

Thus this main lesson is focused on the deeply spiritual theme of human freedom as it develops over the eons. Having said that, we are working from an understanding that these spiritual forces manifest in the everyday life of a people. Thus we must not, as Werner Glas in *The Waldorf School Approach to History* reminds us, merely think in terms of “religious beliefs” of different peoples as if this is both a separate category of human activity as well as being somehow unrelated from one culture to the next. From an anthroposophical point of view, these four cultures (and we, like most Waldorf teachers, divide the Egypto-Chaldean into the Babylonian and Egyptian) are not chosen arbitrarily. Together they form a particular and cohesive picture of the development of human consciousness. A basic tenet of Waldorf education is that each child recapitulates the development of humankind in her own development: the Waldorf curriculum is designed to reflect this growth, emphasizing material which speaks to the soul development of the child at each juncture of her life journey. At age 11, the key stage of growth is the child’s awakening to Time and to her arrival at pre-puberty. She is becoming an “I” and the recapitulation of the larger journey of humankind toward this goal on a macro level, confirms her own inner (micro) journey toward the same goal.

Thus the emphasis in the main lesson is on the stories – and for each culture we are pleased to present the wonderful stories which we consider to carry the core of that culture’s spiritual impulse. In addition, the child also needs to ground herself in Time and for that, she needs to develop a sense for history. And so we take our first little steps toward history in this main lesson by having a look at some of the historic developments of the people of the Egypto-Chaldean epoch. Those who lived in the time of the Indian and Persian epochs are too far back in the mists of time for us to know very much about them: if you look in a history book for information about these two cultures you will find plenty, but it will be about Indians and Persians who lived well after the times we are addressing. The Ancient Indian cultural epoch is rooted in the arrival of the Seven Holy Rishis in India – from Atlantis. This is reflected in the story of Manu and the Flood. Again, whilst the *Mahabharata* was written down only 2,000 years ago, the stories themselves are much, much older. The theme of “from myth to history” will be taken up much more strongly in the main lessons on Ancient China and on Ancient Greece.

Do bear in mind that these four cultures are not successive – we are looking at the spiritual impulse of each cultural epoch. But the cultures themselves and their development of course overlap. According to Rudolf Steiner, Zarathustra, founder of the Persian culture, was a follower of the Seven Holy Rishis and must not be confused with the later historical figure of the same name. For the most part, what we know of each culture in the historic sense dates from that time in which that culture was already in decline. A challenge for teachers of this main lesson is to bridge the early spiritual impulses of each culture with the later historical picture that we are more familiar with.

Please do not get too concerned with historical dates. Just as the Dreamtime consciousness of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia defies our modern Western concepts of time and dating, so too much of what we are dealing with in this main lesson does not fit neatly into the usual accepted sequence of things. The fact that one of the central stories of the Indian epoch begins in Atlantis will undoubtedly challenge many of you! As always, parents are encouraged to make this main lesson their own; to try to come to their own understanding of its goal within Waldorf education, and then