

THE PERSPECTIVE

November/December 2018

TWS

Toronto Waldorf School

THE BUDDHA-WAY AND WALDORF EDUCATION

By Warren Lee Cohen

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Bhutanese painted thangka of the Jatakas, 18th -19th Century, PhajodingGonpa, Thimphu, Bhutan

I would like to share with you my recent research into deepening the grade two curriculum through working with stories of the Buddha. I discovered that the Buddha's developmental journey is archetypal in that it holistically encompasses many of the challenges that children are working to overcome in their journey to adulthood. Furthermore, I have been delighted to learn the many ways in which the Buddha-way parallels the phases of Waldorf education.

In second grade we typically work with and learn through stories that show the highest capacities in humanity in contrast with ones that show our potential to fall into one-sidedness, such as greed, envy, unkindness or foolishness. This polarity is best exemplified in the contrast between the lives of Sainly People (taken from many religious and cultural traditions) and Fables, stories that make light of our human imbalances and foibles. The children delight in listening to these stories and relate clearly to each of these poles. They all aspire to become active and productive adult human beings. In the process of growing up they have to work through a great many challenges along the way. Learning how to become kind, generous, fair and humble is truly hard work. It is so reassuring for them to get to know the guiding lights of humanity while also working in a lighthearted way through the challenges so common to each of us. Working with this polarity cultivates a clear pathway for betterment

while offering reassurance that we can meet foibles with humour, self-kindness and compassion for others.

The life (lives) of the Buddha offers a beautiful example of this process in action and can be a wonderful extension of the typical grade two curriculum. Born a prince, Siddhartha Gautama, was surrounded by great wealth and comfort. His parents sheltered him from all illness, death and worldly struggles. We in the Waldorf Schools aim to shelter our youngest students from the weight of worldly concerns. This is the golden age of childhood - innocent and timeless. As Siddhartha grew older, even though others tried to shelter him, he caught sight of illness, aging and death. He then wanted to know more about the human condition. This parallels the grade school years in which we engage in a long journey of falling from innocence and then exploring both outer and inner worlds. Siddhartha chose to give up all of his privilege, to live as a wanderer trying to discover the meaning of existence. This quest for self mirrors the thrust of the Waldorf high school in which students are pursuing the light of truth. And, after many years and many wrong turns, it was only when Siddhartha relinquished all of his previous notions, even notions of "self" that he made the deepest discovery and achieved enlightenment. Then it became his task to share his gifts with others by teaching them how to walk this path.

Phase of life	Life of Buddha
Early childhood years	Innocence protected by adults
Grade school years	Fall from innocence and first steps into the world
High school years	Search for self and not-self
Adulthood	Bringing one's gifts to the world

What is often not widely shared, is that Buddha lived through 50 incarnations before this ultimate one - perhaps more. Perfection takes that much work! In each life he learned particular lessons about one-sidedness and how to overcome it to become more fully human. These lives are captured in the Jataka Tales, lively animal stories that engage the imaginations of children. These tales enthrall children because they resonate so deeply with core developmental challenges that second grade children are working through. They are at times silly and at others quite harsh. They help guide children to becoming more fully themselves while always maintaining compassion for others and their struggles. Through these tales the children become aware that they too have seeds of the Buddha within them and that will take a lot of work to cultivate these seeds. This is the real work of growing up.

The Waldorf curriculum never ceases to amaze me in its insight, practicality and flexibility. Buddha stories and Jataka Tales are a wonderful addition to the grade two year and it is inspiring to know that students will revisit his life again in grade five when they study ancient civilizations and are ready to learn more from his shining example.

"We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves."
Buddha



GREETINGS FROM ALL AT TWS AND WELCOME TO THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR!

Our last year ended with many festivities celebrating our fiftieth year. It was so wonderful to reconnect with so many people we had not seen, in some cases, for many years. We now look ahead to sharing in the worldwide celebrations of one hundred years of Waldorf Education. Look for more on this to come in the upcoming months.

You will have noticed many changes around the building and grounds when you returned to the campus in September. The bridge, that was built when the school was founded, was restored and reinforced. Parts of the roadway were repaved, and many parts of the interior of the building were renovated and upgraded. We also happily welcomed several new families and teachers to the school.

Looking ahead we have many exciting events to report on. We heard the requests in our annual parent survey and have planned a number of ways for parents to learn more about Waldorf Education. Visit our website under the community tab for the full brochure.

The school is actively working with our WEEFS (Waldorf Environmental Education and Forest Stewardship) partners to develop a master plan for the curriculum associated with the 21 acres of conservation lands adjoining our property to the north-east. We are in the process of seeking recognition as an Eco-School which will include the formation of a lunch time eco-club giving students the opportunity to take an active role in holding us to account as an environmentally responsible organization.

Please join us for the High School's Wings of the Arts on November 23rd and Monday mornings in December as we celebrate our Festival of Light including the Community Spiral on December 21st.

*Helene Gross
Pedagogical Administrator*

WHY DO WALDORF SCHOOLS CELEBRATE MICHAELMAS?



Michaelmas: The Festival of Human Becoming

By Stephen Spitalny

The celebration of Michaelmas commemorates the archangel Michael and the archetype that Michael represents.

In the Old Testament, Daniel names Michael as leader and guide of the Israelites. In the Book of Revelations, Michael battles the dragon. But this archetype has appeared in the mythology of many cultures for many centuries. Ancient Oriental writings describe Indra. The Bhagavad-Gita speaks of Mithra. The ancient Babylonians tell of Marduk, who slew Tiamat the dragon and created heaven and earth from his body. There are many examples, too, of human beings acting out of a Michaelic impulse; the Greek myth of Perseus, the English St. George and the American legend of John Henry to name a few.

The Michaelic archetype is of overcoming or transforming the evil that is faced through intelligence, courage and strength. Michael displays the activity that is the essence of the human being-self-development. We, as human beings, have the possibility of personal transformation. We all have our own dragons, our own lower, less noble aspects. Our egotism, greed and selfishness can be overcome as we evolve as individuals. Michaelmas is a reminder of this process of becoming human beings as we strive toward our full human potential.

The archetype of Michael gives a picture of strength, courage and clarity of thought: Strength to kindle our inner fire, and iron will to keep on working on ourselves. These go with the courage to enter the abyss of our own soul, and the clarity of thinking to know what must be transformed.

Michaelmas is midway between the Summer and Winter Solstices, during harvest season. The iron-filled fruits of nature are ripe, as the days grow shorter and the plant world seems to die. As the sunlight decreases, can we keep our inner light alive, and harvest the fruits and gifts of our own and each other's development?

Waldorf Education echoes the essence of Michaelmas. Each and every one of us has a gift to bring to the world. Can we learn to recognize and have interest in each other's gifts, and encourage each other toward our full potentials? Being human is not merely physical qualities related to skin and bones, but is essentially the process of individual spiritual transformation leading humanity toward its future evolution. Overcoming our antipathy and self-centeredness, and meeting each human being with interest and recognition as fellow human beings; this is what Michaelmas celebrates. It is a festival of what is truly human.

Festivals are held to inscribe into the human soul a feeling of union and community, both with fellow human beings and the world. The festival of Michaelmas is a look ahead to the future, celebrating our process of human development. Our school community celebrates Michael, the Spirit of our Time, who teaches us of the community of human becoming. Human progress is a free deed and it is up to each one of us.



Photos: Grade 4 students at the Michaelmas play and Michaelmas bread baked by farmer Michael Schmidt for the parent social after the play on September 2018

THE ROSE CEREMONY

The Rose Ceremony is a beloved tradition at many Waldorf schools, including Toronto Waldorf School. On the first day of school in September, the Grade 12s welcome their Grade 1 buddies into the school by handing them a rose. On the last day of school, it is the Grade 1s who reciprocate and say goodbye to their Grade 12 buddies with a rose of their own.

The rose serves as a promise of the growth and development that the student will experience in the coming years. The children in Grade 1 are about to gain a new sense of self, while their Grade 12 buddies are entering adulthood. The whole school gathers to witness both events.

Our Rose Ceremony took place on September 4th and was, as always, a beautiful and moving rite of passage.

Photos by TWS alumna Denise Militzer.



HOW A WALDORF EDUCATION PREPARES YOUNG PEOPLE FOR SUCCESS IN LIFE

When I walked through the carved wooden doors, up the stairs and into the forum it felt like I was transported back to the early 90s. There were new faces, new resources, but the general philosophy is still the same.

One teacher that I've stayed in touch with over the years is Anahid Movel, who taught me French between 1990 – 1994. A few weeks ago, I watched her teach grade 5, 2 and 1 classes and I was immediately reminded why a Waldorf education is so valuable.

A little about me first, so you understand who's writing to you. I have spent 20 years of my career working with thousands of children in the arts and leadership development. I also have an extensive corporate background working with a business education and personal development company. Currently, I run an arts education company inspired by my book, *The Artistic Edge: 7 Skills Children Need to Succeed in an Increasingly Right Brain World*. We provide resources to parents and teachers on using the arts as a vehicle to teach growth mindset, creativity and leadership skills.

With this in mind, I can tell you with total certainty that what kids get at a Waldorf School has tremendous value for their future development. From the hand drawn chalk drawings on the classroom black boards, to the art that represents what they are learning in their main lesson books, students are being immersed into various aspects of the arts at Waldorf.

Why is this important? Because regardless of what career a young person is interested in pursuing there is a significant need for creative and critical thinkers who can think outside the box – actually who can just throw the box away! This is what children get to practice in their Waldorf education.

To be frank, everyone looks the same on a résumé. What makes them stand out in a job interview is their ability to communicate effectively and with confidence, to demonstrate that they can solve complex problems, come up with creative solutions to challenges and can adapt to a world that is constantly changing. This is what companies like Facebook, Google and Apple have at the top of their search criteria.

The problem is that these are all learned skills that the majority of young people have underdeveloped. In fact, some parents actually stifle this kind of learning by being 'helicopter parents' and solving too many problems for their children. Their intentions are good – they want to help eliminate stress. However, competition for jobs is fierce and it is becoming more global, and kids need to practice the skills that will create a successful future for them.

Children attending a Waldorf School are learning the exact skills I talk about in my book: creativity, confidence, problem-solving, accountability, relationship building, communication, adaptability and how to dream big. This is what gives them a competitive advantage in the working world.

As a product of a Waldorf education, I am living proof that when those skills are developed you can achieve great success in life. Is it a guarantee? No. But it is a foundation that will put any young person on a path toward achieving their goals in any career they choose.

Lisa Phillips (TWS Class of '94) is an award winning author, arts & leadership educator, blogger, coach and business owner. To learn more about her book visit: www.theartisticedge.ca or pick it up at the Paper Pipit bookstore.

GILGAMESH

Our Grade 10 students study the "The Epic of Gilgamesh" which is often regarded as the earliest surviving great work of literature. It is the story of Gilgamesh, a demigod king who struggles with his humanity, eventually coming to terms with his own limitations upon facing the reality of death.

It is a call to action and is studied as part of our Epic and Romance block as a way to inspire our students to awaken to the fact that what they are searching for is already within them.

These excerpts from essays on Gilgamesh are from current Grade 10 students:

"Gilgamesh, certainly feels the strongest feelings of loss after losing Enkidu and this is a very natural part of human existence. While searching for immortality, Gilgamesh reaches the highest realization that becoming human is to accept the miseries as well as the beauty in life while it lasts."

"With his death, Gilgamesh understands grief, mourning, and the full extent of human emotion. Such deep anguish that he was prepared to journey to the Underworld is only something a human would experience. By the end of the poem, Gilgamesh has fully altered his previously cold and aloof personality. With his long journey, he becomes thoughtful and compassionate and returns to the land of the living a changed man."



"We can see that through their relationships with women, each other and the difficulties of facing death, Gilgamesh and Enkidu became humanized. They only realized their humanity through each other, through each other's hardships and loss. If they hadn't met, then they would have never truly become human."



SAVE THE DATE!

Saturday January 12, 2018,
5pm-10pm

All current parents of children in our Preschool through Grade 12 are invited to our Parent Social, a fantastic adults-only evening full of food, fun and informative workshops.

This year's theme is **Science and Technology** in Waldorf curriculum. Invitations to come!



UPDATE FROM THE BOARD AND PARENT COUNCIL

Seeking New TWS Board Members

The Board of Directors is seeking four new members to join the Board, effective December 2018. If you feel you are ready to make an important contribution to the school, we would love to hear from you as soon as possible. For more information, please contact Alex Christopolous, Treasurer of the TWS Board of Directors, alex@icondigital.com

Parent Council

For updates from Parent Council, including events, meetings and minutes, please continue to watch for the Parent Council section in the weekly blasts.

INNER SPACE



One of the greatest gifts in my role at TWS, is that on tours I have been able to see the Waldorf curriculum in action over several years. I have been able to see how different teachers take on each grade's curriculum in slightly different ways, building on the class dynamic and their own life experience.

I also get the gift of having to explain the Waldorf curriculum to people from different backgrounds. In finding different ways to express this curriculum, I am continually having to learn and learn again, coming to many realizations about its wisdom over my years in various Waldorf Schools.

Lately, I have been thinking a lot about the importance of the development of what one can call the "inner space."

When you read, look at a painting, play an instrument or spend time in nature there is an interplay between the outer stimulus and one's inner experience. Participating in art brings with it the cultivation of this inner space- the soul quality of stillness, of being able to carry the weight of being alone with one's own thoughts while simultaneously being in this busy world of ours. The ability to carry this weight is something that I feel is disappearing more and more. We fill our soul with things, the busyness, the worries, the digital space and our quest for more and more material possession. Our



children leave school and enter the world of university or work too often not able to bear being alone.

If instead we take the time for art and beauty, we end up stronger and more resilient. The longer I spend in Waldorf, the more I appreciate the opportunity students have to develop and cultivate the inner peace and quiet that only art and time in nature bring.

Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Waldorf Education says:

"In this school every endeavor is made to make the young skillful and adaptable. And, because life is the guiding principle and not theory, they are brought in contact with beauty as much as possible and are taught to understand everything in an artistic way. For actually the more a man is imbued with a sense of beauty the less hurt he will take when he is brought in contact with the stress of civilization... The rhythm which thunders through the present will then have no power to smash him..."

All the atrocities which surround us in any city...we may happen to be in would vanish if only we would cultivate for a few generations the sense of beauty which lives unspoiled in every child"

From Lectures to Teachers

Katie Ketchum
Director of Admissions and Marketing

ALUMINI/AE SPOTLIGHT: Larissa L. McWhinney

When did you graduate from TWS?

I graduated from Grade 12 in 1988 after 15 wonderful years at TWS.

Can you please share a special memory of your time here?

One of my most lasting memories is meeting my class teacher, Elisabeth (Hoffman) Chomko, in my senior kindergarten year. It was at the edge of the "big forest" near the open area we used to call "the log" because of the two enormous overlapping trunks that functioned as the centre-piece of our childhood "town square." To this day, I recall the exact details of the red and navy ankle-length skirt Miss Hoffman wore as we started a relationship that would be forged for decades thereafter. As my own children journey through Waldorf (at Waldorf Academy), I am ever more grateful for the impact of the class teacher in a child's development.

Other experiences were equally indelible: the smell of lanolin in the handwork room, playing the role of Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, pulling all-nighters to complete main lesson books, invaluable exchanges to Germany and France, the exciting journey to derive the theory of Pi, and, most importantly, life-long connections with salt-of-the-earth classmates and mentors.

How did TWS prepare you for life after graduation?

Waldorf is more than a school or philosophy – it's a community. Community is always important, but especially so when social mores are in flux and social cohesion is strained. Sharing in something greater than the sum of its parts provides a sense of rootedness in life, and faith that there is always common ground.

Waldorf education gave me the sense that horizons were wide, and stars aligned. As I've wended my way through academic degrees and exciting employment into parenthood and entrepreneurship, I have trusted that things would work out, that what I needed would materialize, that the paths I trod would make a difference. Waldorf made me feel equipped both for whatever I chose and for whatever came my way, and instilled in me the ethic to do things well and completely.



Top photo: Larissa and her children, bottom photo: Larissa in grade 4 at TWS

What advice would you give to a student graduating from TWS this year?

I would advise new graduates to trust their instincts. The world is changing fast. Seek advice from elders about the forest, and from recent graduates and contemporaries about the trees - but follow your intuition to find your way through the woods. Put your own finger on the social pulse to get a read on what the globe needs, and measure your own heart rate to determine where your future leads.

What you are good at is not necessarily what you will love doing. Don't be type-cast by your talents or projections. Your temperament and personality are far better indicators of what will bring success and fulfillment than are your academic strengths. Be true to the person you are constantly becoming, and give yourself the freedom to evolve (and regress). Be ready to shift paradigms and to change course. There are many seas to sail, and many ways to sail them. Bon voyage!



Art from current grade 11 students



COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT

November 6th Tea/Coffee with the Administrators, 8:15am-9:15am, Lobby

November 23rd High School Wings of the Arts, 7:30 pm, Forum

November 28th Why Waldorf Wednesday: Why Reverence with Jonah Evans, 7 pm, Music Room

December 3rd First Festival of Light, 8:30 am, Forum

December 4th Tea/Coffee with the Administrators, 8:15 am-9:15 am, Lobby

December 5th Annual General Meeting, 6:30 pm, Music Room

December 10th Second Festival of Light, 8:30 am, Forum

December 12th & 13th Multi-Session Event with Michael G. Thompson, Ph.D. Community-wide event for Parents and Guardians at 7 pm on December 12th followed by a day of workshops for students and faculty on December 13th.

December 17th Third Festival of Light, 8:30 am, Forum

December 21st Fourth Festival of Light and Community Spiral, 8:30 am, Forum

For a full list of events, including our school and athletics calendars, please see our website.

SISTER ORGANIZATIONS

Hesperus Village is a sister organization of TWS and we have a strong connection with the school. We welcome the opportunity to continue to build relationships with TWS parents and would love to invite you to have lunch at our facility.

Our dining room is open to the public. Please come join us for a meal. Lunch is served from 12:15 pm to 1:30 pm Mondays through Fridays. Take-out options are available and prices are very affordable.

Please call the kitchen directly to find out what is for lunch. Speak to Gustavo or Nathaly 905-764-0758

Christian Community An Event for the Entire Family at the Christian Community. Celebrate Community at the Advent Fair, Saturday, December 1st from 10:30 am to 4:00 pm.

Village Market Please join us every Saturday from 8 am to 1 pm in the lower gym of the Toronto Waldorf School for biodynamic and organic food from local farms.

Save the dates: November 10, 17, 24 the Village Market will be holding a Candlelight Craft Fair in the lobby during market hours.

For more information please see our website: villagemarket.ca or follow us on Instagram: @villagemarketatwaldorf

Rudolf Steiner Centre Toronto The RSCT's annual Waldorf Development conference, Nov 9th and 10th, will be open to both teachers and parents. This year's topic is how to bring Indigenous cultural material to children in a Waldorf school setting. The speaker is Dale Saddleback, a specialist in indigenous curriculum and a Ph.D. candidate, from Alberta. For registration details, see www.rsct.ca

LifeWays Our upcoming LifeWays Ontario weekend events are:

February 23 & 24 - Tools of the Trade- Creating a LifeWays Home or Childcare Centre

April 27 & 28 - Working with the Adults - Colleagues and Parents

TWS HOST FAMILIES NEEDED!



Did you know that our high school has a thriving international boarding program?

Each year we welcome a group of high school students from Europe and Latin America who usually spend a semester with us at TWS, and we have students from China who are completing their high school years in Canada.

We are looking for TWS families to host these fine teenagers and provide a warm, caring and fun home-away-from-home environment. Ideally, families should have at least one child in the high school.

Hosting a student is a very rewarding experience and has a lasting impact on a young person's life.

Families are paid a monthly fee of \$995 to help cover the associated costs of room and board, and, of course, parenting. Security checks for all parents/guardians living in the home will be required.

If you are interested in learning more about this, please contact Sara Anderson at Ext. 309 or at sanderson@torontowaldorfschool.com.

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