

St. John's Contemplation on the Preparations

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Many thousands of years ago people formed settlements. This was when agri- culture was born. From being hunters and gatherers people became cultivators of a piece of ground with the plants and animals that went with it. Roaming through the wealth and breadth of the wilderness was given up in favour of a small place, a few plant cultures, a handful of animals. Nonetheless, this limitation was the precondition for intensive activity, working the different kinds of soil and looking after plants and animals. At this point the cultivating, 'taking into culture' began. The birth of agri-culture was conditional on the fact that from the wealth of nature, in which the lives of the nomadic hunters and gatherers were organically interwoven, a place of cultivation was formed which was limited in space and diversity. The great biotope to wander around in becomes a small, enclosed area, where the soil is tended over generations. From the many wild grasses relatively few become the basis for the two to four kinds of grain which are bred and grown in a region. The same goes for the other plant species and the trees. The endless diversity of the wild fauna is to be found once again in the hen, dog and cow, just to mention the main representatives of the head-, chest- and metabolism-type of animals. This limitation – from our current perspective, where we experience a huge concern about biodiversity, you could also speak of impoverishment – provides the possibility of breeding, looking after and making use of the few species chosen in such a way that a far greater wealth of new species arises. The settled way of life and the new forms of nutrition provide the basis for the forward impetus of development in the social and cultural-spiritual life of these early civilisations. Through stages of development in approximately the last 10,000 years our familiar, established mixed farms have developed.

When we go for a walk around the fields at St. John's, then this archetype resonates in our perception of the quite concrete reality of our farm, as it has taken shape this year. With us it is the case that we go from field to field and without much explanation try to open up the sight, the smells and feeling for the agri-cultural dimension of the farm for our ordinary visitors. The wheat stands at its full height, the reddish beards of the ears shimmer, back-lit at dusk; like a dynamically swaying surface this carpet of ears lies in the landscape, uniformly high through breeding. We can think back to the common seed on the occasion of Zukunft Säen! (Sowing the Future) last October – and we think ahead to mid- August, when the twenty-fold quantity of what had originally been sown can be threshed. In the next field luxuriant rows of squash plants swell up from the ground, the potatoes show clear-cut differences in the varieties, carrots and beetroots mark exact lines in the field, the onions amaze us with their bluish, tube-like shoots. A wide range of vegetables, separated exactly from one another, can be perceived at this early stage through the flavour and partly through the smell. A similar differentiation can be seen with the splendour of forms and colours of the neighbouring plot of flowers, a feast for the eyes. In the next field, where the carrots were last year, clover is growing densely, and a luxuriant mixture of peas and oats is growing, where potatoes were. Thus we can experience the crop cycle, the way it circulates around the various areas of the farm. Then the visitors follow the cows on their way to the

clover/grass pasture, where the soil is built up again through the two fallow years. The brilliant mixture of legumes and forage grasses and the soul presence of the cows, as revealed essentially in its manure, support the overall fertility of the farm in a sustainable way. The mood that arises about with this walk-about, is a culturally elevated mood – the agri-culture, which we are looking at, resonates in the part of our souls that is sensitive to culture.

Back on the farm the visitors gather around a table, where we have laid out the ingredients for the preparations, with which we are concerned in this season. We have laid out the horn with silica from last year as a reminder that the silica horns are now buried in the summer earth. There is a great heap of somewhat wilted stinging nettles, and we show how they are buried in an earthenware vessel. A two metre-high, sturdy valerian plant is there, next to it a basket with the valerian blossoms gathered and even the first bottles of pressed juice; adjacent a cloth with such fine chamomile blossoms. And then the white yarrow blossoms and the still dry stag's bladder, which is to be filled in the next few days and hung up in the sun. Where do these ingredients come from? Do they come from cultures we grow? Are they grown in crop rotation? Are the stags in the cowshed? We become aware that through the preparation work we are turning back into hunters and gatherers. The stinging nettle grows in the shady woodland borders, for the valerian blossoms we roam through the landscape easily in a radius of several kilometres, the chamomile and yarrow grow on the edges of the fields, the stag is not in the cowshed or stable, but needs to be hunted in the woods. For the horns and other organs of the cow the butcher's hunting instinct needs to be awakened so that he hands them over and the silica even comes from the Alps, which shimmer on the horizon.

Is it not astonishing that Rudolf Steiner sends us on the look out in nature with his recipes for the preparations? The point is not for us to become nomads. On the contrary, the preparations should help to lift cultivation to its next level. The soil, plants and animals should be strengthened in their interrelationships, from which they continually develop the agricultural organism so that the agricultural individuality can awaken. And the food that is produced by farming in which the preparations work through and through, is meant to strengthen the human ego- forces in particular. What we have is the amazing fact that Steiner strengthens the centre by activating the surroundings. The place of culture can develop, when the wider periphery is involved. And this periphery is absorbed into the cultural stream through the orientation towards the centre. As the core of biodynamic agriculture the preparations are indispensable for the concrete individualisation of a farm. And we see that in their gesture they arise through the reaching out far into the natural surroundings of the place that is being directly cultivated as a farm and then concretely with each particular preparation and as the whole being of the preparations they enable a new level or an inner centre of culture to come about.

Are we able to think that with the impulse Steiner has brought and which we call biodynamic, the core of which is the preparations, a start is being made in the reversal of the former transition from hunting and gathering to settlements? That would mean that from these places of culture a strong impulse of giving and taking with the wider surroundings takes place. What we concretely fetch in with the ingredients from our wider surroundings finds its counterpart in the bestowing of cultural forces on the natural environment, on human beings and the social organism.