

EURYTHMY IN ORGANISATIONS

*"Virtue is the human skill or capacity to hold the balance
between the too much and the too little."*

Aristotle

In Aristotle's words, if we care to look more deeply, we can discover many truths. For 'virtue' we can substitute any number of other qualities - leadership, team work, right relating, successful working together, or even, becoming truly human - and the statement will still hold true. All the qualities contained in the word 'virtue' are qualities that would benefit any organisation and its members if fostered.

What strikes one in this statement is that virtue is something that can be learnt; it is not, like a talent, something that we are either born with or without, but it is a skill or capacity that through training and practice can be acquired. But then again, that skill, that capacity, is not a static "thing", an absolute, a formula. Implicit in Aristotle's words is the fact that the virtuous solution of yesterday's problem is not necessarily virtuous when applied to today's situation. Life is change. Holding the balance between the too much and the too little is not a static state of being but a dynamic activity requiring acute consciousness not just of what one is doing but of how one does it in response to all the ever-changing factors both around and within one. Like a tightrope walker it requires a firm, sure foot but a light touch, a constant awareness of gravity but a rising into weightlessness, a sensitive but strong focus on the thin line that must be walked while simultaneously holding the whole sphere in which it is suspended. In short it requires a strong and simultaneous awareness of both centre and periphery and the creative energy of that which lives between.

Virtue (or leadership etc.) is therefore not a simple matter of choosing either/or, good or bad, right or wrong. It is not a twofold exercise of choosing the 'right' formula from a set of values set down by the society, religious group, corporation or culture in which we live and work. The dynamic of holding the balance falls always to the individual. It is the threefold activity of the too much, the too little and the individual between, forging a conscious response to the particular situation at hand by embracing the right mix of two extremes. No one could learn to walk for us. They could guide, encourage, support here and there, but each one of us had to find our own sense of balance to take our first free steps in the world. And although we have become unconscious of it, all that acquired skill and wisdom we learnt as toddlers is still at work every time we take a step, every time we move.

How does all this relate to Eurythmy? What is Eurythmy?

The word Eurythmy, literally translated from the Greek, means 'beautiful movement'. 'Beautiful' not just in the aesthetic sense of graceful, harmonious etc., but 'beautiful' as in 'true to itself'. Eurythmy is the art of movement based not on the mechanical ability of the physical body to move, but is created out of the great unseen rhythms of the universe; the movement which creates the rhythms of the day and the year, the movement from whence all form arises, from the crags and folds of a mountain to the minutest detail on a fern leaf. That movement which finds its highest expression in the form and life of the human being and specifically and uniquely in human speech- the ability to sound the word in all its manifold expressions of form and gesture. That same movement which like a strong but unseen

current pulses through the ebb and flow of social life, of social process, of the group dynamics of all human communities.

In our daily life, working and interacting with others, we are mostly unconscious of this underlying flow and hence are often swept along by the current, struggling to keep afloat, grasping at sticks and rocks along the way in a desperate attempt to find stability and security. Or we try to dam it up, confine it within strong walls in order to gain some control of it, only to find that in its stillness it has become stagnant and all life has ebbed away. Would it not be better to, like a surfer, learn to 'see' the wave, learn to read it in its forming, its rising and its peaking, learn to use that energy to carve and tack our way through life, sometimes being engulfed in the white water, sometimes cresting the lip, but always being exhilaratingly and creatively free within the confines of the given.

Through engaging with the laws underlying this living movement Eurythmy starts to make visible the processes of human interaction and dynamic. In that it is group movement, Eurythmy provides the forum to explore social process, for instance in the way in which an organisation develops from a simple form, through differentiation into a highly complex living system. Working with fundamental principles such as 'giving and receiving' or 'space, time and relationship' we can experience how small changes in any one of the above because of our own behaviour can lead to enormous changes (either positive or negative) in the dynamic of the group. The difference between the surfer riding the wave and ourselves functioning in a group is that in the latter we are both the surfer and the wave. What we bring to a group in who we are and how we behave co-creates 'the wave' together with the other group members. As we struggle to find and hold the balance like the surfer, the 'wave' will dance and change accordingly. Eurythmy allows us to experience being both participant and observer at the same time. We practise the ability to engage fully with our particular responsibility in the flow of movement while simultaneously maintaining a 'bird's eye' view of the whole. In fact we discover that the more centred and clear we are in ourselves, the easier it is to hold an awareness of the whole.

Eurythmy demands of us that we not only see the individual members of the group but that we begin to discern patterns and relationships, the flow of movement and form that arises 'between.' Betty Edwards, in her book "Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain" has created drawing exercises to develop a way of seeing not only the discrete object but the object in relationship to that which is around it. By drawing the 'negative' space between, we become aware of that which unites the whole and gives it meaning and form. The exercises in Eurythmy can take this practice a step further; a step into both 3-dimensional space and into time. Not only do we learn to see things in relationship, but we experience relationships constantly changing in space and time. It is very difficult to think in a non-linear way through all the complex dynamics of different relationships and how they change and affect each other in time. But in movement we can directly experience and observe what happens when different processes are integrated concurrently in space, the complexity of the resulting relationships and the individual awareness needed of each other and of all the principles at work in order for it not to dissolve into chaos. Life is non-linear in nature and through the acute observation and conscious movement of Eurythmy we can stimulate a type of active, living, non-linear thinking.

The quality and character of that which is created in Eurythmy is entirely dependent on the inner activity of each individual. In the set exercises it is not enough to know and just follow 'the plan'. As all is in motion the participant has to, in every moment, hold the balance

between the too much and the too little, has to respond to the multitudinous small changes that occur in a group in motion. He/she has to develop a sensitivity to the other while also being ready to take the initiative when the situation calls for it. In the more improvisational exercises the participant practises functioning in the face of uncertainty, learns to create out of the moment and develops trust in his own creativity while remaining true to the underlying principle holding the whole.

Not only are we challenged in Eurythmy by that which changes around us but we are confronted by the very real feelings and experiences, assumptions and judgments which arise within us. Through Eurythmy we can experience spatially an inner reality, i.e. that transformation happens not by changing the outer form but through a growing inner awareness and a change in our personal orientation to or perspective of the outer.

Throughout all the Eurythmy exercises the underlying thread is the development and the strengthening of the inner nature of the individual. Eurythmy has been called by its founder, Rudolf Steiner, "gymnastics of the soul". Here is a form of movement which focuses not on flexing physical muscles but on exercising inner flexibility and adaptability, keen observation, awareness of self and other, patterns and flow, and the ability to discern the fundamental principles at work in them. In short, Eurythmy can strengthen the independence of the individual and hence our security in ourselves to respond creatively to the ebb and flow of living situations. By embracing the paradoxes of life and holding the balance of extremes we discover a willingness to give over to something greater than ourselves which, when consciously worked with, has a rejuvenating and harmonising effect on our whole being and that of the group in which we are working.

And it is our whole selves which we must bring to our work and life for in the words of Winfried Deijmann:

"An educated mind is useless without a focused will and dangerous without a loving heart."

Liz Smith, 2002