

Karlsruhe, May 27th, 2015

Total Destruction, Tears, Traumata

At the Pashupati-Tempel, the place for Hindu cremation in Kathmandu, day and night dark columns of smoke ascend to the sky. In Nepal's largest crematorium hundreds of families cremate their relatives, the victims of the devastating earthquake. The severe earthquake visibly scared the people.

It is the biggest catastrophe in Nepal in 80 years: on April 24th, 2015 a 7.8 magnitude earthquake shook the Himalayan region. To date over 8,000 dead have been pulled from the rubble. According to data from the UN- Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) three million people have lost their homes.¹ The traumatised survivors sleep by the thousands under tarp tents, in provisional housing, or in the open air. This also includes many children and youths, who were separated from their parents during the catastrophe. About 1.3 million minors are dependent on assistance from others. Aftershocks, some of them quite strong, strike the country daily and terrify people over and over again.

During the afternoon of May 12th, 2015, a second severe earthquake with a magnitude of 7.3 shook Nepal.² The 13-person emergency pedagogy crisis intervention team³ from the Friends of Waldorf Education, which was in Nepal from May 9th to the 23rd to help traumatised children to process their experiences, experienced the far-reaching quake first-hand.

First Aid for the Soul in the Shock Phase after the Earthquake

Sunita (7) and Rushi (6)⁴ go into a panic at the first sign of the earthquake. Their eyes open wide, their facial muscles freeze. They run around disorientated, scream with all their might, and their whole bodies tremble. Finally both crawl into the arms of an emergency pedagogue.

The strong earthquake on May 12th hit the emergency pedagogy team in Shanti Sewa Grisha in Tilgange/Kathmandu, a Leprosy hospital with an affiliated orphanage and Waldorf school. Everything began to quake, shingles fell from the roof, water tanks burst.

Thanks to the level headedness of the co-workers of Shanti and the professional conduct of the emergency teams, all the children and occupants of the centre could be evacuated into the open.

In the middle of the chaos, the emergency team began acute interventions. For the injured, first aid was given and disoriented people in an acute state of shock were reoriented and calmed with stabilising techniques. Parallel to that an emergency pedagogical intervention with over 150 children began. Rhythm and movement exercises in a circle, body-geographically exercises, and experiential pedagogical activities quickly dissolved the traumatic state of shock. After a few hours, the children could be accompanied back to their homes and given a feeling of safety.

Emergency Pedagogy helps traumatised children in Nepalese village region

The villages in the mountainous regions of Nepal were hit even worse by the earthquake than the cities. Many were totally destroyed by mountain slides and debris flow. The village of Bimdhunga, situated 10 kilometres north of Kathmandu, was also severely damaged. There in the village school, the team from the Friends of Waldorf Education in cooperation with the Nepalese organisation "Read Nepal" offered daily emergency pedagogy for 350 children, ages 2 to 14 years.

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Krishna (13) draws himself next to his house. The picture is literally „floorless“. The eyes of the boy are wide open in the drawing. A mouth was not drawn on the face, which could be interpreted as an expression for the voicelessness brought on by trauma. In the drawing workshop, the traumata experienced by the children could be visually witnessed. Here, what could not be voiced was communicated unconsciously through the visual medium.

Emergency pedagogical interventions should stabilize traumatised children.⁵ They can help to process debilitating experiences and integrate them into the childhood biography.⁶ ⁷In acute interventions, regulation of eye movements suspend flashbacks and by slowing down the breath, panic attacks can be made milder. Nightmares can be transformed by making gentle changes to the traumatic dreams in conversation together with the children. Forced, traumatised play is positively influenced, when pedagogue and child search together for possible creative solutions.

Movement games counteract paralyse brought about by movement aversion and help with processing the traumata. Rebuilding a rhythmic daily routine helps to create new order in a collapsed and chaotic world. Ritualised procedures give new support, orientation, and security.⁸ Traumatic experiences can usually only be overcome when one learns to talk about them. If children cannot voice their experiences, other creative expression possibilities need to be found, like painting, drawing, music, and dance.⁹

Especially traumatising experiences include experiences of powerlessness, which can for example be brought about by shaking. The collective planning and implementation of small, peradventure charitable projects, during adolescence can help, to gain back confidence in one's own creative power and find a new competence to act independently.¹⁰

Psychoeducation and Methodology Training for pre-school and school teachers

In order to find their own balance again, traumatised children need stable adults. But after a catastrophe, most adults, teachers, and pedagogical caretaker are also traumatised. Shresta (23) is a teacher at the Bimdhunga village school. Since the earthquake, she has been easily startled and overly anxious. Every shake triggers in her a flashback to the catastrophe. She is nervous, can hardly sleep and is plagued by nightly nightmares. She is barely capable of mastering her everyday life and performing adequately to some degree at her job.

Alongside an extensive psychoeducation to understand trauma, parents, teachers, and caretakers need to learn methods of self stabilisation. By means of centring, distancing, and breathing techniques, and also through relaxation exercises, they learn to alleviate stress and find their inner balance again. Only then are they once again capable to transfer their own peace on to the children and psychosocially stabilize them.

On top of this, parents and teachers are often incapable of understanding the changed behaviour of the children after a traumatising event and they react helplessly. Therefore in addition to acute care of children, an important task of emergency pedagogical crisis intervention includes informing teachers and preschool teachers about the origins, process, and possible consequences of psychotraumatization and to show them emergency pedagogical strategies to use against trauma-related behaviours in children and youths.

Sustainable Results

The emergency pedagogical crisis intervention of the Friends of Waldorf Education in Nepal brought sustainable results. All together, close to 2,000 children during a total of 12 intervention days could be treated with emergency pedagogy and about 60 pedagogues further educated in emergency pedagogy. Furthermore, about 250 patients were medically cared for or advised in the mobile clinic. In addition, during the second earthquake on May 12th, 2015 the emergency team proved themselves to be effective in an acute catastrophe situation and the Waldorf pedagogy based

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stabilisation methods proved themselves to be effective in the acute shock phase of the trauma process.

In about three months, the Friends of Waldorf Education are planning a follow-up mission in the Nepalese earthquake area.

The children and youth of Nepal are the future of the country. To support them in the processing of their traumata is not only a humanitarian act, but also a sustainable aid for Nepal's development in the future.

Bernd Ruf
Mission Leader

Annotations

¹ Wohl halbe Million Häuser in Nepal zerstört oder beschädigt. Stern.de, 7.5.2015, 08.30

² Dutzende Tote und Panik bei Nachbeben in Nepal. Stern.de, 12.5.2015, 18.18

³ The international emergency pedagogical crisis intervention team was made up of: Maria Derrez (curative pedagogue/Germany), Moises Elosua (Waldorf teacher, experiential pedagogue/emergency pedagogical team Chile), Peter Elsen (Eurythmist/Germany), Minka Görzel-Straube (Waldorf teacher, trauma pedagogue and pedagogical team leader/Germany), Christopher Huditz (Diploma Social Worker, Team coordinator/Germany), Irina Jankowski (Art therapist/Germany), Reinaldo Nascimento (Waldorf teacher, experiential pedagogue/emergency pedagogical team Brazil), Dr. Johannes Portner (Doctor and medical team leader/Germany), Cathrin Ruf (Waldorf pre-school teacher/Germany), Bernd Rud (Waldorf teacher, special education teacher, and mission leader/Germany), Jorge Schaffer (curative pedagogue/emergency pedagogical team leader Argentina), Sabi Thapa (Interpreter and Assistant/Nepal), Andrea Wiebelitz (Waldorf pre-school teacher/Germany).

⁴ Names changed by author

⁵ Ruf, B. (2012): Trümmer und Traumata. Anthroposophische Grundlagen notfallpädagogischer Einsätze. Arlesheim

⁶ Harald Karutz, Frank Lasogga (2008): Kinder in Notfällen. Psychische Erste Hilfe und Nachsorge. Edewecht

⁷ Jo Eckardt (2005): Kinder und Trauma. Göttingen

⁸ Ruf, B. (2011): Erste Hilfe für die Seele. Wie Kinder und Jugendliche durch Notfallpädagogik schwere Traumata überwinden lernen. In: Neider, A. (Hrsg.) (2011): Krisenbewältigung, Widerstandskräfte, Soziale Bindungen im Kindes- und Jugendalter. Stuttgart.173 – 230

⁹ Ruf, B. (2011): Erste Hilfe für die Seele. Wie Kinder und Jugendliche durch Notfallpädagogik schwere Traumata überwinden lernen. In: Neider, A. (Hrsg.) (2011): Krisenbewältigung, Widerstandskräfte, Soziale Bindungen im Kindes- und Jugendalter. Stuttgart.173 – 230

¹⁰ Peter Levine, Maggie Kline (2010): Kinder vor seelischen Verletzungen schützen. München

*The **Friends of Waldorf Education** is worldwide sponsors of a free education system. Since 1971 they advocate for Waldorf education and the freedom of education systems. Since 1993 the office in Karlsruhe organizes and supervises international volunteer services worldwide. Since summer 2011 it is possible to complete a 12-month civil service in anthropomorphic institutions through the association.*

Since 2006 the Friends of Waldorf Education are active in the area of emergency pedagogy. Following the outbreak of a war or a natural disaster, they worked with psychologically traumatized children and adolescents in Lebanon (2006), China (2008 and 2013); Gaza (2009-2013), Indonesia (2009), Haiti (2010), Kyrgyzstan (2010), Japan (2011), and Kenya (2012-2013), , the Philippines (2013-2015), Kurdistan-Iraq (2013-2015), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014).



Freunde der Erziehungskunst is a member of **Germany's Relief Coalition**, a union of German relief organisations that can provide rapid and effective aid in the case of large catastrophes and emergency situations abroad.