

Andrew Lorand

At the Heart of Biodynamics

The following is an edited version of a talk given at the BDA Conference in Sonoma, California in November, 2001.

Raimundo de Segunda was a very interesting character who lived in the fifteenth century in Spain and in France. He was a teacher, one of those dreaded professors that we heard about the other day. Raimundo de Segunda was not only a good teacher, but he also had some very radical things to say about life, about nature in particular. Raimundo had specific thoughts that he carried through all of his teachings, until he finally summarized them in a book called *The Theology of Nature*. This little-known book expressed his concern about the morality of humanity. His central statement was simply this – and you have to imagine this person being a Catholic professor at a Catholic university in the fifteenth century, in the Middle Ages – : “The gospels were written for sinful humans. The gospels were written out of kindness for sinful humanity, because humanity had lost the capacity to read in the book of nature where God really reveals himself.”

It was Raimundo’s idea, his understanding, his insight into the world that prior to the time of the gospels, humanity had the moral strength to still receive the inspiration and the communication from the spiritual world through nature directly, but that over time humans had lost their direct connection with the spiritual world and became decadent. And the spiritual world in its kindness and its compassion released the religions of the world, including the gospels, as a help, as a kind of medicine for humanity. It was Raimundo de Segunda’s hope that someday humanity would regain the moral quality, the subtlety of observation, the strength of listening, to once again receive spiritual communication from nature all around us here on earth. Many centuries later, a generally unknown philosopher and teacher, Rudolf Steiner, to whom we owe a few debts of thanks for our biodynamic agriculture and a few other things, said that this little book by Raimundo de Segunda was one of the great inspirations for his life, because he believed that everything he was doing, even though it seemed like doing lots of different things, everything he was doing was trying to do what Raimundo de Segunda had hoped for, and that was to bring qualities to human beings, enabling them to have the skills to once again see into the spiritual world through nature, to once again receive communication from the spiritual world directly through our experience of nature.

For me, in some ways, that is the beginning of the heart of biodynamics, and I wanted to share that picture with you. Of course, all of us who are here and everybody I’ve ever met in the biodynamic movement, share some common pictures about biodynamics. We all come to biodynamics in our own way, we develop our own understanding, often slowly and very individually. We all have our unique take; there is no biodynamic dogma. And yet, there are some common threads, some common pictures that I think we all hold, and one of them is of an incredible love of the earth. An incredible love of nature that one can feel, a love of nature and of the earth that is equal to, maybe even greater at times than our love of humanity. This love of nature, this love of the earth is the blood life of the biodynamic movement. You feel it everywhere you go. In every biodynamic garden, in every biodynamic person you meet with, you can feel, without speaking, this love of nature, this love of the earth. There is also a great love of truth and a great love of freedom. Visit any biodynamic farm, talk to any biodynamic consultant, and you will find out that each person has his or her own ideas; there’s a great deal of respect, of mutual respect that lives in our movement and is very inspiring.

There’s also a common understanding that the earth is a living being, that the earth is not just a physical blob, but that it is really a living being, a living, feeling, thinking, self-conscious, self-aware being, and that the earth breathes and lives and digests. The earth in fact is not only a living being, but it is a living being in a living universe. The stars, the planets and the heavens above us are all alive. They are alive in a way that each one of us is alive, with a history and a biography, with feelings and thoughts that change. There is a life cycle and a life span. We understand the universe to be alive and changing, and somehow we all know, even though we do not generally talk about it, we know that the universe is communicating with us every day, at every moment. Some of our greatest hopes, I think, are rising when we are quiet at the end of a long day, or at the end of a long season, making us realize that we have gained additional skills at communicating with nature, additional skills at reading in the great book of nature.

In biodynamics we not only think – and I say this ‘we’ carefully, though I believe this is a common understanding – we not only think of the earth and the heavens as being alive in the physical sense, but we think of the universe as having many spiritual beings that we cannot see,

many forces that we cannot measure. We think of the universe as being spiritually alive. Just like we heard at the beginning of our conference about a sense of connection with people who have passed over the threshold, we also have a sense of the universe as being alive, even if we can't see it all. We have a common understanding that the earth is filled with many different beings that we can see and many that we can't. We accept the vision that there are elemental beings, fairies, and gnomes, who are just as much a part of our agricultural reality as are the angels and archangels and others. We have a sense that we are not alone, and yet we also have a sense that we cannot always communicate with these other beings the way we would like to. In a certain sense biodynamics is a kind of language. I think we have a common feeling that biodynamics is a kind of language that allows us to speak also with these invisible forces and invisible beings as we grope to authentically confront the notion that we are not alone.

So we have a common understanding of the earth as a living being and of the universe to be a living entity that is filled with many mysteries and many beings beyond ourselves. This awareness generates a kind of quiet awe toward the universe and toward our own work that you can feel in every biodynamic garden, in every gardening class, on every farm. We also have a common habit that we actually don't speak very often about these things, at least I have not heard it often, and I myself have not spoken about it much either. But recently I have experienced a renewed sense of awe and a renewed sense of responsibility, and that is the realization that the earth has a life span. The earth is not only alive physically and spiritually, not only does it live in a living universe, but it also has a life span. I am certain that all of us here are not so sure where at this moment the earth is in its life span. But we have a feeling that it is not as healthy as it could be. We know this to be true in physical terms, but there is more than just physical health. It was Rudolf Steiner's impression, and we can take it for what it is, as a hypothesis, that the earth is dying and is past its peak in life, is past its middle age. Those of us who think that maybe we are at our mid-point or beyond, know a little bit about what that feels like: it is a sense of mortality. In biodynamics it is generally felt that our work in part is directed toward a dying earth, though we might not always be conscious of it. I don't want to say that biodynamics is geriatrics, although sometimes it feels that way.

We have the common understanding that the forces of the earth, the youthful forces, the strength of youth, of childhood, are waning, are weakening. This was certainly Rudolf Steiner's impression, and he shared this directly and

indirectly with others, also in connection to farming and the care of the earth. This knowledge is fundamental to the way we work with Rudolf Steiner's practical indications, with the principles and concepts of biodynamics. It is absolutely fundamental that we are trying to support, sustain, enhance, and ennoble the earth's forces of youth and the forces of life. Even though I knew these facts a long time ago, the understanding of them has again and again instilled new respect for the methods that we use in biodynamics, for the ideas that we hold dear, and for the things we're trying to do. These facts are a shared knowledge, I believe, that we hold and that are helpful as a backdrop to some of the things that I would like to share with you today.

One of the remarkable things about Rudolf Steiner's understanding of the earth that is significantly different from modern ecology is the notion that the earth has its own consciousness, that it has its own sense of self, that it is indeed a being imbued with self-awareness. It also has a life span and a self-awareness of this life span. It in reality is a spiritual being and not just a physical body. There are some very fundamental differences between the physical and spiritual in the background of biodynamics, and we all too often, or I all too often, fail to remind myself of the importance of this background in terms of the practical applications in our agricultural work. Rudolf Steiner created a terminology of language that you can read in the Agricultural Course and in his other works which is not particularly familiar to most modern Westerners, and many of his terms feel and sound foreign and distant even today. Therefore I will try to interpret this morning some of the terms, making it more easy to understand them.

Steiner's picture of the earth, and of the individual farm for that matter, even of the individual human being, has more than just physical substance. There are other what he called bodies. Before I leap into that topic, however, I actually meant to explain the terms 'bio' and 'dynamic'. Today I am really trying to talk more about the 'dynamic' side, but the 'bio' side is just as important. I wouldn't want to leave the impression with you that the 'bio' side is not important, while you all know that it is, but I think it's significant to say that biodynamic farmers and gardeners are extremely concerned about bio-diversity, about soil fertility, about integrating cropping and animal systems, about having an integrated pest prevention and management system on each and every farm. We as a group are very much at the forefront of ecological agriculture, and always have been, and I think we have been innovators and have been able to share with the sustainable alternative agricultural movement many of the practices that we have developed. But really, at the heart

of biodynamics, behind all those practices, it is more important to have a sense of responsibility for the earth and the food that we produce, which really is imbued with spiritual forces. Because deep down, I think, many of us feel, sense, and observe that the conventional food we eat is not as healthy as it could be. It is not as strong, not as spiritual, and it doesn't carry the forces that it should. In fact, that is how biodynamics really started. Already in 1924 there were farmers and gardeners who perceived these weaknesses and came to Rudolf Steiner and said, "What can we do? There are these phenomena of decay, these weaknesses, these illnesses. What can we do to strengthen the forces in the life of plants?" It was out of these questions that biodynamics arose. It was a kind of therapeutic question, "What can we do to heal these weaknesses?" By no means do I now wish to intimate the biological side or the 'bio' side of biodynamics in any way. I am sure you know that, but sometimes it's important to say those things into space.

On the 'dynamic' side, even on the spiritual side, it's not always so clear what part it is in biodynamics, and everybody has his or her own stake. But one thing is for certain helpful, and that is looking not at the 'theology of nature', but at the 'theosophy of agriculture'. Rudolf Steiner wrote a book called *Theosophy*, which has been very helpful to me in studying the spiritual background of agriculture, even of an individual farm. In that book, as in many others, Rudolf Steiner describes four different aspects of the earth, four different aspects of each human being, even of each farm. Those four different aspects really are the building blocks, are the ABC of our terminology of language. They are the letters, the vowels, and the consonants of our new language, our new means of communication, our stammering attempts at communicating with Mother Nature. I would like to describe briefly these four aspects and give a bit of a picture about each one, and then try to move from there into explaining where these 'strange' preparations are coming from and what they are all about. Is the 'dynamic side' of biodynamics just the preparations, and is it just working with the star calendar? What in reality is the 'dynamic side', the spiritual side of biodynamics?

So there are these four members of a living body, and I'll write their names down. These (drawing) are Rudolf Steiner's terms, though there are others. Each human being, each animal, each plant, the whole earth, all have these four aspects in one way or another. We are most familiar with the **physical body**. That is the part we feel most comfortable to talk about and are most knowledgeable about. But Rudolf Steiner explained that the physical and the spiritual are not separate at all. In fact, that is one

of the wonderful things about biodynamics, knowing that the 'bio' and the 'dynamic' are one and the same; it is the reason why it's called biodynamic. It's one word. It was Rudolf Steiner's definition – and it is increasingly my impression – that you really can't understand the physical unless you understand the spiritual aspect as well. When we see in the physical world a person and touch the person, we don't just touch the physical part, but in reality we are touching all four members of the body at the same time. Thinking differently is in some way at least a misconception and may just be a moral lapse on our part. It is possibly that it is that part of moral weakness that does not allow us to see into nature.

What are the other members of a living entity? The physical part is the most obvious one. According to Rudolf Steiner's definition, the physical parts are the elements, like calcium, nitrogen, iron, and so on, and the **etheric body** describes already another level of existence. He likened the difference of levels simply between the difference of a dead mineral and a growing plant. The etheric body is often also called the life body or the life force. Rudolf Steiner in his own particular way described the etheric in great detail and differentiated between different kinds of etheric forces. He named four primary etheric forces and described how they work together to create the living plant, animal, or human being. The etheric is the realm of life, and the physical is the realm of death. If the etheric is no longer part of the plant, then the physical laws of chemistry and physics take over, and their laws are really the laws of death and disintegration. It becomes a process of decomposition.

The next is the whole realm of the astral, and here Rudolf Steiner gives us many examples of pointing to the animal world and describing how the difference between the plant and the animal is really the ability of the animal to move around. Motion and emotion is an ample description. So in a very simplistic way, we can define the **astral body** as being the animal aspect of the earth, the animal aspect in us, the movement and the emotion in us, in the animal, and around the plant world.

The final member or aspect is the **ego aspect**, which is the aspect of consciousness, of self-awareness, and of memory. It was Rudolf Steiner's understanding and assumption that we in biodynamics are not just using methods to improve the physical earth, but we are using them to improve the integration of the physical, the etheric, the astral, and the ego on each farm with each of the beings, with each human being that we reach with our food and with our work. Understanding biodynamics simply in terms of methods in the physical world, as

being a better ecological method, would be missing the whole point of recognizing that the earth is a living being with physical and spiritual aspects, and that the farm, an individual farm, also has these many different aspects. There's a kind of secret, or a set of secrets, about the relationships of these different aspects to each another, and biodynamics is right in the middle of these secrets. One of the ways I began to discover these secrets and look at them more carefully was to look at what anthroposophical medicine has to say about the relationships between the different bodies. There is much to say about it, but for today allow me to use Rudolf Steiner's focus on the medical work through the lectures on agriculture. There, as elsewhere, he suggested to focus and look at the relationship between the etheric and the astral. At this point we are not so much interested in the physical aspect, but instead we are interested in consciousness and in awareness, which are qualities being in the realm of freedom. But here we try to focus our attention on the relationship between the etheric and the astral. What does this mean? For one, it means that we are trying to focus our attention on the relationship between the plants and the animals. Let us look at that for a minute together. Let us try to create some pictures here together.

The etheric world or the plant world in many ways is a very pure world. The plant world is untouched by the emotions of the astral world. And yet, without the fertility, which comes from the animals either through the activity of microbes in the soil or the manure-producing animals, much of the relationship of growth and health that lives in the plant world would not be possible. Consequently there is a great deal in biodynamics that focuses on this relationship between the etheric and the astral, in particular on the relationship between crops and the fertility stream. A hitherto secret knowledge that Rudolf Steiner revealed and shared with us, which I find so essential, is that the etheric or the plant world is never really sick. Fundamentally seen, the etheric realm can be either strong or weak, but it never can be sick. Sickness or illness lie in the astral realm, in the realm of motion and emotion, and that's why I believe Rudolf Steiner focused so much attention on cleansing, ennobling, refining the stream of astrality on our farm, because it in reality is the stream of fertility. It is also the waste stream. So much of what we do with our field sprays and with our compost preparations is all about ennobling the astrality of the farm. So in that way biodynamics is very much a therapeutic approach, very much an attempt to speak with nature and to cleanse what is unhealthy, though it is clothed in a different language. When we first learn a foreign language, it seems

foreign to us, it seems distant and complicated, but once we become acquainted with it, we learn to master it.

I would like to leave this image behind now and move to a different picture. I would like to share with you a completely different picture, one that was shared with me by an old farmer and gentleman in Germany. It is a story that dealt with something that Rudolf Steiner mentioned on one of the evenings during the agricultural lectures. Everybody was having dinner, and Rudolf Steiner was talking about the day's events. I think it was on the last night or the second to last night of the lectures. The entire course was overwhelming for everyone. I don't know about you, but when I first read the agricultural lectures, I didn't understand a word. And after all these years, sometimes I pick up the text again, read a section and find at times that I'm still confused about certain things that I read, and I wonder what they mean and how things relate to each other. People at the dinner table in Koberwitz were asking Rudolf Steiner questions, and he was trying to be patient and explain his perspectives. As a way of answering some of the questions, he then developed a picture that he presented: the idea of the farm as an individuality. The farm as an organism having, just like a human being, a physical body, an etheric body, an astral body, and an ego, with all their complex physical and spiritual relationships. The effort needs to be made, Rudolf Steiner stressed, to strengthen the forces coming from the moon and the planets and using preparations that require complicated ways to make and then apply them, preparations which are supposed to bring down these forces into our farm individuality. It was all very overwhelming to these folks, just as it is today for us. What does it all mean, how can we map it all out, how can we understand what he was really talking about? On that evening Rudolf Steiner gave a picture of the agricultural farm individuality that has always been very helpful to me, and I would like to share it with you today. I'll draw the picture. (draws picture)

Rudolf Steiner did not call this image the heart of biodynamics, but he emphasized not to view your farm only as a layout on the surface of the earth. Don't think of your garden or of your farm as an individuality that's just spread over the earth in the horizontal plane. Think of it also as something reaching into the vertical. He further indicated that you can imagine this farm individuality, this wholeness that we are trying to create through establishing a closed system by building up bio-diversity, soil fertility, and so on, as our attempts to create a healthy organism. As little as possible is brought in from the outside in order to create this closed system, which is aimed at strengthening this farm individuality, strengthening the

sense of self, strengthening the healthy relationship between the etheric and the astral. That being created by us, that space, is like a pillar, a pillar that stretches from the stars, from what Rudolf Steiner called the periphery of the universe, right down into the center of the earth. Each farm, each garden, each unique place that we work biodynamically is such a space. It is not just a horizontally spread-out place, but it acts like a column of space that extends from the heavens above to the center of the earth. In reality it is our task in the biodynamic reality to work in that space, to engage in activities that are helping to bridge what is above with what is below. In that space we will be able to create healing substances and use them in ways which will strengthen the spiritual forces that are currently waning from the earth. Without such efforts we would not be successful to strengthen the farm individuality; it would not come about. Rudolf Steiner mentioned that in addition to working with the influence from the stars and planets, we also have to establish a bridge to the elemental beings in nature.

When Rudolf Steiner talked about the image of the pillar in space, he was very much motivated by his attempt to bring across the seriousness of this need to create such spaces. I learned about these facts from the then young Count Adalbert von Keyserlinck, whose parents hosted the conference on agriculture. Each farm is really yearning to be recognized not only as a physical being, but as one having all other spiritual aspects. It is not good enough any more to only believe, – I'm interpreting now, getting enthusiastic about it myself – it is not good enough just to hug the tree. We need to know, we need to learn, to know what it means to work with the etheric and the astral, what it means to put preparations in the compost pile. We need to reach for a new understanding of what it is to make these preparations, which are really mediators between the etheric and the astral. If you look at how almost all the preparations are made, then you will see that they are made in the field of tension between the plant world and the animal world. They go through a process in which they are prepared to become mediators between the etheric and the astral. Honestly, we know so little about biodynamics. We are just at the very, very beginning. But it was Rudolf Steiner's impression that his practical indications, the things he suggested, could not be understood unless we understood the fact that the farm individuality is not just the physical part, but it is the integration of the physical, etheric, astral, and ego forces on the farm, and as such this individual is like a child. A child whose care is incumbent upon us, whose stages of development we need to recognize, that each

farm has its own biography, its own character. It is a being that lives in space, just like we live in space. Each one of us is a column in space.

It is that kind of respect and intimacy that you can sense in every biodynamic garden and on every biodynamic farm. It is the kind of intimacy and respect that you feel when two people who know each other are trying to talk. Two people who know each other don't talk loudly to each other. Two people who want to communicate something important of their lives stand close, they touch, they communicate in more ways than plain language. I believe it is that kind of intimate communication that the language of biodynamics can facilitate in our quest for understanding nature, in our quest for taking care of the earth, and in our quest for taking care of our farms and gardens. I think we all have this feeling of enormous love and protection for the work that we do on the land with our farms and gardens. And this image of the farm individuality as a pillar gives us, I think, another perspective, another understanding of what this farm really is and how in this space between heaven and earth, between the deep center of the earth and the far periphery of the cosmos our farm exists, how the forces of the physical, the etheric, the astral, and the ego work and weave together.

At the heart of biodynamics is an enormous love for the earth, an enormous respect for Rudolf Steiner's ideas, although we may not comprehend everything Rudolf Steiner had to say. I find a lot of what he had to say about economics very confusing, but there is an enormous love of task within biodynamics, resting at the very heart of it. If nothing else, I hope that you can feel the intimacies when you visit biodynamic farms, and that it will inspire you to do the work that you are doing and that needs to be done.

I think that's all I want to say right now. If you have any questions or thoughts or comments, please let me know. Thank you very much for listening so attentively and carefully, and I hope that the rest of the conference, short as the time might be, will be of further inspiration to you. I personally want to thank you for coming. Every conference like this is really a home-coming for me. If you look around at the people that have been in this movement for a long time, you may not always agree with everything that is being expressed, but in reality we are a family, and I want to welcome you to that family, to the family of biodynamics. Thank you for listening.

Andrew Lorand is a biodynamic farmer, educator and Executive Director of the Kolisko Institute, a non-profit organization dedicated to furthering research and education in biodynamics.