

Some excerpts from:
**MORE PRECIOUS THAN LIGHT:
HOW DIALOGUE CAN TRANSFORM RELATIONSHIPS
AND BUILD COMMUNITY**
by Margreet van den Brink

Rudolf Steiner describes a beautiful human quality that calls forth hidden capacities in others. It is the practice of reverence, a deep respect and acceptance of the other. 'Reverence', he says, 'awakens a sympathetic power in the soul through which we draw towards us qualities in the beings around us which otherwise remain concealed.' It is indeed an open sesame to deep, health giving human conversation.

I am reminded that the nurturing receptive listening is akin to love, which Scott Peck describes as the will to support another in their spiritual development.

It is interesting that the events in life which hurt us most are virtually never due to a physical cause. 'What was it that was hurt?' The answer lies in the human soul, not the body. And wasn't it due to a problem in relationship? It almost always is. The healing of these hurts is a maturing process which can develop in us new capacities for compassion and understanding—'healed inner wounds can become organs of perception.'

In the struggle to awaken to community we are trying to heal the separation and isolation which is the result of increasing individuation.

From the introduction by Russell Evans

The result is that we as people are no longer naturally bound to each other, and that all the ancient forms of society, which are based on man as a groupbeing, are falling apart. We face each other now as independent individuals and have to discover new ways to find each other.

p. 9

The need which people feel nowadays to become aware of things, to find truth themselves, and to change and develop themselves, indicates that it is this inner spiritual being—our spirit self—who wants to come through in our time. This is what is knocking at the door of our inner selves asking for attention and integration. This is what inspires us to ask questions and look for answers, seeking the truth about our lives and life in general. After all, it is only through inner activity which we engage in that the spiritual human being within us can be awakened.

p. 18

In this day and age, the desire for the spirit self, the spirit person in us, to break through, is expressed in two different ways: in the first place, in the need to develop the individual personality as strongly as possible, developing the spiritual powers within it; and secondly, in the need to be there for people

other than oneself, and to help them in their development. In this respect I make a distinction between the individual impulse and the social impulse.

p. 19

For when the power of the spirit is released in our personal development, it also arouses the other, the social orientation. The development of the spirit self awakens within us the profound need to truly understand other people and to have concern for their needs.

p.19

Rudolf Steiner indicated that there are two aspects of the path to the spirit: an individual and a social aspect. By this, he meant that the inner human being can partly be aroused by ourselves, while the other part can only be aroused if the conditions for this are created in the contacts and interactions with another person.

The individual path is the task to reflect again and again on what is happening in our self, so that we can get to know our selves. At the same time, we should endeavor to develop the forces of our soul, our behavior and our feelings and thoughts in such a way that they become an instrument for the spirit to work through. The individual path requires study and spiritual deepening. This is the nourishment for the spiritual being within us, and provides us with the insights we need in order to understand everything related to these new spiritual aspects.

p. 38

As a result of this process of inner deepening and constant exercise and inner activity, the individual path transforms the soul forces into suitable instruments for the spirit. In this way the best conditions are created for following the second path, which may be referred to as the social path. This second path is aimed at awakening the spirit in the soul by means of encounters and conversations with other people. Rudolf Steiner described this path more clearly at a later stage in his life, and referred to it in a number of places. The aim of this path is to help each other to know our own self, and the soul of the other, and in this way awaken the living spirit, the spirit self in the soul.

p. 39

...it is not possible to go through this process on our own. To do so, we need each other... We are dependent on the concern of another person to help us to open up the inaccessible subconscious or superconscious parts of our soul. This concern is the key. When another person is interested in what is happening to us, listens to us and asks questions, creating the space for us to express ourselves, we not only become familiar with a larger part of our soul, but we also come closer to our own spirit self.

p. 40

It is easy to observe how this concern works when we ourselves ask someone else about his or her experiences, desires and ideals, and explore these. In the first instance, there is often a sense of surprise that this is happening. Clearly people are not used to it. They may try to establish how seriously the questions are meant and how much space there is for an answer. This sort of explanation and assessment takes place because everyone knows that after one or two questions, most people start to talk about themselves and are no longer interested in the other person. However, when the other

person continues to express an interest, this leads to some inner movement. We see a change in the facial expression, often the face gains color, the eyes become livelier and sometimes shining, and it is evident that a lot is happening in the soul. These phenomena occur in any person we talk to in this way, whether it is a shop assistant at the greengrocer's, a conductor on a train, or professional colleague in a dialogue.

When the soul starts to stir, the spirit self is activated and becomes more deeply incarnated, as it were, in the body. Often the hands and feet get warm, and there is a sense of inner enthusiasm and delight. At the same time, this is accompanied by a clarity in the soul. By expressing what is happening to them, people become aware of the dormant aspects in their soul and are in closer contact with themselves.

This incarnating and awakening effect is reinforced when we not only respond to the other person's experiences and impulses in an empathizing and interested way, but also gradually start to formulate insights on the basis of these. These insights may express the true nature of what is felt, or reflect the essence, so that the other person thinks: 'Yes, that's how it was, that's what I experienced, that's what the experience was about', or 'That's what I really want, that's what I'm aiming at.'

When this insight is achieved in the right way, i.e., when the insights arise from the situation itself, and are not imposed upon it intellectually, the other person feels that he comes closer to himself. He makes contact with a deeper part of himself, and this produces a sense of liberation and strength. This reveals that a little more of the spirit self has been awakened in the I. The inner being is awakened by consciously focusing on the content of the soul in this way—interacting with another person—and by permeating and enlightening it with knowledge and insight.

p. 41-42

Steiner writes: "The human spirit grows by digesting its experiences."

p. 46

This is the purpose of the social path. For it is only possible to harvest the fruits and produce of our experiences on earth to the proper extent and depth, if there is another person who is willing to listen, to empathize and to think with us—a person who for a short moment is willing to serve my spiritual growth, and who in turn will need another person to help her or him to go through this same process her- or himself.

All this clearly shows why there is such a great need for true encounters and conversations in our time. Nowadays every person has a deep desire to be heard, seen and known. Intuitively, we are aware that we are only really born when this happens. Yet we still meet one another so little.

p.46

'Despite its chaotic & tumultuous character, which will permeate our whole culture, the whole of the twentieth century will be characterized by this need—a strong need in people to be awakened by other people rather than only be awakened by the purely natural environment.' Then follows words which sound like a summons: 'The human being must become more important to his fellow human being than he has been in the past. He should become a spirit awakener for the others.'

In his so-called Letters to Members, Rudolf Steiner frequently—and very simply—speaks about the human encounter. In the tenth letter he points out that it is often difficult for us to find words for the things that affect us most profoundly. When however there is a listener prepared to listen attentively and with respect, he says, this can loosen the other person's tongue, because it leads to trust and the possibility of finding the truth. This in turn results in a feeling of spiritual strength in the soul, where before there was impotence. It is this feeling of strength Rudolf Steiner is saying then which is what the other person is actually seeking.

p. 49

In what happens between human beings, Rudolf Steiner says, we can perceive what the spiritual world really is. At the same time, it enables us to understand the essence of Anthroposophy. Anthroposophy is not a theoretical spiritual science; but essentially is a living spiritual experience.

p. 51

Steiner formulates this as follows: 'We may assimilate all sorts of wonderful anthroposophical ideas from this knowledge of the spiritual world, we can theoretically understand everything that is said about the etheric and the astral body and so on, but this does not mean that we understand the spiritual world. We start to develop an understanding of the spiritual world only when we wake up to the inner being or spirit self of the other person. Only then, can there be a true understanding of Anthroposophy.'

p. 52

This is why Rudolf Steiner said, 'Our task, the most important task we have for the future, is wanting to learn to understand people.'

p. 69

Our soul is characterized by a great deal of movement. This movement is caused by two opposing forces which are the foundation of our whole psychological life. One force enables us to move out of ourselves so that we can connect with the world around us. The other force separates us from the world, pulling us back inside into our own inner world. The first happens for instance when we are breathlessly listening to music in the concert hall: we become separated from ourselves and love ourselves in the music, becoming one with it. The second thing happens when we are distracted by something: in the row in front of us somebody may be moving their head in time to the music. The whole top half of their body seems to be moving. This can cause a slight irritation. At that moment we are back inside ourselves, & the world is separate from us, confronting us.

In Anthroposophy, these basic gestures of the soul—this primordial rhythm of connecting and separating, of opening up and contracting—are known as the movements of sympathy and antipathy. These terms are used in an entirely neutral way; sympathy is not 'good', and antipathy is not 'bad'. The movement of sympathy in the soul connects us with the world around us, removing us from ourselves. The movement of antipathy frees us from the world around us, so that we return into ourselves. Both movements are necessary for a healthy development of our personality and a healthy interaction with the outside world. In Anthroposophy sympathy and antipathy are related to the processes of falling asleep and waking up. This indicates that these movements are also linked to changes in consciousness.

Each time it flows into the outside world, our self-consciousness momentarily descends to the level of sleep. When it contracts, the soul awakens and comes to itself.

p. 73-74

The rhythm of connecting and contracting, of surrender and separation, which we find at every level of our life, evolved in the polarity between the developing individual human spirit and the divine world. It is reflected in the great rhythm of death and birth; in other words, of excarnation and incarnation. It is reflected in the alternating pattern of sleep and wakefulness, day and night, and in the process of 'sleeping into' things around us and waking up in ourselves. The polarity is found even in the process of the acquisition of knowledge. Every perception takes us for a moment into the object outside, while the concept, the thinking about this object, takes us back into our self.

p. 74

Not only is there a constant process of 'sleeping into and waking up' taking place in each of us personally at every level of our life and soul, but is same process also takes place in our interaction with each other

What happens when two human beings stand opposite each other? Rudolf Steiner described this as follows: 'When two human beings stand opposite each other, one is always trying to put the other person to sleep, while the other is always trying to stay awake. This is . . . the basic phenomenon in social science.' When I stand opposite another person, my attention is momentarily caught by him or her, and for a moment I lose consciousness of myself, just as with everything else I observe in the outside world. It is as though the other person hypnotizes me for a moment, putting me to 'sleep'. Then the sense of survival and the feeling of self reassert themselves and I return to myself. In this process it is as though we are vibrating between sleeping into the other person, waking up in ourselves, sleeping again into the other person, and waking up again in our own consciousness. This is a constant process when we are in contact with another person. We do not know that it is happening, because it takes place in the unconscious regions of the will.

At the point that I sleep into the other and my self-consciousness is reduced to the level of unconsciousness, my soul flows into the world of the other person's experiences and soul, and assimilates an element of this. I am not conscious of what I take in from that other person's world of experience, because I am 'sleeping' there. For the brief moment that my soul becomes so immersed in the other person's soul, we are unified in a social gesture, connected together in 'sympathy'. However, I am afraid of losing my self-consciousness altogether if I remain 'asleep' in the other person too long, and therefore there is a movement of antipathy: I withdraw and become conscious of myself again. My soul closes up, the connection is broken, and we stand opposite each other once again as two separate persons. The same process also takes place in the other person in a corresponding fashion. This is why Steiner says that when two people stand opposite each other, one is trying to put the other to sleep, while the other tries to remain awake. However, this unconscious interaction actually changes both. Because afterwards an aspect of the other person now lives in me and an aspect of me lives in the other person, neither of us is the same person that he or she was before.

Steiner call this tendency to sleep into the other person by losing the consciousness of oneself and being assimilated by the other person, the social impulse.

p. 77-78

Steiner calls the other force which pulls us back into ourselves with a gesture of antipathy, the antisocial impulse, because it breaks the unconscious connection with the other person, so that we once again stand opposite him or her as a separate individual. The antisocial impulse springs from our own intellectual abilities and consciousness, and is therefore related to the development of the I-personality and self-consciousness. Because we are thinking people, we are antisocial, i.e., we are able to look at the world around us without losing ourselves in it.

If we did not have our own individual thinking and self-consciousness, we human beings would immediately be returned to the unconscious state of primordial interconnection. Therefore this situation is immediately restored at times when our own consciousness is extinguished, as it is in sleep during the night, or in life after death. As Rudolf Steiner says:

‘In this state (...) it is possible unconsciously to build the bridge connecting us with all people.’ But he continues to say that even when we are awake, ‘(...) the other person opposite us wishes to unconsciously put us to sleep so that the bridge can be built to him—and we do the same to him. But we must guard against this, because otherwise we would be deprived of our thinking consciousness in our relationship with people.’ That is why—subconsciously—every person is a threat to our own thinking, and we are inclined to protect our thoughts from the other, and that is why ‘we are highly antisocial beings with regards to our thinking (...)’

As I said above, this vibration between sleeping into the other person and waking up in ourselves takes place in the unconscious area of the will. However, it can also be found in a more conscious area, for instance, in a conversation. I ‘enter into’ another person when I listen to him or her as a result of the effect of the social impulse. If however I do this by returning momentarily from time to time while I am listening, and then returning to the other person again the next moment, I will not lose myself entirely in that other person, and then I do become conscious of what is going on in him or her. However, I will only be able to express this at the point at which the antisocial impulse brings me back to myself again, and when I am able to think about what I have perceived and experienced. If I then give the other person my response, he or she in turn will sleep into me as a result of the social impulse, and so on. This shows that the ‘going and coming’ between the other person and myself is actually the basic phenomenon of social life.