

PERSONAL CONTEMPLATIONS

On Covid and other world events

I started making notes on Covid some time ago, but then stopped doing it after realising that my audience might consist of one person only – of myself. But later, during one of our conversations, my wife asked me to explain to her, in writing, 'what is happening in the world'. We often talked about this and her question was genuine. But it was also prompted by her desire 'to keep me busy spiritually', i.e. to provide a counterbalance, as it has been for the last few years, to my worsening physical condition. For the same two reasons I decided to address her question being fully aware, at the same time, of the disparity between its complexity and enormity and my abilities and knowledge. Hence my response can only be limited and subjective. I shall begin, or rather continue, with Covid.

So much has been written on the subject, both by various specialists and by many others, that adding anything to this abundance of data and opinions, especially by a lay person, seems to be sheer self-indulgence and a waste of time. My justification for still making a contribution to the subject is that what I have to say lies somewhat outside the main theme of the current debate. At present there is a clear division between the opposite views concerning the nature and treatment of Covid which are well known and don't require a restatement. My contribution is not a response to them; it concerns another aspect of Covid.

We take for granted, as an intrinsic part of our life, the fact that we are regularly afflicted by various kinds of adversity. The most common of them is illness. There are also accidents or personal, family, financial and other problems and misfortunes, or even disasters. Some we overcome and resolve, some go away of their own accord and others scar us for life or even shorten it. Various calamities – accidental, natural or others – also affect us collectively, as groups. These groups are incidental or determined by the circumstances of life, they vary in size and can even be national or international. Sometimes, in the form of wars, economic crises or pandemics, the disasters might become global and affect the best part of humanity. This is exactly the case with Covid-19. But before going further with my deliberations I have to indicate that aspect of it which is mainly outside the current debate but which I consider no less important.

It is not confined to Covid alone but concerns misfortunes as such, any of them, illnesses in particular. What interests us here is people's attitude to them. Most common and natural is a negative one and a desire to get rid of them as soon as possible. But some people, who seek a more profound view on life, see in misfortune and illness not just bad luck and the pain that they cause, but something which doesn't happen to us arbitrarily. There is a deeper reason for it which, in fact, is beneficial to us in the long run. All our misfortunes and illnesses happen as consequences of our previous wrong doings which should be compensated for and corrected, in this painful way, for our own benefit. We should realise this and treat them accordingly, as something that we need and whose benefits might be hidden from us or become evident only much later.

As to who made such 'arrangements' and who sends us our misfortunes, there are different views on this. Some say it is God or just Destiny, some have more sophisticated views based on their studies of spiritual sources such as anthroposophy. In this case they might refer to Higher Spiritual Powers, but can also note that various misfortunes and disasters might be the deeds of Adversary Forces hostile to humanity. It might be very difficult to distinguish between the two, let alone know how to respond to them, even with the help of the anthroposophical spiritual science. In any case it must be said that in some circumstances, whether personal or collective, it is natural, or at least understandable, to experience and regard the befallen calamities as attacks.

In my view, we have every reason to call the present pandemic of Covid-19 an attack on mankind, whether we mean it metaphorically or literally. As such, this is the most global, devastating and diverse attack on humanity in all of its history aiming to cause it maximum damage. It attacked all major spheres of life: health, economic, cultural, social and political. It caught us unawares, unprepared and powerless. On an individual level, it attacked both human physical and mental organisations. We are confused and divided as to its nature and how to cope with it. As a whole, if we imagine that behind it there is someone who, being in a position to do so, contrived to harm humanity to the utmost, to its destruction, this pandemic is the most comprehensive and clever execution of that evil intent. Even as science-fiction not every human fantasy is capable of devising such a nightmarish devilish scheme.

Unfortunately it is here, as a reality, affecting every one of us regardless of our views or actions. This, being all victims, became our common ground. Unwelcome as it is, this factor is the only one which unites us without, alas, providing a common language and answer. As humanity we, despite all our extraordinary achievements in various spheres of life, can't respond to this disaster in a reciprocal way, i.e. with a comprehensive understanding and decisive actions. We are doing our best of course, but as humanity we've been outmanoeuvred. What is more, our division and disagreements, inevitable as they are, play into the hands of the attacker. The battle is still going on, without a clear outcome, but people are already talking about 'the lessons to be learned'. Not before time, but what lessons, what would be their nature? At the present state of the prevailing consciousness they can only be a reflection of the very reasons that have caused the present helpless situation itself. This brings us to my wife's original question about 'what is happening in the world' which I'll try to address now.

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Verily, man proposes – God disposes. The above intention of mine couldn't be carried out due to the events beyond my control – I suddenly found myself in hospital without any prospect of continuing my contemplations and my work. But later, while still in hospital, I felt that I could resume my inner activity though not to the extent it was before hospitalisation. I also realised that I might never achieve the previous level of workability and that I should use the present opportunity the best I could. I knew I wouldn't be able to open and develop new themes as I intended in answering the question of what is happening in the world. But I had some further thoughts regarding two themes which I had explored earlier in my other works and which are also relevant to this question: Israel (Arab-Israeli conflict, to be precise) and anthroposophy. I felt I could develop these thoughts and make them presentable, though, by necessity, in a simple and simplified way. Here is the result of my 'hospital contemplations':

Arab-Israeli conflict

Before Covid imposed itself on us, this conflict was perhaps the most prominent single item on the world agenda. Among the world events it is also the most persistent and long-lasting due to the inabilities of the parties to resolve it. Over the years there has been no lack of propositions aiming at solving it which came from the Israelis and Arabs, as well as from members of the international community, only to be rejected in the end by one or both parties. Many consider this conflict insoluble as the parties' positions appear to be irreconcilable. But are they irreconcilable in principle, by their very nature, or for being unrealistic, or due to the intransigence of one or both parties? Would the same conflict have been resolved by now by other, more reasonable, tolerant and, mainly, willing to compromise, opponents?

To understand this better, one should first know the parties' positions as they are, without contraposing them against each other. As both parties reject each

other's position, it is enough in this case, at least to begin with, to examine one of them. I propose to do this with regard to the Arab position as it can be more clearly defined and easier to comprehend. There are two major factors which define it.

The first one is the Arabs' perception of the conflict which is as follows: the Jews invaded and conquered their land, forced them out of their houses, took their property and created on their territory their own state relegating them to the existence of homeless and destitute refugees in other countries. It is not our task to verify this perception against historical facts and events or to challenge it in any way. What is important for us is the perception as it is, being, as was mentioned above, one of the defining factors of the Arab position.

Inseparable from this perception is the pledge of the Arab leaders to throw the Jews out of Palestine to enable the refugees to promptly return to their homes. This was over 70 years ago, and this pledge, despite continuous efforts of its proponents, remains unfulfilled. During these years there have been several wars and many military confrontations between the Arabs and the Israelis with many victims on both sides, without any perspective for the Arabs to achieve their objective.

In the meantime there have been huge changes in the area, both material and psychological. First of all they concerned the refugees themselves, i.e. those who remained ones. Their number was multiplied by their numerous descendants, but there is no question of them being destitute – all these years they've been generously helped and supported in their refugee status by the international community. This is the way of existence to which they are accustomed now, while their new generations don't know any other life. Nevertheless, they claim their 'right of return' and its material components – their land, their houses and their property.

But much greater changes occurred in the object of their claim – demographical, geographical, economic, political, military, etc. As to the material components of their specific demands, they, for all intents and purposes, don't exist any longer, at least not in their original form. Now all these changes, as their earlier failures and empty promises of their leaders, didn't moderate the Arabs' claim which constitutes the material aspect of their position.

The other aspect which defines it is psychological and there are two elements to this. One is the elevation by the Palestinian Arabs of the losses sustained by them in their conflict with the Israelis to the status of national commemoration and engraving it in their culture and even into everyday life as a permanent reminder of their disaster. The other element has already existed as a particular national/cultural phenomenon. It is a profound sense of honour and dignity or, equally, dishonour and disgrace, which is felt by these people and which happens to be at the very centre of their conflict with Israel. The original humiliating failure to achieve their objective and fulfil their pledge vis-a-vis the triumphant creation of the State of Israel, was repeated by further not less painful military defeats in subsequent years with the Jewish State becoming more prosperous, powerful and confident. Given their disposition of soul, it is difficult to imagine anything more hurtful than this to the Arabs' honour and pride. For them the only way these can be restored is by cleansing their land of all Jews and throwing them into the sea, though it is difficult to say what motivates them more – their sense of disgrace or hatred towards the Israelis and Jews. In any case this outcome is the aspiration and hope of practically all Palestinian Arabs, while many of them have devoted their lives to this objective. Their determination is not limited to rhetoric, slogans or prayers; they equip themselves with weapons and continuously attack Israel and the Israelis. Being refugees, it wouldn't be possible for them to do this without the support and material help from the outside, whether it came from some organisation, or individual states, or the international community.

The overall Arab position as described above is not compromised by their periodic declarations of readiness to compromise, by their occasional talks and negotiations with the Israelis and even by some agreements with them. All these are either meant as propaganda for international consumption, or are acts of political or

economic expediency, or regarded as transitional means, the stepping stones as it were, towards the final objective.

Thus, according to the Arab position, the only way to resolve this conflict is to eliminate the other party, the State of Israel. Irrespective of whether such an objective is reasonable or realistic, the Arabs have been able to pursue it because all these years they have been helped and sustained – economically, politically and military – by someone else, from the outside. This outside help, if nothing else, allows us to say that there are three parties to this conflict.

In fact, the third party, of a variable composition and a changing role, has always been there as an integral part, even before the present conflict began. It was, in a way, its instigator and contributed profusely to its development. Originally the third party was what we may call the Western or Christian world, with its relentless anti-Semitism which drove the Jews to escape this world to their historical birthplace, Palestine, and create there their own home and state. What happened as a result was a precursor of the current conflict. And the third party was there, in situ, and had a clear identity, as the Ottoman Empire at one time and the UK at another, though it was also present as a wider entity.

At present the third party can be defined, broadly, as the international community. It is not shy to exert its influence on the parties or even interfere directly into the conflict – politically, economically, diplomatically and even militarily. It does it collectively, through the United Nations and other organisations, or as individual states. But all this is outside the scope of our deliberations. We are only interested in the financial/material help given to the Palestinian refugees and only in the context of the Arab position.

It goes without saying that refugees, with no income, do need such help. But for how long? The answer seems obvious: till they are settled, one way or another, and are capable of supporting themselves. It hasn't happened to the Palestinian refugees in over 70 years and there are no signs that it will happen any time soon or ever. There are various reasons for this, but underlining them all is, in my opinion, just one – the Arab position. Any settlement at present will necessitate a change in it, readiness to compromise which they are unwilling to grant. For this or any other reason they prefer to carry on the existence of subsidised refugees which allows them to adhere to their position. Thus, what was intended as a temporary and purely humanitarian help turned into an unconditional and open-ended subsidy to the 'eternal' refugees, generation after generation. It not only morally corrupts these people, but protracts the conflict and allows the Arabs to empower themselves with political and even military weapons.

It is not to say that this is the only factor contributing today to the conflict or that there is any bias intent in it. Nevertheless, unaccompanied by proper thinking and a constructive policy, this help by itself maintains the existing status quo and encourages the Arabs to keep their hopeless position alive.

Anthroposophy

Regarding my original intention, I have written enough on the subject of anthroposophy, be it anthroposophy per se, or the Anthroposophical Movement, or the Anthroposophical Society, or anthroposophists. If I decided to return to this subject now it is only because of the new situation in the world created by Covid. I had a question which I wanted to explore: Does the presence of anthroposophy and the anthroposophical community in the world change anything in this situation? Do they make any positive contribution to it or just carry on their parallel and detached existence alongside it?

As it happened, I did write in the past, in my work *Concerning the History of the Anthroposophical Movement*, of an anthroposophical contribution to the world. That contribution, by the Anthroposophical Society and its members, was a negative

one, due to their pretence, after Steiner's death, to be of the high spiritual entity to which they had been elevated by his leadership, but which had ceased to exist when he died. Unfortunately this damaging falsehood continues to exist in the world. However, it doesn't prejudice my present investigation into any anthroposophical contribution to this new situation, if it happens to be there.

By contribution I don't mean here numerous assertions and statements on Covid made by anthroposophists, both professionals and lay people, like my own above. I'm not in a position to judge them and their value. Rather I wish to examine anthroposophical contribution in the light of the principle suggested by Steiner for some critical situations when the wrong or evil can't be removed or avoided (the situation apropos which this principle was suggested by Steiner was created by himself (!) – see the above *Concerning the History of the Anthroposophical Movement*, p.133).

According to Steiner, the best way to confront the unavoidable wrong or evil is to contrapose it with the right and the good. In the anthroposophical context it means to bring into the world the utmost genuine anthroposophical work and also the utmost anthroposophy and spirituality. So what is coming in this respect from the anthroposophical community into the world? In the first place, it is anthroposophy itself. There is no doubt that it is only thanks to anthroposophists and the Anthroposophical Society that anthroposophy continues to be in the world today. And it doesn't only exist – it lives, as is evident from specific anthroposophical activities.

To begin with, it is a process of acquainting oneself with anthroposophy by reading and studying Steiner's revelations about the spiritual world. Thus, its content, its facts, events and beings, enter the earthly domain via a particular individual. When this person deepens his studies and then develops his own anthroposophical thoughts and ideas, the anthroposophical/spiritual content which comes through him into our world becomes much richer. Some individuals grow into true researchers of the world of spirit and then their contribution to our world reaches a very high level.

When individuals striving for anthroposophy come together to pursue their interests collectively, they enrich not only themselves but also their contribution to the world. Their collective work takes different forms – regular study groups, special meetings and events, workshops, seminars, conferences, symposiums, etc. And it concerns not only general anthroposophical knowledge. Many individuals apply it to their professional fields thus enriching both themselves and those fields. They also do it individually and collectively. Of a particular importance and value is the application of the anthroposophical knowledge to practical activities in life like medicine, education, agriculture, economy, social sphere, etc.

And, finally, a very special anthroposophical contribution comes through the meditative work which some anthroposophists carry out diligently and consistently. They work with meditations given by Steiner to anthroposophists to facilitate their connection with the spiritual world. If done properly, an opening to the spiritual world is established for the individual and, through him, a channel between the two worlds. In some cases, to increase its effect, the meditative work is done collectively. All in all, it is impossible to overestimate the value of the meditative work both for those who carry it out and for the world in which they live.

All these examples of the anthroposophical activities are taking place today and are the reality of life. Unfortunately not all of them qualify for 'anthroposophical contributions', which is decided by higher than human beings authorities. But those which are, go on the historical-spiritual record to testify that at the time of the pernicious Covid there has been a healing anthroposophical presence in the world.

Yet someone might object that, firstly, all these activities are not a specific response to the Covid attack and, secondly, they don't amount to much in the face of this attack. I can answer the first objection by saying that there have also been many specific responses to Covid which I mentioned above, without qualifying them spiritually. There might be others, of a deeper spiritual nature, of which I am unaware

or which haven't been made public but which I would be equally unable to qualify. But these specific responses could be qualified as genuine anthroposophical contributions by the spiritual authorities.

As to the anthroposophical presence not amounting to much – the destructive Covid attack should have been met by a powerful anthroposophical counterattack – alas, there isn't much that can be done about it. The presence of anthroposophy and anthroposophists in the world is too modest for this, and their positive contributions to it should be seen at present as their combined response to all wrongs and evils in it. Using Steiner's illustration, on the world scales the pan with wrongs and evils hugely outweighs the other one with what is right and good performed by many people, both individually and collectively. The anthroposophical counterweight is also on this pan but, regrettably, it is too light to tip the balance.