



Santa Fe, December 3, 2009

Charlotte Selver Oral History and Book Project

Dear Friends of Sensory Awareness,

Just as I sit down now to write to you, so too the young Charlotte Selver-Wittgenstein sat down to write to her beloved Heinrich on most days when she was away from him (and she was gone a lot). Heinrich did the same, though he might have had some trouble keeping up with Charlotte. Luckily – and amazingly – these letters survived separation, emigration and many other challenges and eight decades later they are invaluable to me as the primary source of information about Charlotte's early life. The sheer volume of letters is stunning: over 800 plus many more between her and her parents and friends. Combing through them has taken longer than expected, much of this year, but it is an extremely fruitful process as so much lies in these letters that brings Charlotte to life for us today. To simply read through them is not enough. It sometimes takes several readings before a relatively obscure passage in a seemingly irrelevant letter suddenly reveals important information. Here are two examples:

In a letter from November 1925 that has otherwise little to do with her work Charlotte suddenly ponders: *“Am I such a faithful follower of Bode-Gymnastik (after my experiences with Gindler) that I feel so committed to Bode's cause? Hidden within me isn't there a fire of devotion burning for a much farther reaching idea? Is it more important to work on oneself and through that to find ever more clarity in one's work with a small circle of students or would it be better to focus on touching the many with Bode-Gymnastik while still working on oneself? Is this or that egotistical? Is this or that sacrifice? I cannot find an answer to these questions. Both voices in me are valid and I do not have the strength to decide.”*



Charlotte Wittgenstein and Bode-Gymnastik workshop participants on the beach in Warnemünde, Summer 1926.

Evidently she did decide to go with Bode and for the years to come she was fully focused on building her career as a teacher of Bode-Gymnastik. But a deeper calling was never far below the surface. In June 1926, Charlotte writes from Warnemünde: *“Nothing in my life has touched me more than the realization that Elsa Gindler's relationship with her life's work is like my relationship with you. I*



see germinating in her the same feeling toward consciousness that I have toward our love. Deep within me lies the potential to perfect myself as I work to fulfill the ideal of this love. This is my wealth, this is my calling – to be your wife.” These passages are illuminating for a number of reasons. To point out just one that I find particularly intriguing: Charlotte's recognition that Gindler was discovering consciousness as central to her work. At that time Charlotte was completely focused on Bode-Gymnastik, yet when she writes about her deepest desires, Gindler comes immediately to mind and consciousness and love stand side by side.

While devoting much time to these letters I also conducted more interviews, most of them in Europe. To date I have interviewed about 70 people for the Oral History part of this project and to gather information for the book. More will follow next week when I travel to California. This time I will meet mostly with former students of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi to document Charlotte's connection with San Francisco Zen Center.

Such deep research is crucial for a meaningful account of Charlotte Selver's life. It takes time and it requires the support of many. Thank you for the tremendous generosity I have experienced over the past two years. I now ask for your support again so that this work can go on. Raising \$60,000 for 2010 is crucial for continued research and writing. Every single dollar is a step in that direction. Small and large donations are equally welcome and will be received with great appreciation.

Tax-deductible donations, earmarked for the 'book project' can be made to the Sensory Awareness Foundation, 23 Wallace Way, San Rafael, CA 94903. If you do not need the tax deduction or if you don't reside in the US, send your donations directly to me (for more options visit the web site).*

Thank you!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt

PS: Thanks to modern technology I have the ability to let you take part in my journey and share some of the "harvest" with you as I go along. On the web site www.CharlotteSclverBiography.org you can find excerpts from interviews, reflections and a log of my activities. Members – people who actively support this project – can access even more materials and receive an occasional e-newsletter.

* When sending donations directly to me make the check out to 'Pathways of Sensory Awareness' and send it to the address below.