

# Under the BD Bonnet

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## The presentation of biodynamics

In 2021 the BDA turned its focus upon itself in a Genius Personae project, with the intention of understanding where it has come from and what its task is now. A thread that runs throughout the BDA's history has been its struggle with the best way to present biodynamics to the public.

Does one embrace spiritual science as a USP which differentiates BD from most other approaches to helping the planet? Or is that same foundation impossible to understand, and unhelpful when talking even with potential allies? A hostage to fortune, or cool water for parched souls?

## The roots of this

Dr Steiner and other early pioneers agreed that the original lectures should be kept close to the collective Anthroposophical chest until such time as biodynamics could demonstrate efficacy as manifest in standard parameters. Until then, those with access were required to sign a non-disclosure agreement<sup>1</sup> for decades after the 1924 Koberwitz event.

John Paull<sup>2</sup> thought that the 1938 publication of Ehrenfried Pfeiffer's *'BD Gardening and Farming'*<sup>3</sup> was the first opportunity to lift that embargo but the Koberwitz lectures only became fully available to the public from 1963. During those intervening years there were advocates for full disclosure and others for great



caution. Lilly Kolisko would appear to be in the former stable. In her introduction to the 1946 *Agriculture of Tomorrow*<sup>4</sup> she wrote:

"It is to be regretted that the original lecture course of Rudolf Steiner is not yet published and is only entrusted to a relatively small group of farmers, gardeners and other personalities in the form of a private manuscript."

However, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer declared 'the book' to be a grave problem! He wrote to Lady Mackinnon<sup>5</sup>:

"There are of course grave problems like the book by Frau Kolisko, and I wonder how the Mier group feels about it? Our tendency should always be to put the practical aspect into the foreground as far as the public representation is concerned. The publicly discussing of the aetheric and astral or cosmic forces in our movement lacks still a solid basis of a scientific representation and is apt to create too much the odour of mysticism."

Pfeiffer gave this further attention in a letter<sup>6</sup> later that year. "First, there should by all means

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be maintained an internal circle of Anthroposophical Farmers and Gardeners who do research work, investigation, and work out such schemes that the Anthroposophical agricultural ideas of Dr. Steiner can be made understandable to the general public. In fact this internal group is the research group proper who bring down the message of the spiritual worlds into practical forms. This ought to be a study group which studies, in particular, the Agriculture Course of Dr. Steiner, brings its own experiences and brings all this together into one unit of knowledge and wisdom. Second, the Biodynamic Association is to represent the experience based on the application of the Biodynamic Method to the outer public, that is, to those farmers and gardeners who are not able or willing to deal with the Anthroposophical ideas, but still want to use and apply the Bio-Dynamic method. Within our own ranks opinions differ..."

This careful distinction between public presentation and deeper understanding and research makes sense.

1. <https://considera.org/wpwp/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/undertaking.jpg>

2. [https://considera.org/downloads/Published%20Papers/6\(1\)-Paull-pp27-41.pdf](https://considera.org/downloads/Published%20Papers/6(1)-Paull-pp27-41.pdf)

3. <https://considera.org/wpwp/research-published/>

4. <https://www.koliskoarchive.com/download-agriculture-of-tomorrow.php>

5. <https://considera.org/wpwp/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/PfeifferToMacKinnon.pdf>

6. <https://considera.org/wpwp/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/PfeifferNancyFisher.pdf>

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### Mission creep

My concern is that caution in discussion of the worldview behind biodynamics has seeped beyond the arena where it is appropriate. Where can this be seen?

It can be seen in a certain apathy towards understanding the deeper roots of biodynamics. I would love to see more energetic engagement in building upon those spiritual-scientific foundations. This deficit results in parts of the BD world becoming inflexible, ineffective and, in the worst cases, dogmatic.

Could it be that Pfeiffer's inclination to bring the organische aspect of BD to the attention of the public has contributed to the atrophy of the energetic or *dynamische* aspect, even in anthroposophical circles?

### A possible way forward

Given that the genius personae process looked back with the intention of understanding how to move on, here are some thoughts about a possible future with which I resonate. First from a Glen Atkinson Podcast<sup>7</sup>:

"Pfeiffer, being the first generation, was really attempting to get BD on to the Earth, and so he tended to up-play the biological reality, and down-play the energetic reality of all these things – from my impression. And the next generation tended to do the same. People like Koepf in his book, he was really focussing on the [material] scientific realities of Biodynamics, and I've got to say I feel it's now my generation's task to bring back the knowledge of the energetic realities... that it's biological forces we're playing with."

### Stewart Lundy<sup>8</sup>:

"What do I see for the future of

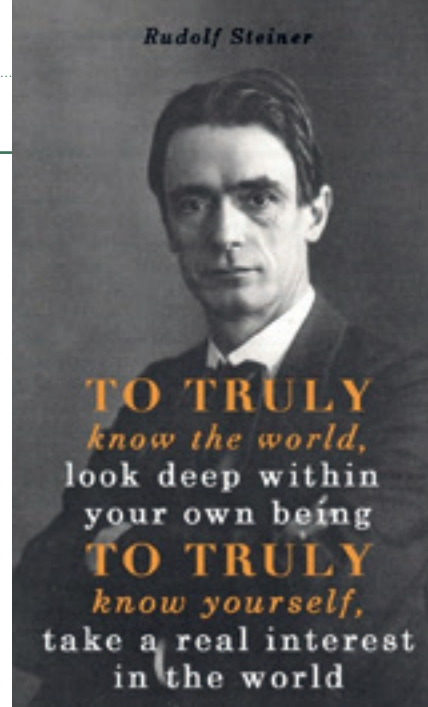
biodynamics? I think we should keep being the weirdos and not dumb it down because people are actually at a point where I think they're hungry for the spiritual world. I think the whole purpose of the Kali Yuga, this dark night of our collective soul, was to dim our senses to the spiritual world so that we become more receptive to that light. It's meant to awaken the hunger for the spiritual world. So I think it has served a very important purpose. It's given us a scientific method. But if we were to dumb it down or make it too accessible in the sense of doing away with all the weird terminology or the (seemingly) otherworldly concepts, it'll stop being what it is.

I think people are ready for the idea of renewing the spiritual foundations of agriculture. If we start to water biodynamics down, we actually lose people because then it sounds like organic, permaculture, or regenerative agriculture. And while all of those certainly are our allies, I think we need to maintain the fact that we're talking not just about productivity or symbiosis in an ecosystem. We're talking about the ecology of the physical, etheric, astral, and spiritual worlds. So, I see the path forward for biodynamics as a renewed commitment to its foundations. And I think the world will rush to it, especially with a tool like the internet. Now, people can find anything they're interested in and plug into it. I think the future is where we have the opportunity to speak about biodynamics out of anthroposophy without having to hem and haw about it because an open audience will find us.

### Presentation and efficacy

This approach motivates me. Above all it does so because I think in embracing our USP we have the chance to be the most effective. We are in a culture where things spiritual are seen as the opposite of practical. Steiner was of the opinion that the deepest practicality only emerges from the deepest spiritual work.

By inclination I'm a look-under-the-bonnet type and so I am naturally inclined to advocate for this path. I want to really know how BD works, its weaknesses and strengths, where



it struggles and where it needs help and how it has to adapt now that it is 100 years old.

This may best suit an R&D mindset. To those who prefer to be busy on the fields, and those who work from their gut feelings, those with green thumbs and peasant wisdom... this may seem very abstract. I don't want to knock anything off the rails for you guys.

I realise the potential drawback of my particular path. Action can be *sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought*. To avoid being lost in head stuff requires triangulating with trials and with what intuition remains - as reality checks. It also places an extra onus on listening to and liaising with those with different approaches.

Dr Steiner mentioned<sup>9</sup> two ways that the promotion of practical outcomes of anthroposophy can miss the mark. There are those who think that professionals (including farmers) can be made into anthroposophists at the drop of a *bonne mot* or two. Neither have such a sharp turning circle. Then he warned against "a sloppy patchwork of anthroposophy and [material] science. That will not bring us forward at all." That does set the parameters rather succinctly.

With that challenge in mind and the opinion that a proud embrace of biodynamics' roots can only be successfully grounded with communal effort, I would be delighted to hear what you think.

Mark is the Charity Manager for the Biodynamic association and also has a useful website with lots of goodies, including research references.

9. <https://considera.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/RStoExpO.pdf>

7. No longer at original URL. Available from the author on request

8. <https://considera.org/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=2895>