

Theme of the Year 2008/09

Practices Leading to a Culture of the Heart

Based on Rudolf Steiner's essay "At the Dawn of the Michael Age" in *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts* (GA 26), previous themes of the year have referred in various ways to the motif of heart thinking. Last year, two meditations from the Rudolf Steiner's first Mystery drama were the focus. This year, too, our basic theme dealing with the union of light and warmth will continue, this time in the context of the human being whose practices take him along the anthroposophical path of knowledge.

Rudolf Steiner's suggestions for practice often begin with a sensory observation or thought content; the practitioner should devote himself to these with the greatest attention and concentration. Then comes the task of accompanying what happens in this context with the corresponding feeling in order to change what is known into an experience—and doing this in a daily rhythm.

How can we accomplish this? How can I choose to create a situation where a corresponding feeling arises? Anyone who tries it soon notices that the feelings we are seeking are not so easily accessible, and they are particularly hard to bring up when we try to repeat them. A strong effort is needed (together with imagination) in order to discover something new in the familiar, something that can echo in our life of feeling.

We grow aware of how little we know about dealing with the multihued world of feeling; how hard it is to find a feeling that is intentionally acquired as opposed to one that arises spontaneously—especially a strong antipathy; how hard to find the path from head to heart.

We find this when we are together. We say we go head to head; we do not throw our heads around each other, but we throw our arms around each other with warmth of heart. It is our hearts that must find one another so that we can have conceptual disagreements without personal antipathy.

A social understanding results when I move my center—located in the head at first—into the region of the heart and I learn how to understand through the heart; when I empathetically place my attention and capacity to perceive into the world around me. In the esotericist, this leads to the formation of a new center from the head and across the larynx to the heart (as described by Rudolf Steiner in *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*; GA 10).

In the ninth lecture in the cycle *Macrocosm and Microcosm* (GA 119) Rudolf Steiner characterizes heart thinking as follows: "We have a quite different feeling about the thinking that becomes possible when we have made a little progress on this path. The feeling then is as if what had hitherto been localized in the head were now localized in the heart. This does not mean the physical heart but the spiritual organ that develops in the neighborhood of the heart, what we call the twelve-petaled lotus-flower."

But this goal has quite practical, concrete preliminary stages. For instance, there is the dictum: "Every idea that does not become an ideal kills a power in your soul; every idea, however, that becomes an ideal creates a power of life." (GA 10) How many ideas can we make our own so that they may become ideals? This is a question we need to ask ourselves again and again, and for the most part we find that we take up more ideas than we can possibly make into ideals.

In an elementary form, we can exercise everything described here by practicing the organism of the six subsidiary exercises. It is noteworthy that Rudolf Steiner states in his great 1923 examination of community: "The Anthroposophical Society needs all of these six virtues, and we must work toward an Anthroposophical Society that possesses them." (Lecture of January 23, 1923, *Anthroposophical Community Building*, GA 257).

Fortunately, the last few years have brought several helpful books on this theme; last year, a collection of Rudolf Steiner's statements on the subsidiary exercises was published by Ates Baydur (see "Recommended

Reading”). These demonstrate the basic quality and remarkable extent of the exercises for the spiritual student and for practical life.

Rudolf Steiner’s descriptions in the Esoteric School lessons (GA 266) are a gold mine for this work; for instance, “The connection with the members of our being” (GA 266/3, January 2, 1914 and February 7, 1914). “Observation of feelings” stands at the center, and the wonderful book *Herzwege* [Paths of the heart] by Rudy Vandercruysee shows how this exercise is reflected in all the others.

This third subsidiary exercise begins with paying attention to our landscape of feeling with its swelling waves and stereotypical habits of soul; we get to know them, and then proceed to control how they come to expression. This presupposes the first subsidiary exercises: concentration and decisiveness.

Further steps are the acquisition of inner peace, composure, balance of soul. This can become a source for transforming our own feelings and emotions so that they become receptive organs for what comes toward us from the world. Feelings acquired in this way are the only feelings that will be permeated by the ego.

In practice, these feelings play a decisive role in art, but also in social life. Every objective esthetic judgment depends on how strongly we have developed our senses in regard to the specific values being expressed, the degree to which our feeling has become an organ of knowledge. Most often, modern esthetic judgments rely on an egocentric or group feeling. How far the human being has progressed with his capacity to control his own feelings, act appropriately, and even comprehend the feelings of another—this is what determines his social competence.

Some branches have taken up the subsidiary exercises as an integral part of their work; others discuss individual experiences from time to time. Special working groups occasionally meet for a mutual exchange. It is in this sense that we would like to encourage members to turn in the coming year to the theme of a culture of feeling against the background of the subsidiary exercises, and do so in as practical a way as possible. The connection to the whole of the anthroposophical path can be found in the 8th and 9th lectures from *Macrocosm and Microcosm* (GA 119) which is also recommended for study. | *For the Collegium of the School for Spiritual Science: Heinz Zimmermann*

Recommended Reading:

Rudolf Steiner: *Macrocosm and Microcosm* (GA 119), especially the lectures of March 28 and 29, 1910.

Michael Lipson: *Stairway of Surprise*, Anthroposophic Press, 2002.

Rudolf Steiner, *Die Nebenübungen*, ed. Ates Baydur, Dornach, 2007.

Rudy Vandercruysee: *Herzwege*, Stuttgart, 2006.

Hans Jörgen Pingel: *Hinweise zu den 6 Nebenübungen des anthroposophischen Schulungsweges*, Hamburg, 2004.

Rudolf Steiner: *Das Ätherherz und die 6 Nebenübungen*, Basel, 2005