

„Where no „Safa“ can be found, no one will want to go...“- Impressions from Iran

Bahardocht Naderi Tabrizi

In the long, narrow alleys of northern Tehran, it smells as it did in earlier times; in times when the houses were built so that the kitchen windows opened onto the street. The fragrance of delicious Iranian spices filled the alleys at midday and, for us children returning from school, stimulated our appetites. We were filled with anticipation of joyfully arriving at home, and we were filled with happy dreamlike images that allowed us to forget the burden of school and plunge into our protected world again.

Through the fragrances, the sounds, and the light, these alleyways had a very special atmosphere that gave us a sense of protection. We called it "Safa". Yes, there was a word for the sense of protection that came from another world that created the atmosphere for it. "Safa", I later learned as an adult, is the name for God. So therefore God was everywhere to be seen and smelled and tasted. And this made life in our streets, alleyways and gardens so meaningful, cozy, and lovely. Where there is no "Safa", no one would want to go.

Shops closed at lunchtime, and the midday break lasted until late afternoon; those who had nothing to eat were fed. Human beings encountered one another with deep heartfelt respect. The architecture of the streets and houses, the way the gardens were laid out, the alleyways and squares, the respectful way of being together and much more all created a very unique way of life in Iran.

One was always concerned with creating a healthy, nourishing space for existence; one never spoke about money.

Impressions from recent days are going through my mind. I was traveling for more than 10 days with two lecturers on Waldorf education who had come from Germany. They openly discussed problems with children and young people. College lecturers, teachers, parents, and educators see the conditions in which children and students are growing up today as catastrophic. Iran has not yet overcome the consequences of the difficult eight-year war from the 1980's; in addition are the hard years of embargoes and lack of resources in the economy, culture, communications, and education - in short, everything. Unemployment, drugs, prostitution, environmental concerns - human beings are thirsting for new perspectives, visions of the future, and growth. There is no trust any more. Children are growing up under unthinkable circumstances, while those who are their examples deal hopelessly with everyday life.

I was deeply lost in thought one day when I passed a street corner and heard a man's voice from a small shop:

-“Are you walking up and down the streets again, my son?”

- „What else should I do? I am watching over your shops to see that everything is okay - am I not even allowed to do that?”

The old man laughed and the young boy took another puff of his cigarette. Their voices continue to echo within me.

Iran has a very young population - most are under age 35, many have no occupation and nothing to do; among them are many academics from the middle class. They would love to leave Iran and begin a future in another country. In Europe and America the scientific fields are often full of people with these capacities. How sad that they see no opportunities for themselves in their own country.

In Isfahan, the historic capital of Iran, people have begun an initiative that offers hope. Personalities working in the bureaucracy, in universities, and as teachers, have formed an association called “For the Well Being of the Child and the Family” that plans to bring Waldorf education to Iran. With support from Germany they held a six-day introductory course in October that was designed to respond to the needs of many local people.

For years, Iran has allowed various international educational approaches but it has not been possible for them to be established in the country. With Waldorf education, those responsible are pleased by the holistic view of the human being that lies at the basis of this education. There is something familiar hovering in the air.

Bahardocht Naderi Tabrizi grew up in Tehran, studied sociology in Berlin, and completed a supplementary Waldorf training in Cologne.