For Simone Weil (1909-1943), a French philosopher and mystic of Jewish descent, life is the search for the Absolute. She says: "It is not important to make people happy, but to find meaning for existence." Her own meaning she ultimately finds in her relationship to the divine.
Throughout her life, the French philosopher and mystic seeks a spiritual answer to her despair over the state of the world.

After her studies in philosophy and during her subsequent teaching career, she engages herself politically and in the union. Her concern is a better working world, in which humans are not just working robots, but a world in which what is human is fostered by art and further education. To this end, she gives free courses and evening discussions to factory workers, trying to reconcile mental and physical work with one another.

During this time, she takes a year of unpaid leave of absence to get to know the conditions of the industrial workplace. However, her efforts exceed her physical and mental strength thus she quits this endeavor.

Threatened by the events of World War II, she increasingly seeks her own spiritual home. In doing so, she turns to the study of Sanskrit, the teachings of Pythagoras, Plato, the Manichaeans and, above all, the spiritual movement of the Cathars. The worldview of the Cathars suits her own thinking. In her opinion, the Cathars were the heirs of Plato's thinking, of the esoteric doctrine, and the original mysteries. The Church of the Cathars was the Church of the Pure, who rejected everything that had anything to do with violence. Simone Weil also feels attracted to the asceticism of the Cathars, as she herself rejects the materialistic life.

The Cathars lived in the Middle Ages in southern France, the Languedoc, and they were called in their time “bonnes hommes”, good people. Whoever became a member of this community gave up his or her private property. They served their fellow-brothers and fellow human beings through work and nursing, lived a secluded spiritual life, and also looked after spiritually to those who had a link with the community. The Gospel of John was at the center of their spiritual orientation.

Simone Weil states in her 1939 philosophical studies on the culture of the Languedoc, that she calls "Genius Occitanic", “Le Génie d'o”:

"Only once, in the past centuries after Christ, was there a Mediterranean civilization that, had it been given a chance, would have achieved perhaps as much freedom and spiritual creativity as in ancient Greece: that is the Languedoc of the Cathars."
The liberation movement of the Cathars was conquered in the 13th century by a coalition of the pope with the French king with persecution and extermination. The author condemns this procedure with harsh words.

"The need for roots" - a need of the human soul

It is with great sadness that Simone Weil must leave France in May 1942 as a persecuted Jew because of the war events. At first, she goes to America together with her parents. But in November 1942 she returns to Europe and settles in London.

There, she tries to be active in the Resistance, but this does not succeed according to her plans. She publishes the work “Rooting” in which she develops guidelines for social, political and public behavior. Here, the focus is on the need to take the human soul into account. She explains these spiritual needs in her work through values such as order, freedom, obedience, responsibility, equality, security and truth.

Her reflections are each so special, unusual and far ahead of her time. They contain some significant psychological statements and show much accuracy. Many consider Simone Weil a pioneer of modern socio-political thinking because of her sharp-witted analyzes and nonconformist views.

Weil on "responsibility" and "freedom"

Determination and responsibility, the feeling that one is useful, that one is indispensable, are the necessities of life of the human soul. A complete robbery in this regard is found, for example, in the case of unemployment; even if the unemployed receives the necessary support. Each person must be given a sense of the value and utility of his being, through the awareness of his contribution to the community with his work.

According to Simone Weil, the term "freedom" includes the possibility of choice. A possibility within the given reality. This choice is limited by the common benefits of where humans live in communities. In day to day life, freedom is thus always limited. In the consciousness, freedom can be complete and unlimited.

The work is based on the Platonic theory of ideas, with which Plato tried to plausibly address the immortality of the soul. He concluded that man possesses the innate ability to remember his divine origin. Plato also argued that it was up to the state to allow citizens to participate in philosophical education programs so that they would
recognize their true destiny and thus find their bearings in central issues of life.

After they were uprooted by the war, in the opinion of Simone Weil people should once again associate with values, such as fatherland, language, culture, occupation, place of residence. A lack of such bonds, in the opinion of the thinker, will result in the disease of "uprooting or homelessness". In the second part of her book "Rooting", Weil writes about "being homeless": in contrast to being homeless, the rooting of man is perhaps the most important and most misjudged need of the human soul.

For the human being has a root through his actual, active and natural participation in a community that keeps alive certain treasures of the past and certain inklings of the future. This participation is characterized by location, birth, occupation and a familiar environment. Every human being needs a multiplicity of such roots.

**The model of the Cathars**

During her search, the lives and activities of the Cathars inspire Weil and become her social and spiritual role model. Because she herself decides to live according to the principles of non-violence and frugality in the broader sense of a higher order, which means obedience to the eternal laws hidden in the innermost being. Freedom in the spiritual sense, as the Cathars have seen and lived, is preserved in the spiritual mind and is born of divine powers. It is a state that can become manifest when the spiritual mind becomes master over matter.

Weil's concept of freedom has now been replaced by the concept of obedience. For her, that kind of freedom finally creates balance and is the only authority given to him who lives it.

Finally, she realizes that neither political nor revolutionary activity provides the answer she seeks. Especially because she is completely imbued with the idea of non-violence.

Simone Weil dies on 24 August 1943 in London at the age of 34 years of heart failure from starvation and tuberculosis. She leaves a broad and extraordinary work. Most of her writings appeared only after her death. They contain thoughts and texts on philosophy and cultural philosophy, on theology and mysticism, but also on treatises on social reforms and social policy issues.
Quotations by Simone Weil:

"Not the individual man loves his neighbor, but God in him loves the neighbor."

"Even the love of the beauty of the world is just an imitation of the divine love that created the universe."

References:

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