

A Comprehensive Knowledge of the Human Being as the Source of Imagination in the Teacher

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WHAT I wish to offer you in these lectures is intended essentially as an impulse toward the inner enrichment of the teacher's profession. I would like to add the following to what I said this afternoon. You see, we must bring our knowledge of the human being to the point where we can really know in detail what is going on in human beings during their ordinary activity in the world. I have shown you that the first form of activity we perceive in human beings is the movement of our limbs. Now we must ask: what actually moves our limbs? Which force is at work when we walk or do something with our arms? What is it? Now, the materialistic view—which conceives of a person as a piece of the cosmos consisting of blood, bones, and so on, described as a human being—will simply be that it is we ourselves who move the limbs! We are the true initiators of action! Fundamentally, there is no sense in putting it like that since we ourselves are the *object* in movement, are what is moved. If we ask who is the actual subject, who is moving the arm or the leg, then we arrive at something spiritual, certainly not material. We are forced to say that it is the spiritual itself that must bring physical forces, forces that we usually designate as physical, into action. Our leg must be moved by something spiritual just as, for example, we say that a piece of wood is moved by us from one place to another.

Here, however, we come to something remarkable that generally receives little attention, because a great illusion prevails regarding it. Our human movement is really a magical effect, because in it something is set in motion by the spirit. Our movement as a human being is in truth a magical effect, and our view of the human being is entirely incorrect if we do not associate the magical element with the movements we make. The will—that is to say, something purely spiritual—must intervene in physical activity; these are in truth magical effects. When you walk, an inner magician, something essential, is working within you. How does this happen? The fact that we are physical human beings, made up of bones, blood, and so forth, does not make us into moving human beings; at best it is able to make us inert beings, beings who lie permanently in bed. If we are to be able to move, the will must be directly active. Materialistic science simplifies things by theorizing about motor nerves and the like. That is nonsense. In actual fact we have in human movement a magical effect, a direct intervention of the spirit into the bodily movements. How is this possible? This will become clear in the following.

I pointed out to you this afternoon that as the human life process passes from the rhythmic system to the metabolic-limb system, what comes out of carbon has an affinity for what comes out of nitrogen, and a continual tendency arises in the human being to create combinations of carbon and nitrogen. This tendency exists, and we shall never become clear about the digestive process itself, and especially the excretory process, if this tendency toward the combination of carbon and nitrogen is not kept in mind. This tendency finally leads to the formation of cyanic acid. As a matter of fact, there exists from above downward in the human being a continual tendency to produce cyanic acid, or at any rate, cyanides. There is really no commonly accepted expression for what happens here.

What happens only goes so far as to just reach the point of coming into being, and then it is immediately arrested by the secretions,

particularly of the gall bladder. Thus, in the lower part of the human being there is this continual tendency to create cyanide combinations that are arrested in their *status nascendi* by gall secretions. To create cyanide combinations in human beings, however, means to destroy the human being; the speediest method of destroying the human form [*Gestalt*] is to permeate it with cyanide. This tendency exists particularly in the direction of the metabolic-limb system; the human organism continually wants to create cyanide combinations, which are in turn immediately broken up. At this moment between the coming into being and the immediate dissolution of the cyanide compounds, the will lays hold of the muscular system. In the paralyzing of this process lies the possibility for the will to take hold so that human beings can move. From above downward there is always a tendency in the human being to destroy organic substance through a kind of poisoning. This is continually on the verge of beginning, and we would not be able to move, we could never achieve any freeing of the will, if this continual tendency to destroy ourselves were not present. Thus, to express it in a grotesque way, from above downward we have this continual tendency to make ourselves into ghosts and thereby to move by magical means. When considering human movement we must not limit our gaze to the physical body, but must turn to the human will, to the calling forth of spatial movements by purely magical means.

You see, therefore, every time people bring themselves into movement they are faced with the responsibility of intervening in the processes that are the actual processes of illness and death. On the other hand, we must know that this process of illness is opposed by the health-bringing process I spoke of this afternoon. For everything that occurs in the processes that take place in the lower human being there is a corresponding process above. Carbon has the tendency to form nitrogen compounds downward, but upward it has the tendency to form oxygen compounds.

Early alchemists called carbon the “stone of the wise,” which is nothing other than carbon fully understood. Upward it has the tendency to form oxygen compounds, acids, or oxides. These stimulate the thoughts, and whenever we vitally occupy a child we stimulate the formation of carbon compounds and therewith the activity of thinking. Whenever we guide children into some form of action while they are thinking, we call forth a state of balance between the formation of carbonic and cyanic acids. In human life everything actually depends upon producing symmetry between these two things.

If a human being is occupied only with intellectual work, the process of the formation of carbonic acid is too strongly stimulated; the upper organism is saturated with carbonic acid. Now a proper, intelligently conducted musical education counteracts this excessive carbonic acid formation and enables the human being to again bring some activity—inner activity at least—into the carbonic acid process. By arranging a schedule so that the teaching of music, for example, is interspersed among the other subjects, we actually penetrate directly into the processes of illness and health in the human organism. I am not telling you these things today simply for the sake of the subject matter, although I believe they are among the most interesting things that could be found in physiology, for it is only in this way that we can see clearly into the living activity of the substances and forces within the human being. Processes of illness and health are continually taking place in the human organism, and everything a person does or is guided to do has its effect upon these processes. From this knowledge must be created a feeling of responsibility and a true consciousness of one’s purpose as a teacher. We must realize, in all humility, the importance of our profession: that we help to orient what are in the most eminent sense cosmic processes. In fact, as teachers we are coworkers in the actual guidance of the world. It is the particular value of these things for our whole

life of feeling [*Gemüt*] and for consciousness that I wish to stress today.

By fully penetrating this, every one of our actions will take on extraordinary importance. Think how often I have said that a person will completely misapprehend the whole of human evolution if he or she persists in trivial pictorial instructions [*Anschauungsunterricht*] and never attempts to introduce children to more than they can already understand. Such teachers fail to realize that a great deal of what they teach children in their eighth or ninth year will be accepted only if the children feel themselves to be in the presence of a beloved teacher, confronted by an obvious authority. For the children, the teacher should represent the whole world of truth, beauty, and goodness. What the teacher takes to be beautiful or true or good should be so for the pupil. This obvious authority, during the period between the change of teeth and puberty, must be the basis of all the teaching. Children do not always understand the things they accept under the influence of this authority, but accept them because they love the teacher. What they have accepted will then emerge in later life, say in the thirty-fifth year, and signify an essential enlivening of the whole inner being. Those who say that one should merely teach children trivial mental conceptions have no real insight into human nature, nor do they know what a vital force it is when at thirty-five a person can call up something he or she once accepted simply through love for a teacher. Now you can see the inner significance of what I have been saying. The human process that is the equilibrium between the carbon and the cyanide processes is essentially supported, made essentially more vital, by the fact that something of this condition remains deeply embedded in human nature in the same way that something that we may have accepted lovingly in our eighth or ninth year remains hidden and is understood only decades later. What occurs between receptivity and understanding, what lies directly in the soul in the

process of balance between the lower and upper human being, together with the corresponding action of carbon, has enormous influence.

Of course, you cannot apply these things in detail in your approach to teaching, but you can go into the classroom supported by this knowledge and apply one aspect or another in various realms of your teaching; if one has acquired this knowledge, a definite result will follow. One can distinguish between those who have knowledge that is inwardly mobile or inwardly static. One who simply knows how diamonds, graphite, and coal appear in nature outside the human being, and goes no further than that, will not teach in a very lively way. If one knows, however, that the carbon in coal, in graphite, and so on, also lives within human beings as a metamorphosed substance; that on the one side it acts only in death-bringing compounds and on the other only in compounds of resurrection; if one speaks not only of the metamorphoses of carbon, which in the various stages of the earth's evolution produced diamond, coal, and graphite; if one realizes that there are different kinds of metamorphosis of carbon in the human being that can become inwardly alive, can be spiritualized, can mediate between death and life; if one understands this, one has in this understanding an immediate source of inspiration. If you can understand this, you will find the right approach to teaching in school; it is essential for the right approach to occur to you; you should not stand in the classroom with such a sour look that anyone can tell from your expression that you stand before the children in a morose, surly mood. Such a mood is impossible if you possess inwardly mobile, creative knowledge. Then, in all humility, you will realize the importance of the work, and this will reveal itself even in your facial expression while teaching. Your expression is then naturally illuminated by the etheric and astral and unites with outer form to create a whole.

A teacher's face has three main nuances of expression, with any number of intermediate stages. There is the face with which teachers meet an ordinary person, when they forget that they are teachers and simply engage in natural conversation. There is the face teachers have when they have finished their lesson and leave the classroom; and there is the face they have in the classroom. We may often be ashamed of human nature when we see the difference in the teachers' faces when they are going into their classroom and when they leave it. These things are connected with the whole consciousness of the teacher. Perhaps it may comfort you a little if I say that under the influence of an active, vital knowledge every face becomes twice as beautiful as it is otherwise, but the knowledge must do its work, the knowledge must live, and teachers' faces should always be alive, inwardly expressive, especially when they are giving lessons. The importance in what I'm telling you is not that you should know these things, but that they should work on your life of feeling [*Gemüt*], strengthening you, giving you the vigor to spiritualize your profession.

Teachers ought to be conscious, especially nowadays, of their great social task, and they should ponder this task a great deal. The teacher, above all others, should be deeply permeated with awareness of the great needs of modern civilization.

I will give you an example of what is needed in order to adopt the right attitude in our civilization today. You have all heard of Mahatma Gandhi who, since the war, or really since 1914, has set a movement going for the liberation of India from English rule. Gandhi's activities began first in South Africa with the aim of helping the Indians who were living there under appalling conditions, and for whose emancipation he did a great deal before 1914. Then he went to India itself and instituted a movement for liberation there. I shall speak today only of what took place when the final verdict was passed on Mahatma Gandhi, and omit the court proceedings leading up to it. I would like to speak only of the last

act in the drama, as it were, that took place between him and his judge. Gandhi had been accused of stirring up the Indian people against British rule in order to make India independent. Being a lawyer, he conducted his own defense and had not the slightest doubt that he would be condemned. In his speech—I cannot quote the actual words—he spoke more or less to the following effect, “My Lords, I beg of you to condemn me in accordance with the full strength of the law. I am perfectly aware that in the eyes of British law in India my crime is the gravest one imaginable. I do not plead any mitigating circumstances; I beg of you to condemn me with the full strength of the law. I affirm, moreover, that my condemnation is required not only in obedience to the principles of outer justice but to the principles of expediency of the British government. For if I were to be acquitted I should feel it incumbent upon me to continue to propagate the movement, and millions of Indians would join it. My acquittal would lead to results that I regard as my duty.”

The contents of this speech are very characteristic of what lives and weaves in our time. Gandhi says he must of necessity be condemned, and declares it his duty to continue the activity for which he is to be condemned. The judge replied, “Mahatma Gandhi, you have rendered my task of sentencing you immeasurably easier, because you have made it clear that I must of necessity condemn you. It is obvious that you have transgressed against British law, but you and all those present will realize how hard it will be for me to sentence you. It is clear that a large portion of the Indian people looks upon you as a saint, as one who has taken up his task in obedience to the highest duties devolving upon humanity. The judgment I shall pass on you will be looked upon by the majority of the Indian people as the condemnation of a human being who has devoted himself to the highest service of humanity. Clearly, however, British law must in all severity be put into effect against you. You would regard it as your duty, if you were

acquitted, to continue tomorrow what you were doing yesterday. We on our side have to regard it as our most solemn duty to make that impossible. I condemn you in the full consciousness that my sentence will in turn be condemned by millions. I condemn you while admiring your actions, but condemn you I must." Gandhi's sentence was six years at hard labor.

You could hardly find a more striking example of what is characteristic of our times. We have two levels of actuality before us. Below is the level of truth, the level where the accused declares that if he is acquitted, it will be his solemn duty to continue what he must define as criminal in face of outer law. On the level of truth, also, we have the judge's statement that he admires the one whom, out of duty to his government, he sentences to six years' hard labor. Above, at the level of facts, you have what the accused in this case, because he is a great soul, defined as crime: the crime that is his duty and that he would at once continue were he to be acquitted. Whereas on the one level you have the admiration of the judge for a great human being, on the other you have the passing of judgment and its outer justification. You have truths below, facts above, which have nothing to do with one another. They touch on one another at only one point, at the point where they confront each other in statement and counterstatement.

Here, my dear friends, you have a most striking example of the fact that nowadays we have a level of truth and a level of untruth. The level of untruth, however, is in public events, and at no point are the two levels in touch with each other. We must keep this clearly in mind, because it is intimately bound up with the whole life of spirit of our times. An example as striking as this reveals things that occur everywhere but are usually less obvious and startling. We must achieve first, however, a real consciousness of what has come to pass in the present in order to put truth in the place of what is happening in the present. We simply must find the true path. Naturally, it is not a matter of overturning

everything or of engaging in false radicalism, which leads only to destruction, but of seeing what one can do. We have to find the way to a clear insight and then work in the area where our efforts can be most fruitful.

The most fruitful sphere of activity is education. There, even if education is controlled by dictatorial rules and standards, teachers can let what they gain from a true feeling for their profession flow into their lessons. They must, however, have a knowledge of the human being that will imbue life and spirit into what is otherwise dead knowledge, and, on the other hand, have an enthusiasm arising from a really free and open-minded conception of what life today actually is. You must be clear that in outer life you are at the level above, but as a teacher facing children it is possible to maintain the level below. It is not by practicing an educational method based on clichés, but by acquiring real enthusiasm for your profession, the consciousness of your profession, that you can emancipate yourselves from the constraints in educational activity and be inspired by the majesty contained in a true knowledge of humanity. It is sometimes a very bitter experience to speak to anthroposophists, for example, and be compelled to say things that turn what people have learned upside down (though not in a bad sense)—and then to find that no attention is paid to what has been said. If you grasped the full weight of what I said in the lecture yesterday¹² about meteoric iron, for instance, you might well be astonished at the indifference with which such a matter is received. I can understand this in the case of people who have not learned anything, but in the case of those who are conversant with the scientific concepts about iron, it is incomprehensible. But the world is like that today.

12. Rudolf Steiner, "The Michael Inspiration, Spiritual Milestones in the Course of the Year," *The Festivals and Their Meaning*, London, Rudolf Steiner Press, 1996.

That is not, however, how the world *should* be in the head, and especially in the heart, of teachers and educators. They must be filled with the consciousness that all the knowledge acquired through modern science is dead knowledge out of which we must create something living, and the only sort of knowledge that we can use in school arises from this enthusiasm. If you are permeated on the one hand with the enthusiasm kindled by such a knowledge of the human being, and on the other with the consciousness of the necessity to put truth in place of the lies that are accepted today—you can find no more impressive example than the legal case I just described to you—if you realize this necessity with your whole being and know that it is the teacher's task to find the right direction through recognition of this necessity, and in face of the appalling crudities inherent in what appears to be truth in public life today, then something happens within the human being that colors every sphere. You will become a different kind of eurythmy teacher, a different kind of art teacher, a different kind of mathematics teacher. In every sphere you will become different if you are permeated in the real sense by this consciousness. Everything is established by this enthusiasm. This is not the time to talk about the niceties of this or that method. We must bring life into the world, which through its dead intellectualism is faced with the danger of falling still further into death.

Basically, we have fallen out of the habit of being inwardly incensed by things as they are. If you merely pull a long face, however, about things that ought to be rejected in our civilization, you certainly will not be able to educate. That is why it is so necessary from time to time to speak of things in such a way that they can really take hold of our feeling [*Gemüt*]. If you go away from these lectures with nothing more than the feeling that there has to be a change in the spiritual factors governing the world today, then you will have grasped my aim in giving them.

The dragon takes on the most diverse forms; takes on every possible form. Those that arise from human emotions are harmful enough, but not nearly as harmful as the form the dragon acquires from the dead and deadening knowledge that prevails today. There the dragon becomes especially horrible. One might almost say that the correct symbol for institutions of higher education today would be a thick, black pall hung somewhere on the wall of every lecture room. Then one would realize that behind it is something that must not be shown, because to do so would throw a strange light on what goes on in these lecture rooms! Behind the black pall there should be a picture of Michael's battle with the dragon, the battle with deadening intellectualism. What I have said today shows you how the struggle between Michael and the dragon should live in teachers. What I wanted to present to you is this: we must become aware of Michael's battle; it must become a reality for us if we are to celebrate Michaelmas in the right way. No one is more called upon to play a part in inaugurating the Michael festival in the right way than the teacher. Teachers should unite themselves with Michael in a particularly close way, for to live in these times means simply to crawl into the dragon and further the old intellectual operation. To live in the truth means to unite oneself with Michael. We must unite ourselves with Michael whenever we enter the classroom; only through this can we bring with us the necessary strength. Verily, Michael is strong! If we understand Michael's struggle with the dragon in a particular sphere, we are working for the healing of humanity in the future. If I had been asked to give these lectures a title, I would have had to say: *Michael's Struggle with the Dragon, Presented for the Teachers at the Waldorf School*. One should not speak about the possibility of celebrating a Michael festival now, but rather give thought to introducing into the most diverse spheres of life the kind of consciousness with which a Michael festival could be connected. If you can make these things come

alive in your hearts, can permeate your souls with them; if you can bring this consciousness with you into the classroom and sustain it there in complete tranquility, without any element of agitation or high-sounding phrases; if you can let yourselves be inspired to unpretentious action through what can be kindled in your consciousness by surrender to these necessities, then you will enter into the alliance with Michael, as is essential for the teacher and educator.