

## Workshops in Waldorf Education in Tehran

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From August 15<sup>th</sup> through September 5<sup>th</sup>, two series of workshops were held in Tehran, Iran. The themes of the first were introduction to Waldorf education and the art of Eurythmy and introduction to Waldorf approach to early childhood education.

The first event featured a lecture about Waldorf Education and introductory workshops on Eurythmy. The lecturer was Bobak Moghbel, a California based Waldorf high school teacher and Eurythmist.

Bobak and I are both originally Persian and share the dream of bringing the wisdom of Anthroposophy to our home country, Iran. As a first step together toward realizing this dream we planned a short event for Bobak to speak to and lead a series of workshop for an enthusiastic audience. When I first met Bobak at IKA airport in Tehran, on a midnight in August, 2017, my heart was full of excitement, appreciation and uncertainty about what was on the way to be born out of the initiative we were going to start together.



The event occurred from Thursday, August 17<sup>th</sup> through Saturday August 19<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday August 23<sup>rd</sup> and was appreciated eagerly and greatly by the audience.

The second event consisted of a series of introductory workshops on Waldorf approach to early childhood education held at The House of Children's Librarians in Tehran. As the lecturer of these workshops I tried to bring a touch of daily activities at a Waldorf kindergarten and the wisdom behind them.

The workshops took place every Tuesday and Wednesday for 60 hours from August 15<sup>th</sup> through September 5<sup>th</sup>. The participants were mostly early childhood teachers as well as a mother of a newborn who is a physician.

The main subjects of the first week were: Introduction to the threefold human being (the physical and soul-spiritual constitution of the human being), the uniqueness of each child as a gift of the spiritual world to



humanity, meaning of inner freedom as introduced in Anthroposophy, significance of human encounter in education and the relationship of the teacher with the children, self-education and self-development of teachers, introduction to the three phases of development with a focus on the first seven years, the three major steps major steps (walking, speaking, thinking) in the first three years of life, concepts of breathing, movement, rhythm, creative discipline and repetition and their influence on the spiritual flow of life in the young child, and experiencing baking as a whole work.

In the second week we focused on introducing the concepts of thinking, feeling, willing, and how these forces work together harmoniously to create integrated human beings, importance of free imaginative play and stages of development of the forces of fantasy and imagination and their role in raising purposeful human beings, importance of training the hands and their role in the integration of thinking, feeling and willing, concepts of meaningful, purposeful and whole work in the life of a Waldorf kindergarten, and exploring handwork through felting and sewing.

The focus of the third week was on storytelling, morning circle and how it shapes the day in kindergarten, exploring Waldorf puppetry (choosing story, making puppets, practicing and performing a puppet show), fairytales and how to choose age appropriate tales for any specific group of kindergarten aged children. We reviewed Persian fairy tales and selected tales for setting up our puppet show.

The subjects of the fourth workshop was the significance of arts and specifically wet in wet painting in the life of a Waldorf kindergarten and the role of arts in deepening the understanding of the inner self of human beings, as well as the relation between inner world of human being and the outer world. The participants were briefly introduced to Goethe's theory of color and experienced painting as it is done in a Waldorf kindergarten.

Although each workshop had its own subject, the spiritual flow of the workshops rotated around the concepts of outer and inner movements, universal and growth rhythms, breathing between self and the world and the human relationship between teacher and children, as well as the importance of self-reflection, self-questioning and self-development of the teacher. The participants underwent various feeling experiences during sessions of discussion about the Anthroposophical view of human development and education, as well as practical sessions when they experienced thinking with their hands and bodies and created their own bread, puppets, handworks



and paintings. These workshops formed a brief introduction to more comprehensive training courses that will hopefully be planned and held in Iran in the future.

A direct fruit of these workshops was an eager request from the participants to form a working group and study Anthroposophy in more depth. We hope this study group can be formed and provide the spiritual vessel for receiving the right guidance from the spiritual world and lead our endeavors in the right direction toward igniting sparks of interest in the souls of human beings in this part of the world.

Although I graduated as a Waldorf class teacher, I decided to put my focus on early childhood education after returning to Iran on March, 2016. The main reason for this decision was the extreme importance of early childhood education and its significance as the root of any educational reform. The second reason is the fact that independent schools are not accredited by the ministry of education in Iran and the only opportunity to work away from the direct supervision of the ministry is early childhood section. I consider this a gift of the spiritual world and try to make the best out of this opportunity. As a first step, I began two ongoing projects at two different school settings in Tehran in the previous school year (2016-2017). Both projects are continued in the current academic year.

The first one began a few months after I returned to Iran. The school is a center for children with learning disorders located in one of the most underprivileged areas in south of Tehran. The head of the pedagogical section of the school contacted me and requested that I hold some classes for their teachers and introduce Waldorf education to them. This was the beginning of a long-term cooperation with the school. We began the classes and soon they decided to gradually and slowly shift their educational method to a system inspired by Waldorf education. Over the past eighteen months classes the teachers were introduced by basic and fundamental insights of phases of child development, the threefold nature of human being, the four temperaments, training the observing eye of the teachers, as well as specific and practical methods for working with kindergarten and first and second grade children. They are introduced to the concept of morning circle, teaching math, alphabet and writing. The children are from underprivileged families and are faced with various kinds of abuse at home and in their environment and many of them have to work after school. Therefore, the school has an active social work section as well as a therapeutic section. These two sections work in close conjunction with the educational section to serve children in the best way. However, therapeutic knowledge based on Anthroposophy is a great need for this school setting in order to best serve the children's needs.

The other project that I began last year and ever since have devoted most of my time on is at the early childhood section of a large school located in north east side of Tehran. Unlike the other, this school serves children of families of middle and upper classes. Each year, the school's early childhood section receives 30 to 50 six-year-old boys and prepares them for elementary school. I took on the responsibility to train four early childhood teachers, create the curriculum and rearrange the physical space based on Waldorf approach to early childhood education. My goal is to insert change into the system and ignite spark into the hearts and minds of



the teachers.

The teachers get ongoing training about the threefold phases of child development, layers of the human physical and soul-spiritual constitution, observing children, self-development, concepts such as universal growth rhythms, inner and outer movements, repetition, warmth, expansion and contraction, the concept of breathing and its role in education and many more concepts coming out of spiritual science. The main focus is on the teacher-child relationship and knowing the children by observing them. The teachers are practicing to learn by observation and ask themselves: What is this child asking for? How can I best serve him?

We have created a curriculum based on meaningful, purposeful and whole work coming from daily life of our children. Each morning at circle time they sing beautiful songs and enjoy rhythmic games by imitating their teachers.

They bake traditional Persian bread once a week, sew their own dolls as well as garment for their dolls, make simple felted animals, take on a journey to their innermost world through experiencing wet in wet water color painting, create a little garden where they grow little plants and vegetables for daily use.

They also experience free imaginative play every day with simple and natural things such as wooden blocks, pieces of fabric, stones, and seashells. In the middle of each day they take a short rest and then travel to the world of fairytales during story time. Every day, they enjoy chopping vegetables, participating in preparing their meal, eating together, washing the dishes and cleaning their classroom together. They take short trips to natural parks close to the school and play freely in nature. This rich experience fills their hearts with awe and love of nature and free human participation.

My hope for this project is a gradual and slow growth and flow of Anthroposophic wisdom in the lives of children and hearts of teachers. The teachers work out of the love for children in their heart and work eagerly to enrich their inner life.

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*Leila Alemi graduated as a Waldorf class teacher from Antioch University New England, US with a master's degree in Waldorf Education in March 2016. She worked at the kindergarten of Rudolf Steiner School of Ann Arbor for a year and returned to Iran to promote Waldorf education in Iran. Currently she lives and works in Tehran.*