

The new theme for 2011/2012

Forward to the Wellsprings!

New beginnings featured strongly in our 2011 conference. Like beacons of light, the seeds are now sown for individuals, farms, and indeed the whole biodynamic movement actively to take part. Responsibility for shaping the future of civilisation is increasingly being taken on by people directly affected. We are of course part of this trend because our core business involves modifying the environment based on 'points of individuation' set by real life. Biodynamic farms are wellsprings of change for the social life around them and for the natural surroundings. Put another way, the source of this change is the individual and their community, i.e. people who are actually working right now to further biodynamics in their particular locality.

What is essential in biodynamic agriculture?

What is at the heart of my engagement with biodynamics? What is the most essential thing about biodynamics for each of us? Is it the possibility of healing a piece of the Earth, or the chance to produce healthy food for consumers? Is it the intimacy of being able to farm according to one's very own aims and intuitions? Or could it be our fascination with being able to intervene in natural systems with 'spirituality', for example through careful work on the preparations? Is it a deep love of the Earth and the natural world which support and nourish us? Or is the driving force our being socio-politically engaged in an honest primary industry that is a basis for healthy communities? Is it the Earth or the human being that is at the centre of this? What do we really mean by 'cosmic forces'? Are cows and horns just symbols, or are they the essential parts of the reality on our farms? Is the 'individuality of the farm' an idea to be realised only in the distant future, or is it already a spiritual reality in the present time? Is the statement in the *Agriculture Course* 'Man is the foundation' to be taken just metaphorically, or is it a guide to action?

New inward beginnings

We think that these new inward beginnings for the wellsprings of our work together represent the next step that we should take in a more earnest way. We envisage that, in many places in the world, biodynamic groups will meet and work on the wellsprings of biodynamic agriculture, using the established forms of dialogue facilitation that we were getting acquainted with at the Agriculture Conference 2011, such as Dialogue Interview, World Café, Case Clinic, and Dialogue Walk-through. Each person is asked to look for the connection between their own aims in life and our movement towards farming for the future, as indicated by Rudolf Steiner in his *Agriculture Course*. Actively listening in conversations with others, or even a quiet hour alone, creates a space in everyday life where what is essential can become clear. In the agriculture conference in 2012 we shall be able to consolidate the points raised, bring order to their diversity and create an overall picture. We intend to achieve this with the help of extended forms of dialogue, only this time focusing more strongly on the content, firmly supported by a greater number of individual contributions in the form of stimulating presentations, as well as reports of personal experiences. The aim is for us all to arrive at a formulation of the essentials of biodynamic farming principles that truly reflects the present time.

The cosmopolitan dimension of biodynamic agriculture

This leads us to an overview of a triennial period of work. After the 2011 conference, and by thinking about what is essential in the run up to and during the coming conference in 2012, we can envisage the 2013 conference taking a wholly outward perspective and seeking contact with people, organisations and movements related to ours. This challenge would then involve bringing in our specific initiatives through personal contacts, regional partnerships and global networks. This opening up to global responsibility has of course already been discussed in our 2011 conference. Biodynamic principles also have a cosmopolitan dimension and we are confident that we shall succeed in growing and maturing in the next two years sufficiently to be able to present it in a fruitful way during the 21st century – a time of new beginnings.

Practical involvement with the theme for the year

The following suggestions are intended to help us work on the theme for the year in a decentralised and networked manner:

- Distributing, translating and copying this document which formulates and sets the theme for the year.
- Taking up the resurgent mood of the 2011 conference right now, and, with this impetus, addressing the question as to what is the most essential. To make this relevant to the current situation we will not rely on inspiration that comes solely from the past, but also above all from the future. What are we facing in the future?
- Further developing the *Beacons of Light Project* arising from the 2011 conference, if possible in connection with the theme for this year.
- Using every opportunity to examine what is essential, whether individually or in conversations and conferences. In the summer letter, we hope to be able to present additional tools for working on the theme in dialogue form.
- Amongst the many aspects of this theme is a systematic one: can we produce a list of biodynamic principles that is as brief as possible but comprehensive? Can these principles then form the basis for Demeter guidelines?
- The next Michael letter is connected with the theme for the year. It is the letter of 8 February entitled *Sleeping and waking in the light of recent studies*, together with the Leading Thoughts numbers 156 to 158.

Agriculture Section at the Goetheanum, end of March 2011