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On the Leading Thought: Memory and Conscience

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After the previous Leading Thought (see the article in Circular 110), in which we especially explored the polarity between the sensory organisation and the thinking organisation, we discover a further step for the human being in his (or her) relationship with the world; that of sleep and of what happens unconsciously in it. The sleeping state is compared with the waking state and all the various stages between waking and sleeping in our various bodies are described. In the process memory and conscience in particular are examined more closely.

At the outset of this contemplation it may be helpful to remind ourselves what R. Steiner's intentions were with his anthroposophy: he wanted to investigate the second person within us. He describes it as follows, "thus, the name is old; we apply it to something new. The name is not supposed to mean for us 'Knowledge of the human being'. That is the express intention of those who have bestowed the name. We are led by our science itself to the conviction that a spirit human being lives within the human being of the senses, an inner human being, to some extent, a second individual. Now while what the human being is able to know about the world through their senses and through their intellect, which is restricted to sense observation, can be called 'anthropology', what the inner person, the spirit human being, is able to gain knowledge of, should be called 'anthroposophy'..." (GA 35, p. 176 of the original).

In this sense this Leading Thought portrays a particular aspect of the relationship of the first human being (of the senses) to the second. In this case it is worthwhile to not only take the 'communications' from Steiner's spiritual research as revelations or simply knowledge, but rather, as Steiner continually suggested, to explore for ourselves where in our own lives there are concrete experiences that point us towards these facts. The study of this concentrated, difficult text can offer pointers for observation on a soul level in order to draw conclusions for our own lives and actions.

Structure of the Text

At the outset two main conditions of human life are put as a polarity: Sleeping – the human being is yielded up to the cosmos. You could also say the human breathes out in order to connect completely with the spiritual world. Waking – the human being withdraws from the cosmos. He (or she) breathes in and comes 'to themselves'.

In the waking state the soul-spiritual part of the human being is absorbed by the sensory organisation (which belongs to the surroundings, as we have read in the previous Thought) and leads us into the world of the senses. Here Steiner distinguishes between forming memory images, which, on the one hand, originate in sense perception and, on the other hand, those which can go into the imagination. These processes that are bound to the

physical body take place semi-consciously. How can we understand this? I may have seen something, and yet not looked at it properly. It has entered me more or less consciously. We perceive an awful lot of things only semi-consciously, especially with the lower senses, or with the sense of smell.

In order to make clear thoughts our thinking organisation and thinking activity is required. When we 'think of' or 'call something up', we are completely awake, and our self-conscious awareness can only develop in this state of complete separation from the world.

Moreover, Steiner reminds us that in its origin the thinking organisation is an organisation of the stars, that is, an organisation which lives in the etheric world that creates connections. Thinking is creating or 'perceiving' connections, relationships; see Circular 110. In this context Steiner's thoughts on human evolution are interesting (GA 26, p.76). He explains how, step by step, this starry organisation of the thinking was moved to the earthly scene of events and thereby from about 15th century the human being received the possibility of freedom. These stages can be discovered with children; thus, the small child does not have any self-awareness 'in themselves'. It is interesting that at roughly the same time it can say I to itself is when the first thoughts arise in its thinking and are expressed.

The next step leads us to the state of sleeping, where the soul-spiritual part of the human being is carried over to the part of the cosmos, which is still farther away than the 'starry firmament'. The person sleeping now comes into a relationship with the divine-spiritual beings which were originally present, when he (or she) came into existence. A magnificent picture! This region was called the region of Inspiration in the previous circular. Here the human being is "human in the true sense" and can now know themselves.

Approaching this level presents a certain difficulty. Nevertheless, several observations can be made, which show us the particular quality of the world of sleep. For instance, if we go to sleep with an existential question in the evening, an answer may actually be there in the morning upon waking. A lot of important ideas arise in the morning after a good night.

Steiner describes how these divine-spiritual beings impress a moral content into us, while we are in an unconscious state. With this we are no longer involved in processes of nature (physiological processes), but are involved in 'objective', real, moral processes: quite a different level!

This encounter with the divine-spiritual emerges in our waking state as the voice of conscience. Can we detect such experiences within ourselves? Besides the inner memory images, which we can call to mind, we bear within us soul experiences of a different quality, which we cannot grasp so easily, from which, however, we have the impression that they concern our moral nature. A 'voice' wants to tell us something about what we have or indeed have not done. We actually know this voice of conscience well. More or less consciously we try to apologize to ourselves for what we have failed to do or have done. Unlike the level of Imagination, where we enter a scenario of living pictures of the world, we are now in the level of Inspiration, in a world of listening.

Interestingly, there are actually two different kinds of 'remembering' which open the door for us into these supersensible worlds; the memories of the world of the senses to enter into Imagination and the 'memories' of the 'voice' of the divine-spiritual beings at night to enter

into Inspiration.

How can we come into this region in a more wakeful state? Actually it is quite simple and, at the same time, difficult, because it is a matter of the will: through the backward look, the review. Steiner gives a series of indications on the schooling of the will through the review as exercises, e.g. at the end of the day or at the end of the week. Thereby “in some respects one takes ...what one’s ego and astral body go through night for night into waking consciousness”. (M.M. Sam, *Seelenuebungen des Willens*, page 38, Verlag am Goetheanum).

What is the difference from the images of memory? It is the task not only to experience the situation, but to examine on a higher level what really happened, without being completely caught up in the picture or in the events. Then a wider awareness can come about of the impact of an action as a whole. In a broad sense it could be termed “conscience for one’s surroundings”. What significance do my deeds have for the world around me? Does this concrete decision have a constructive or destructive impact on people and life around me? Such exercises as the review can also help on a daily basis, for instance, when we have had to carry out difficult actions, like the killing of an animal or the felling of trees, etc. Now was that beneficial for the whole herd, the species, the breed? Was the felling of the tree beneficial for the landscape?

Thus, we become more and more attentive to the quiet voice of conscience, which, so as to leave us free, patiently waits for us to listen.

We may also realise that a lot of great personalities, such as, e.g. Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela or people who have committed themselves to the cause of particular animals or landscapes, are great not especially because of their knowledge, but rather through them having listened to this voice of conscience in a special way; and despite their lives being at risk, they have committed themselves completely to a cause.

At the end of the Thought (page 239, bottom) Steiner shows how these two soul activities, memory – in pictures of the inner eye – and conscience – as a ‘voice’ of inner hearing – form a polarity physiologically: remembering takes place as an activity of the head in the sense-nerve organisation and the formation of conscience as its polar opposite in the metabolic-limb organisation.

Connection of the Poles through the rhythmic Organisation

The rhythmic organisation with the breathing and circulation of the blood is differentiated as two-fold, actually in the form of two types of people, represented by Goethe and Schiller. They are related to tendencies of the human soul, which Steiner calls Ahriman and Lucifer.

The Thought concludes with a great picture of our situation on the earth, of the starry world as the archetype of the regular element and the inner aspect of the world as archetype of the chaotic element. The human being bears these two poles inside and has to “experience the earthly human being in finding a free balance” through his (or her) rhythmic organisation.

The Connection to the agricultural Organism

Biodynamic agriculture makes the human being its basis. It is not agriculture according to natural laws, but agriculture in keeping with the human being. Thus, from this wider understanding of the human being we can indicate several questions and considerations for the farmer's work.

We may wonder whether the earth as a being has a similar rhythm in relation to the cosmos as the human being has between waking and sleeping, or between breathing in and breathing out. Steiner describes how the earth breathes in in winter and thus is awake and breathes out in summer and is asleep. This can be experienced directly, if we are attentive to how in high summer the earth as a whole shows us through our sense perception the way it breathes out. We lose ourselves in our surroundings, out into the cosmos, and connect with nature in the summer: we go to sleep into the world. The warmth strengthens this expansive movement of our soul. The Shakespeare play "Midsummer Night's Dream" shows this mood of high summer in a wonderful way. Actually we are only half-awake or half-asleep in our sense perception and are thus able to go sleep into the world. Clear thoughts are required, even 'deadening' concepts, for us to be completely awake. The cold winter, in which the earth breathes in and becomes completely awake, completely head, helps us to do so. Correspondingly, we can think much more clearly and are thus much more awake. Rudolf Steiner's Soul Calendar gives us a stimulus to experience the many varied nuances of this archetypal rhythm of the seasons as a being.

This comparison with the life of the earth opens up perspectives in relation to the theme of the year with the preparations. The biodynamic preparations (except for horn silica) are put into the earth just at this time of waking in the earth and in spring, when the earth goes to sleep, they are dug out. Can we understand what happens in this wakeful earth that is inhaling? Conversely, the crystalline, solidly formed silica is put into the earth that is going to sleep, when it is exhaling completely, is connecting with the cosmos.

The comparison with memory and conscience can open up questions as well. Does the earth have memory? And if so, does it live in pictures as with human beings? Are perhaps the fully grown plants, which enter year after year into many and varied relationships to the soil, the location and the climate, the memories of the earth? Would all these 'memories', taken together, form the memory of the earth as humus and also as 'soil' for a new substance of the future (new plants)? And how is it with conscience through the seasons?

What would be the task of the compost preparations in this context? Between the two poles of the human being (head and belly) the task of the rhythmic system is to create a free balance in order to give human beings the opportunity to experience themselves as free beings of the earth. According to Steiner, the agricultural organism, in contrast to the human being, is bipolar and not three-fold: its belly is situated above the ground and its head below the ground. And the rhythmic organisation is not there by nature. However, it can be actively developed by human beings, in the way that human beings need to actively foster their rhythmic system, if they do not want to stay stuck either in the cold pole of the head or in the warm pole of the belly.

Is it not the task of the farmer to revitalise this diaphragm of the agricultural organism through the active formation of humus in such a way that it is possible to achieve a free balance, so that a middle comes about? For the soil a two-fold danger arises: the danger of

becoming too much head, of becoming sclerotic, or else of becoming too much belly, of encouraging processes of transformation too much, (without forming lasting humus), which makes the plants develop too many shoots. The former occurs where the organic matter becomes peat instead of humus. Peat preserves all memories; 10,000 years of old traces of pollen have been found in it. New possibilities for the future are not present in peat. The latter can be seen with organic substance that is too fresh, which has no memory of earlier years and turns to minerals very rapidly. Is it not an aspect of the task of the fertiliser that has been prepared with the compost preparations to strike a balance between these two tendencies?

How is it here with conscience? It is astounding that Steiner uses moral expressions for the effects of certain preparations, as, for example, in his saying that stinging nettles make the soil more sensible? A lot of open questions arise for further study of this Leading Thought.

To summarise, it may be emphasised that we are basically not very awake, not very awake in the way we live and solely our life of thought proceeds in a fully wakeful state, or may do so. All other processes, starting with sense perception, which is characterised as only semi-conscious, are more or less unconscious. So what H.D. Thoreau writes can be readily understood, "We need to learn to wake up again and to remain awake – not through the use of mechanical means, but through the constant inner expectation of a dawning, which will remain in the deepest sleep" (in A. Zajonc, *Aufbruch ins Unerwartete, Off into the Unexpected*. Verlag Freies Geistesleben). Have a good awakening!