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Birth and death are more than thresholds of life

Conference for a Culture at the Threshold at the Goetheanum

Human beings are increasingly influencing the limits of their lives: the date of birth is planned by Caesarean section, and the moment of death moved forward by euthanasia. Experts from the fields of support that accompany birth and care for the dying will discuss the worthy design of these two life thresholds.

“Pregnancies that are prematurely terminated by Caesarean section and people who cannot let go in view of their approaching death are phenomena that make us ask questions about the dignity of humanity,” says Joan Sleigh, co-responsible for the conference Culture at the Threshold, for the General Anthroposophical Section at the Goetheanum. She can understand that human beings also strive for autonomy in these areas of life, for after birth each individual becomes increasingly independent: It leaves the womb, emancipates itself from its parents and finally takes responsibility for its own life.

“Freedom gains value where it becomes aware of its field of engagement and the consequences of its actions,” says Joan Sleigh. In the process of dying, whether through the desire to leave life “earlier than the body intended” or “at the predestined moment”, strong pain, loneliness or fear of dying often accompany the process. Palliative medicine today has means to relieve pain, and human care helps against loneliness.

A starting point to engage with the relevance of birth and death in human life is falling asleep and waking up. “With the phrase ‘Sleep is the little brother of death’ in mind, I can take on to do something during the day that supports my sleep, and let the impulses with which I awake, inspire my day.” This practice can enable one to become aware of how to let go of consciousness and still live on. And it shows that our actions are also motivated by layers beyond the daily consciousness. As an analogy, the practice opens up new perspectives of birth being preceded by a being and of death whose time is rooted in human destiny and initiates life in another consciousness.

(2010 characters/SJ; translation by Joan Sleigh)

**Conference** Soul Courage and Self Transformation at the Threshold, 6 to 8 December 2019, Goetheanum
**Web** www.goetheanum.org/en/conferences/soul-courage-and-self-transformation-at-the-threshold

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