all obstacles. This is the background to the many movements which have made it their task to focus on the earth and on nature, to enjoy and foster their health and beauty and to

find union in this aim. Think of Friends of Nature and Friends of the Earth, think of the former German Wandervogel movement, and the innumerable later groups right up to the Greens of today. Yet the most powerful consequence of this Second Golgotha, or Easter, is the opening of the totally new possibility and faculty of human encounter—encounter through empathy.