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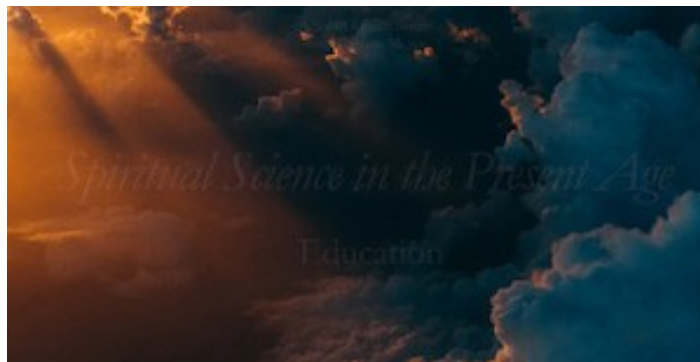
Spiritual Science in the Present Age

Series:

Steiner Academy: Education

with

Thomas H. Meyer



Thomas Meyer: Dear listeners, dear friends, we are going to proceed with our talk. The next one today will be on education. Of course, it is in the context of Steiner's spiritual scientific work.

Education is a broad subject, and we want to take into account the aspect of how we can learn to learn, not just being mechanical and repetitive beings of what we have been taught. The question is: How can we learn to learn? Or we could even ask: How can we learn to evolve? It's all about evolution in the development of human beings and of other beings. There is evolution in all levels of being—not only physical. This is often neglected.

How can we learn to evolve and become more and more true to our own inner being, which is often hidden? A sub-question of this question is, of course: How can we learn to think in order to evolve in such a desired direction?

Thinking is not just a process of informing us. I think that there was never a world or a time in which so many people had so much information about so many things and at the same time had so little thoughts.

Let's start in the development of Rudolf Steiner's that led him to become the "inventor" of a new contemporary art of education. I say "art of education" with consciousness because it should become an art. In the end of the lecture, I will concretely go into what the art of education is.

When Steiner was a young man, he lived in Vienna, and he was in his 20s when a task came to him which prepared him for his future pedagogical work. He was asked to become the private teacher in a Jewish family, interestingly, in Vienna. They had four kids, and one of them was considered to be backwards, so he needed a special teacher. That made it necessary for Steiner to devote many hours of preparation each day, as he stated in his autobiography, in order to meticulously form the teaching, or the presence, which made every minute of the lesson meaningful for this ten-year-old boy. He couldn't improvise in such a situation.

In fact, after two years, there was quite a considerable success. His method led to this boy becoming healthy, becoming able to go to the normal school, and later even entering university and studying medicine up until he was a victim in

World War I.

In the beginning of his education by Steiner, he was ten years old, and he was not able to read or write. So the boy was really considered more or less hopeless. By this miraculous [pedagogical] method [that Steiner developed], Steiner learned a lot about human nature, and he said that by having to deal with an “abnormal” human nature, that could be very, very fruitful.

By the way, in this family there were other boys. One of them was quite cheeky. Once, he stood in front of Steiner when he entered and said, “You are sillier than three asses.” Three is quite a good number. Steiner was amused. I don’t know how much he could show it to the child, but he thought it was quite a funny situation.

He was on very good terms with this family because of the successful education of the boy up to a certain time when there was a grave misunderstanding between the parents and Steiner. This concerned the new wave of antisemitism that was born in Vienna and Paris and throughout France around the case of Captain Alfred Dreyfus.

It was all a misunderstanding. Steiner wrote an essay which was misunderstood by many people, in which he only said that the idea of building a new national state of Israel, in his eyes, was not a contemporary good idea. In fact, most modern Jewish people in Austria and Hungary were assimilated; they were part of the bigger nations that they lived in. They were integrated and used their religious rites in a private manner, or they could go to the synagogue, but they didn’t think of erecting a Jewish state. This was the great idea of Theodor Herzl. We have touched on that a little bit in earlier talks.

If you read what Steiner wrote about why this was not a good idea, you can feel in the core why he is not a friend of the state of Israel. Of course, that doesn’t mean that he was becoming an anti-Semite. Already the fact that he was in this family proved the contrary. He had no problems with individuals of Jewish background, but he did have problems with people who thought that they had to make a modern Jewish state.

This is just a short introduction on this issue because today we have a wave of

antisemitism accusations against Steiner and also Waldorf. I will be coming back to that later.

Now let's turn to his earliest insights into the human nature in regards to being educated. No one can educate a human nature who is not clear that the human nature is fourfold—physical, etheric, astral, and ego. So the educator has to be conscious that he is standing in front of a compound being with its own laws. For example, the physical body develops within seven years. In fact, after seven years none of us has the same physical material particles in his body as before. It changes all the time. After seven years, you are a new physical entity, so to speak.

This is important for education. The child wants to develop the physical body in the best possible way. Now when the child is between birth and seven years old, the child has an innate belief that “the world is good.” The world that it is born into is a good world. Therefore, the child has the innate drive to imitate whatever it encounters. It is all good, and the child wants to imitate the world or the deeds or the acts of the persons around him. That, of course, can show us that we have a tremendous responsibility to surround the child with the right deeds and acts—and even thoughts. Even thoughts can be picked up inwardly and imitated. Speech, of course, can also be imitated. Imitation is the key for the first seven-year period of every child. That is before the schooling starts.

Around the time of the second phase, the child loses his baby (primary) teeth. Then, when the schooling starts (apart from kindergarten, of course), we have the second period, which is now devoted, in the evolution of the child, to developing the etheric body in the right way. Here, there is a shift of worldview. It's not only that the world is good, but now it is, “The world is beautiful.” In the second period, the world seems to be something full of beauty, and this should be reckoned with by the educators—surrounding the child with as much beauty as possible, pointing to the beauty in nature, the sunrise and sunset, music and art, and all of this beauty. That is the natural drive—to be surrounded by beauty. That is the second seven-year period.

Next, the child enters the third seven-year period in which another rule is experienced by the child. Now, it's not the good world or the beautiful world, or maybe that is just in the background. Now the foreground is, “The world is

true,” and the child expects to be introduced into this world of truth. This is a tremendous task today when the child is surrounded at home or at school or whatever by all of the media things which are usually full of fantasy and lies.

So, at an age beginning around 14 years old, the world is true. That means that the child has the impulse to find judgments about “this and that.” Now is the time of educating in Goethean science and natural science. The world has to be understood in its laws. That starts only in these years, which Steiner calls “the birth of the astral body.” There are actually, in his view, three births. They go from the physical (the first seven years) to the etheric at age seven to the astral at age 14. When I say “birth,” that means that there is a growing independence from the astral sheath of the mother when the child turns 14, and from the etheric sheath of the mother when the child turns 7. The etheric sheath of the mother has all of the temperament and habits of the older person. This is a freeing process.

Education should really be in tune with these laws of development and of the threefold—or fourfold—human being. The fourth element is the ego. That comes only, in terms of real development, at about 20-21 years. What comes before as an “ego” is not a fully-born ego, for example when the child says “I” already at three or four years; the real ego comes later.

Steiner wanted education to be in tune with these natural laws of development and help the individual to develop according to these laws to find his own being, which is deeply hidden.

Steiner had a good example in his own life. Any child who is considered handicapped or backward, of course there is a deep being in this child as well. There is an individuality. Take the extreme example of Kaspar Hauser, who was imprisoned for many, many years [as a child]. What does that mean for his deeper inner individuality? It is there, of course, but it can’t show itself easily, if at all. Education is a tool that the child learns to develop for his own true being.

Education is not there to engender or create children who parrot the being of the adults, but it is getting out to the light and hearing the individuality of each human being. That task shows immediately that the educator has to have an interest in the child, and even in the unseen part of the child. There is a little

god in this child, but this little god is not able to speak or manifest directly. Sometimes it even manifests indirectly in caricatures like anger or whatever character traits.

The educator should be having a kind of a faculty of intuition to get to the unseen source inwardly. If you like, this is a holy element that you should have the greatest respect for, we should have the greatest respect for the unseen little god in every human being. That is the morality basis for the educator.

If you look around today, this basis almost does not exist anymore. So, this basis for this sort of education has to be cultivated in the educator. The educator should have gone through a process of self-education to such a degree that he can fulfill these demands when he has a class in front of him.

We have this pedagogical impulse that was ripening in the life of Steiner in the year 1919, where he had already made contact with a man who had a factory producing cigarettes. All of the smokers among our listeners might be very happy about the fact that it was a cigarette factory [the Waldorf-Astoria factory] that gave birth to the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart. The owner of the factory was a Mr. Emil Molt, who gave a lot of money to this impulse of Steiner's. Of course, he sent many of his own workers' children to this first Waldorf school. So, there was a connection with a living factory.

It started in autumn of 1919 after World War I. Steiner chose the first teachers for the first school by giving a lecture, which is published in English under the title, "The Study of Man." I know that some absurd discussions have arisen about the title. Some people have said, "We can't call it the 'Study of Man' anymore. This is male chauvinism." Everyone who can think clearly understands that the word "man" can as easily be used for a biological woman as for a man. But now, out of political correctness, I think it is called "The Study of the Human Being." Why not? But it's not necessary. It's a superfluous operation in linguistics.

This illustrates one important aim of education in the Steiner sense—we can call it "Waldorf education" since its founding in 1919. That is, that the human being gets more and more independent in his thoughts from mere words and formulations, which is not so easy. You can see many people immediately

reacting to words, but before we react to a word that somebody uses, we should ask ourselves, “What does he mean?” That is the essential thing.

Waldorf education should also free the inner life from being too closely put into the armor of verbal formulations. That can only be done if the teacher himself is free from thoughtless words, formulas, and slogans.

In order to be true to human nature, you have to find—and Steiner did deep research on this—what the prerequisite of learning is in life. This isn’t just referring to evolution and this and that, but how is something becoming an intellectual faculty? For example, to learn to write or to speak or some facts in geology, what is necessary for a learning process in the soul to take place?

The answer is that you have to be able to forget. There is a good forgetting—a necessary forgetting. If a child is not allowed to forget and is always reminded of what he has learned yesterday, you actually block the learning process. You fill it up with a useless, non-flowing body of information. Because of that, Steiner organized the teaching in blocks or epochs. For three weeks, they would learn this. Then for another three weeks, they would have another discipline. In the second three-week period, they are allowed, and actually must, forget what they have taken up. The time of forgetting is the time in which what you have taken up is able to become an intellectual faculty.

If you want people to develop intellectual faculties, give them the chance not only to be conscious all the time, but also to be unconscious or to forget. Forgetting is part of learning. That is largely forgotten today, and that is not a good forgetting!

This is an insight into how the human soul transforms something which it has taken from the world into something which is an individual faculty. That is why you never have always the same subject at the same time every day. You can always be asked by the teacher about it, and a good pupil seemingly gives them quick answers, but that may not be the pupil who really learns the most, because that pupil cannot forget.

Forgetting and waking are in a polarity that should be balanced. That is true throughout life, even in later adult life. People who are not able to forget have

difficulties in learning in the same way that others are able to. This is a fundamental law in Waldorf pedagogy, that you have a structured way of bringing the “material,” so to speak, into your class so that you forget. Then you go again, and then you go back to the same epoch and repeat—after a while. Then you can see that some things have really grown in the meantime.

These are very slight points about the structure of Waldorf pedagogy. Another thing that Steiner wanted was for the college of teachers to be self-governing. They decide with whom they engage, and they decide about the finances of the teachers, and so on, and the government and the state has as little influence as possible. That means that as a so-called private school (not a state school), it means that private sponsoring and funding are needed, which worked to a certain degree, but I think that it has been given up in many places.

In Germany, in the beginning of the 1970s, there was a boom of Waldorf schools. They needed more and more teachers. The question was: Where are the teachers? How can you find teachers who are able to fulfill what is necessary in a Waldorf School? So, there was an overflow of uneducated teachers, and at the same time, the state took over part of the management and the finances. With state financing of the schools, the schools lost a certain amount of sovereignty. I think that in the United States, there is a division between schools, called “Waldorf” schools, that are totally state schools, and the few private schools there, which are quite expensive. It’s not a very happy situation.

Steiner envisaged, already in 1920, a world school community to organize Waldorf education globally—but not through the state. That is something that has not been fulfilled. The dependence on the state is bigger than it should be.

I want to end with a few words about why Steiner wanted education to be an “art.” He talks of education as an art. I want to go back to what I developed a little bit earlier. The way that Steiner understood an artist was someone who not only relates to what has become in the world and is finished and can be photographed or painted or described—as it is there, finished—but an artist, in his sense, is always somebody who sees not only what *has* become but what *can* become: a seed of potential evolution. That is exactly what a teacher needs. He needs intuition into what can become of this boy or this girl. It is not there; you don’t see it. But if you grab the reality of this seed, then you know in what way

you can give an impulse to this person. That is something totally different from just putting your knowledge and your soul content into the child as a bag of your riches. This is totally different.

In that sense, education can become an art if the educator works with “the possible” and with “the becoming” in the boy or the girl; the educator needs to develop that faculty. Then the educator can become an artist of education. Otherwise, it will not work.

These points are just a brief sketch. We will go through it all again later on and get into more differentiation, if necessary. Thank you for your attention. Until next time.

MODIFICATION

Transcripts are not always verbatim. Modifications are sometimes made to improve clarity, usefulness and readability, while staying true to the original intent.

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