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## The Biodynamic Movement: The Complexity of Being Both Esoteric and Exoteric

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The following is both a response to Walter Goldstein's article "The Biodynamic Movement: Where Have We Been, Where Are We Going?" (*BIODYNAMICS* Number 232) and an attempt to offer further points of reference and reflection.

An invitation to reflect and collaborate anew

Our friend and colleague, Walter Goldstein, offered us a wonderful beginning for a new dialogue on the 'state of affairs' in the biodynamic movement (with particular reference to North America) in his recent article. I believe we all owe him a not-so-small debt of thanks for his courage and outspoken effort to bring our attention to our own organizational purposes, practices and prospects. I was touched not only by his candor and willingness to breach some essential issues, but also by his willingness to go out on a limb and offer some perspectives on what is needed.

In that same spirit, acknowledging as Walter did that each of us has a limited perspective, the following is my initial contribution to our budding self-reflection as a movement. It can be but one person's reflection and lays no claim to comprehensiveness. I too offer my candid words in the hope that it will stimulate fruitful discussion.

Walter's article touches on many salient issues. Particularly insightful I thought were his introductory comments and analysis on the first page and a half: outlining our unique potential contributions and offering a reality check on where we stand in terms of transforming our ideals into reality. I found this

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refreshing and hopeful. Many topics were described that we must take up. What followed became a bit less clear for me, particularly Walter's discussion of biodynamics being based on spiritual science or was it conventional science? ("Conventional science has developed a powerful methodology for objectively evaluating the truth with a narrow scope.") Although Walter does some justice to the down side of natural science, the reader is (or at least I was) left somewhat unclear as to what methods would actually be appropriate for biodynamics to base its work on. It could almost sound like we need only work harder at conventional science in order to confirm Steiner's indications. There is considerable confusion on this point historically too in our worldwide movement. What follows then in the body of Walter's article is essentially a push for 'good science.' I thought Walter's open discussion of Maria Thun's work refreshing in this vein, but not consequential enough: Yes, "the overwhelming scientific (and practical I might add) evidence before us is that life does not seem to (always?) obey the Thun calendar." But what kind of scientific work would help us understand how "life" truly works? (Perhaps Maria Thun and others like her have made a start, even if not arriving at a whole answer yet.)

Secondly, I agree wholeheartedly that we as a movement have not "yet won the content of anthroposophy and biodynamic agriculture for ourselves." What could help us do this better? What *is* the content of anthroposophy and biodynamics? I was left wondering and wanting and hoping Walter would say more.

Finally, I found Walter's closing appeal for working (better) together, for complete honesty and clarity very, very inspiring. It was, however, Walter's line: "Biodynamic agriculture is not a religion" and his subsequent thoughts on science versus religion, that moved me to write this response and to reflect openly about what biodynamic is or could be.

What is biodynamics?

Biodynamics is, it ought to be said plainly, inseparable from anthroposophy. Anthroposophy is a spiritual movement created by Rudolf Steiner and his students. It was designed to renew and transform human activity, personal and professional, and eventually perhaps transform human society based on an entirely spiritual understanding of our humanness, the Earth and the universe. Anthroposophy, as Steiner developed it, is based on what he called 'Spiritual Science' which is the development of advanced cognitive capacities allowing the 'spiritual scientist' (each of us can aspire to this) to experience directly the spiritual forces and beings at work in us, in nature and in the cosmos.

Anthroposophy has the 'spiritualization' of life on Earth as its primary purpose (Steiner had a lot to say about what this meant) and to this end sees itself as a reunion of science, art *and* religion, not just a renewal or transformation of science.

The Anthroposophical Society was designed to further an understanding of these goals and the methods of Spiritual Science generally. Steiner also helped to foster 'daughter movements' based on the various interests of the Society's members, to bring the principles and practices of anthroposophy into practical domains of life such as education, medicine, business, architecture, the fine arts, religion and agriculture. Biodynamics is just such a daughter movement. Both the Anthroposophical Society and the daughter movements have as their explicit goal to effectively infuse esoteric knowledge (knowledge of the spiritual forces and beings at work in us, on Earth and in the universe) into practical (exoteric) life. Historically, we have not always been very clear and open about this — in part because there is an inherent tension in attempting to be both an esoteric and exoteric movement.

It is a fundamental assumption of anthroposophy (and the daughter movements) that life on Earth has become morally and practically lacking in healthy conditions. We understand this to be due in large measure to a loss of spiritual understanding, to a loss of a concrete understanding of how spiritual forces and beings (including ourselves) function. Regaining such knowledge and putting it to effective, practical use, is the aim of all the daughter movements including biodynamics.

Anthroposophy: science, art *and* religion

Central to an understanding of anthroposophy is the evolutionary concept: that all of life is in a process of change, transformation, and metamorphosis. Steiner in fact defines the history of humanity as the evolution of our individual consciousness. He describes various ages and epochs of development throughout history and names our current time the 'age of the Consciousness Soul' meaning the time in which we become increasingly conscious of our own soul, our own individuality, our own spirituality. This is not a vague change in Steiner's mind, but a fundamental shift in outlook, of perception and self-recognition.

This new awareness, said Steiner, will further a reunion of science, art *and* religion, whereby each will be transformed by the other on a higher level. One can think here of science developing a deep reverence for the spirit and religion,

developing an interest in knowing, instead of just believing in, spiritual realities and both expressing such new interests and understandings in a artful manner. Steiner goes even further to suggest that science will become increasingly interested only in spiritual forces and beings (and how they live and work in the physical world) and less and less in the purely material, mechanical, statistically quantifiable aspects of life which reveal little of the spirits that created them and little of the forces that make and keep us healthy.

Different approaches: religion and science

One of the insights Steiner shared throughout his efforts to develop the anthroposophical movement and very explicitly in a series of lectures during his last year, was that there are, interestingly, two major, distinctly different approaches to developing anthroposophy. I will not try and do this theme justice in just a few sentences, but for the sake of simply recognizing that there are different approaches within anthroposophy, allow me to oversimplify and say: there are those who are more scientifically inclined (called Aristotelians or young souls) and those who are more religiously inclined (called Platonists or old souls).

One of Steiner's great concerns was that these two groups of people within the anthroposophical movement learn to work together. He felt this working together, based on a mutual respect of each group's strengths, abilities, talents, etc., and the potential for each to off-set the one-sidedness of the other was an essential prerequisite for the success of anthroposophy and its daughter movements into the future. We can hopefully learn from his insights and concerns on this matter and find new ways of working together.

The significance of Christ for biodynamics

Equally central to anthroposophy is the understanding of what Steiner calls the 'Mystery of Golgotha' or the 'Christ Event.' Steiner's understanding of the evolution of all of humanity and the Earth is that the being Christians call Christ, was in fact a great cosmic being who came to Earth and affected, through his life, teaching, death and resurrection all of humanity, the entire Earth, and the whole universe. This is, for Steiner, not a religious question so much as a fundamental 'objective truth' revealed through spiritual science. Steiner further explains how this 'Christ Being' is now the actual 'Spirit of the Earth,' having united Himself with the Earth, and how in order to understand nature, to understand how to work with nature, to understand how to work with each other we must come to understand how Christ lives and works in all of the

## Earth, in all of nature:

In the age of the Consciousness Soul, humans must very soon develop the possibility of having not merely the abstract, dry natural science which petrifies the whole being — a science which is today extolled as the salvation of the world — but a science that can deepen itself to a reverent perception of all the sacred symbols spread out over the world by the Godhead, in all the deeds giving joy to humans, but also in everything by which the Godhead puts humanity to the test. If humanity is able once more to do laboratory experiments sacramentally, on a higher level, and to make the operating table an altar, instead of a carpenter's workshop and a shambles, then the time will have come which is demanded for souls of today by divine evolution. ... I once said, and this was truly not said rhetorically, but out of the deeper knowledge of the soul: Until our physics, our mechanics, the whole of external science, come to be permeated by the Christ Impulse, science will not have reached its goal. Not only history should speak of the Mystery of Golgotha: humanity should also realize that since the Mystery of Golgotha natural phenomena have to be observed in such a way that Christ is known to be on the Earth, whereas He was not on the Earth before. A truly Christian science will not seek for atoms, not for atoms and their laws, nor for the conservation of matter and of energy; it will seek for the revelation of Christ in all the phenomena of nature, and these will thereby reveal to humanity their sacramental character.

From a contemplation of nature in this light there will spring a feeling for moral, social, political and religious principles in human life, which will really answer to the demands of human living. If we absorb the divine element in nature, if we draw upon the power of Christ in our knowledge of nature, then we shall carry into the rules of conduct that we set up for mankind, and into all that we want to exemplify, whether in caring for the poor or in a any other realm of social service — we shall carry Christology into all our works. If we are unable to look upon nature around us as permeated by Christ, if we are unable to discover the activity of Christ in all that lives in human deeds even when they are halting deeds, neither shall we be able in our social, moral or political life to meet the real demands of our time.

— Rudolf Steiner, October 13, 1918

If indeed we are to understand how to read in the Book of Nature as a basis for biodynamics, then we will have to not only pursue Goethean science, which is no doubt our initial guide upon the path of observing nature, but we will also have to open ourselves up to a new kind of science, a science permeated with a deeper understanding of such great Mysteries as the influence of Christ in nature. This new science is what Steiner was trying to develop with spiritual science, with anthroposophy.

### Working with Spiritual Science

In this light, Spiritual Science is much more than just attempting to verify the existence of various spiritual forces and beings in nature; it is centrally the search for an understanding of the influence and presence of Christ in us, in nature and in the universe. This is something that does not contradict the notion that anyone, regardless of religion can practice anthroposophy or biodynamics. Neither anthroposophy or biodynamics is a religion, but they are both centrally

concerned with spiritual realities, with spiritual beings and forces. They are both an attempt to pursue life in a manner befitting a reunion of science, art and religion. They are both in fact centrally concerned with the being we call Christ as a vitally significant spiritual being for all of humanity and all of nature — as the being we can all call: *The Spirit of the Earth*. This is a further reason to understand Spiritual Science in a broader sense and certainly not to misunderstand what Steiner means by Spiritual Science or to confuse it in any way with what appears today as natural science. Seventy-seven years ago today, on the evening of January 1, 1924, Rudolf Steiner gave his last lecture of the so-called Christmas Foundation Meeting, in which he addresses the members of the Anthroposophical Movement about an appropriate relationship with the spiritual world and the responsibility we, as anthroposophists, may feel. There, Steiner shares three major concerns:

- First, he makes it clear that modern, natural scientific thinking, with its strongly dialectical and empirical materialism leads humanity away from a healthy spiritual life. Not “fanatically, but in an honest, straightforward love of the truth” Steiner says, we must be able to move away from our obsession with what is only physically visible, physically tangible and learn to speak about “genuine experiences, genuine forces and genuine beings of the spiritual world.”
- Second, Steiner is very concerned that we do not try and prove spiritual science with natural scientific methods: “If we have the ambition to make what grows in the soil of our own ... research into something that can stand the scrutiny of present-day clinical requirements, then we shall never achieve any definite goal in the things that really make up our task. ...” He refers here to a talk given by the Dutch anthroposophist and medical doctor Zylmans van Emichoven: “That is why it was so good to hear Dr. Zylmans speak this morning about a field which is to be cultivated here in Dornach, the field of medicine, and to hear him say that it is *no longer possible to build bridges from ordinary science to what is to be founded here in Dornach.*” (emphasis mine)
- Finally, Steiner warns against being afraid to share openly what anthroposophy (and in our case biodynamics) really is and he wants us to take a decided stand in our approach: “Thus, in the future the situation will be clear. No one will say: Let us first show people eurythmy; if they hear nothing about anthroposophy, then they will like eurythmy; and then, having taken a liking to eurythmy, they will take a liking to anthroposophy as well. No one will say: First we must show people how the medicines work in practice so that they see that they are proper medicines, and will buy them; then if they later hear that anthroposophy is behind the medicines, they will also approach anthroposophy. *We must have the courage to regard such a method as dishonest.* (Emphasis again mine) Not until we have the courage to regard such a method as dishonest, not until we inwardly detest such a method will anthroposophy find its way through the world.”

I observe that this is true of biodynamics as well. Not until we are clear about what anthroposophy is, what its goals and methods are and that biodynamics is a true daughter movement of anthroposophy with *identical goals and methods*, simply *applied to agriculture*, will we see biodynamics truly succeed.

The historical situation

In the past, for a variety of reasons, some better — some worse, we have hidden these realities about biodynamics, in part and in whole at times, from not only the public, but privately as well from many individuals seeking to understand biodynamics. This was a mistake, I think, from which we could and should now make a full departure.



The foremost reason cited for this lack of full disclosure has been avoidance of being seen as fanatics, as a cult, or as a religion. In the process, however, we have failed to explicitly explain who we really are and what we are really up to in biodynamics — so much so that there are people actually practicing biodynamics (or at least using some of the methods) who have no clue about anthroposophy, nor do they wish to. There are those practicing biodynamics that actively disassociate themselves from anthroposophy and try to hide the relationship between biodynamics and anthroposophy. This is a strange and unhealthy situation that begs remedy.

The other challenge: professionalism

If we are unable to articulate our purposes clearly and unable to guide our fellow practitioners towards a serious path of spiritual development on which they may “win the content of anthroposophy and biodynamics” for themselves, we may certainly not be surprised at our lack of growth as a movement. Our lack of leadership, whether from within the Biodynamic Associations or Demeter or the Section is a direct outgrowth of our lack of clear and explicit purpose. It is at least, to my perception, half of the problem. The other half is implicitly intimated in Walter's article, or at least I hear in Walter's cry for science: the plea for professionalism.

We may have been afraid of being seen as a religious cult and therefore did not speak openly about our spirituality, but I think equally detrimental to our success has been our lack of professionalism. In all these criticisms, I include myself and wish that I/we could muster so much more professional management of our activities. I think we can if we help each other. It does not follow just because we are a spiritually oriented group seeking to bring esoteric knowledge into practical life that we must give up on being professional. Quite the contrary. I find in my advising that those agricultural practitioners given over to a keen attention to detail, know their farms, their fields, their crops and animals better and have an easier time bringing their spiritual capacities, their spiritual efforts to effective results.

The role of the Section

In 1924 Rudolf Steiner created the ‘Free University of Spiritual Science’ in Dornach. Integrated into the Anthroposophical Society, the ‘School of Spiritual Science’, as it is more often referred to, has Sections (or Colleges) that foster spiritual research and education in a variety of domains including education, the arts, medicine, social science and so on. There is a Natural Science Section there,

which aims to spiritualize natural science using spiritual scientific methods. Embedded in this Section there is a Department of Agriculture, which is all about research and education in biodynamics. Here in the US, we also have these Sections represented and somewhat confusingly (but to this author's mind appropriately) we have our own independent Agriculture Section (there is also a Natural Science Section here, but the two are separate). In any case, we have a Section for biodynamics here in North America too.

These Sections are designed, as I said, to foster research and education in their fields and have an important role to play in providing the rest of the Society and the daughter movements with a degree of leadership, especially in spiritual matters, particularly with regards to research.

The difference between leadership and management

It is important at this juncture, to make a distinction: leadership is not management. Managing and leading are two different, if related, activities. Too often they are confused. Management provides the maintenance of goal achievement. It takes care of day-to-day business. Leadership provides values and vision that makes those goals worthy and relevant in the first place and provides on-going decision-making, inspiration and example that keep an organization vital and relevant.

In an effort to maintain control, secure resources, protect assets, we often see organizations devolve into management without leadership. It is safe, predictable and minimizes risk. It is also the quickest way to stop meeting the ever-changing needs of an organization's clientele. However, it is our job to meet the ever-changing needs of our farmers and gardeners and to a degree, the needs of the public with regards to biodynamics.

Leadership is what initially starts an organization. It is also needed throughout the life of the business. Leadership provides vision. Vision is not a vague abstraction, but the clear, explicit, well-reasoned response to the often complex, dynamic trends and events facing the organization. Leadership requires deep knowledge, substantive experience and on-going assessment. Organizations need leaders to instruct, inspire and model next steps in thinking and in doing within the organization. Organizations need leaders to make courageous and risky decisions. Organizations need leaders to be on the cutting edge of what is possible, always grasping for the impossible in order to better meet the needs of the customers in a world of change. Organizations must embrace change to survive and therefore leaders are needed who will lead into change. And leaders



need organizations that stand behind them. Leaders in turn need to manage or have help managing the day-to-day, no doubt. Without management we see organizations loose market share, get behind, become sloppy. Without leadership we see organizations loose relevance altogether.

The role of the association(s)

Since the Agricultural Course (1924) was given, there has been a biodynamic association (later many). Although it was originally called: 'The Experimental Circle of Anthroposophical Farmers', it soon became known (1927) as the 'Association for the Biological-Dynamic Method.' Its role was to support the practicing farmers in trying out and developing an understanding of these new methods (mutual education). The meetings were places for the farmers to exchange experiences and ideas, to ask each other questions and to offer each other moral (and at times practical) support. The association(s) has a strong social and educational element. To a lesser degree the association(s) helped with the carrying out on-farm research, collaborating at least ideally with the Section in Dornach (and now in the individual countries). The associations also play an important role in educating the public about biodynamics.

The role of Demeter

Since 1929, the Demeter organization(s) have been at the forefront of certifying and marketing biodynamic products. It was the first such alternative agricultural organization aimed at economic necessities. Today, many countries have their own Demeter organization; however, there is a strong movement underfoot to internationalize Demeter in order to foster greater international cooperation, mutual support, legal coordination, and so forth.

Suggestions for North America and beyond

**A new impulse towards developing biodynamics will require a rebirth of *both* a spiritual understanding of biodynamics and a true commitment to professionalism. Here are some suggestions that may deserve discussion:**

*A renaissance of biodynamic understanding might be helped by seeing:*

- Biodynamics as a spiritual scientific profession (not a natural scientific effort with some vague spirituality sprinkled on top). We need clear, explicit spiritual scientific methods aimed not at just proving that the spiritual practices work, but rather at assisting practitioners in understanding how they work and how to work specifically with the spiritual forces and beings in nature; indeed also how to begin to relate to the Spirit of the Earth;
- Biodynamics as a spiritual art (or craft) whereby the practical activities are designed for the spiritual health of farm, farmer, and consumer and where the activities are seen as an integral part of both a spiritual livelihood and spiritual path with spiritual, not material purposes;
- Biodynamics as a spiritually-morally motivated socio-economic effort, working not only for ecological, social and economic sustainability in the materialistic sense, but working towards the development of socio-economic conditions that further the spiritual

development of humanity and invite the presence and support of other spiritual beings.

*A renaissance of the biodynamic movement might be helped by developing:*

**A threefold internationalization of our biodynamic organizations:**

- The Agricultural Section; an independent Section in Dornach would be essential (like we have in North America). The Section in Dornach and all of the national and regional Section groups together should focus their attention on *spiritual research* and most of all on helping those interested in understanding the spiritual path that leads to accurate spiritual research;
- An International Biodynamic Association; like Demeter International, we ought to form a global umbrella association, with all of the existing national or regional associations as members. Its purpose should be clear: *education*: (a) to train biodynamic practitioners through courses, conferences, field days, mentoring, literature, etc.; (b) to educate the public about biodynamics, including working with other alternative agricultural movements, NGOs and government agencies.
- Demeter International; continued internationalization of Demeter, with national and regional Demeter organizations re-integrating to a large degree into a federated whole which ought to serve to solidify our abilities to meet the demands of *certifying and marketing* Demeter products in a dynamic market.

Although there will be some who resist internationalization as a loss of their regional or national sovereignty, there ought not be any cause for alarm as the umbrella organizations should serve to alleviate duplication of efforts, coordination of resources, advancement of common causes and so on, not infringing the least on local or regional questions. We need leadership and not fragmentation. Leadership is provided by professional instruction, genuine inspiration and practical demonstration. A strong, internationalized movement might have a fighting chance at having the resources, both human and financial, to provide such excellent leadership that is sorely needed, remembering that leadership and management is not the same thing.

Resolving the esoteric-exoteric tension

Resolving the esoteric-exoteric tension will be a part of our challenge for a long time to come. Becoming aware of its reality is half the battle. We will need, as Walter implores, to work together better, respecting each others' modalities, predilections, gifts, talents, experiences and indeed respecting each others' shortcomings and failures as an integral part of who we all are as a movement. Forgiving each other (regularly) and overcoming our negative prejudices in order to work effectively together will of necessity become our path of humility. We will need to do even more: recognize our old soul/young soul orientations and what each of us brings to the mystery of our work.

We will also need to be candid, that we are a part of a larger, worldwide spiritual movement, that biodynamics is a daughter movement of anthroposophy and that we have both support from and responsibilities to the Anthroposophical Movement. Foremost of those responsibilities is the development of a true spiritual science that does not look for traces of spirit here and there as an

afterthought to conventional scientific investigations, but truly seeks to understand the workings of spiritual forces and beings in nature, including in ourselves.

If we describe purely material existence in the customary manner and then add as a kind of decoration that this material existence contains everywhere the spiritual, this will not produce genuine spiritual science. My Dear Friends, people are very strange in this respect; they are intent on withdrawing to the abstract. But what is necessary is the following: in the future we must cease to differentiate abstractly between the material and the spiritual, but we must look for the spiritual in the material itself and describe it as such; and we must recognize in the spiritual the transition into the material and its mode of action in the material. Only when we have attained this shall we be able to gain a true knowledge. ...

— Rudolf Steiner, October 30, 1919

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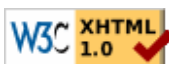
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