

Rüdiger Janisch

A methodology of conveying anthroposophical contents

In many years of living with anthroposophy a number of questions have arisen for me: As you begin to comprehend the thoughts arising from anthroposophy you realize that you start to look at the world and human beings in a different way. You also notice how new skills emerge. One of my questions is: to what extent can anthroposophy be conveyed without the simultaneous training of skills? Since anthroposophy is a suprasensible reality further questions come to the fore, such as: where and how can anthroposophy be found and how can I best prepare my consciousness so that I recognize anthroposophy when I meet it? And in the end, and seemingly unrelatedly, there is the question of what cleaning shoes has to do with anthroposophy.

Thinking through a course of action

Many anthroposophists know the thinking exercise, the first of the basic exercises which are also referred to as the «subsidiary exercises». Many will have started working with this exercise and many will have dropped it again because it is not an easy task. We usually choose an object such as a pencil, chair or bed. In his lecture on the practical training of thinking (Steiner 1986) Rudolf Steiner described this exercise and others. At the very end of the lecture he added, as an aside almost, that objects from nature recommend themselves particularly for this exercise. I observed in my studies of Rudolf Steiner that, whenever he presents a line of thought he tends to leave out at least one aspect. The last connecting link that would close the circle is missing. Years can pass before one finds this missing cognitive link and finally sees the whole picture. The principle seems to apply to this first basic exercise, too. Rudolf Steiner does not mention the possibility of choosing a routine activity for this exercise, such as polishing shoes, putting on shoes, tying laces or whatever else one does in everyday life.

At our training centre I gave students the task of choosing the simplest and most familiar activity, one they carry out frequently. They were asked to not just picture the process of this activity after carrying it out, or go through it in reverse order as we do in our evening review, but to think it through precisely, step by step. As a next step they were asked to pay attention to whether anything had changed when they next carried out the activity in question. We ended up with an amazing array of observations.

The experience towards imagination

The next question helped to deepen the experience of this exercise: how does thinking through of an activity affect our thinking? The observations shared

showed that our forming of mental images was not a linear process. It rather resembled the tentative touching and exploring of the surface of an organic sculpture. It makes our thinking mobile, flexible and more alive. We sense that this exercise, if it is developed to a high degree, will awaken in us the capacity of living thinking that Rudolf Steiner refers to as imagination. Rudolf Steiner described in various writings how we can train in us the faculty of imagination and the next higher faculties of inspiration and intuition.¹

The experience towards inspiration

We then further examined the observations made in the exercise by asking how thinking through of an activity affects our feeling. Many different feelings were described, with nuances ranging from despair through joyful discovery to overflowing enthusiasm. We realized how through these feelings something of the everyday activity in question, something of the thinking exercise and also an aspect our own self began to speak in us. Further exercises along this line, that ask of us the courage to be selfless and create an inner space where we can listen to our feelings and where our observation can begin to speak, give us an initial sense of the capacity of inner listening that Rudolf Steiner calls inspiration.

The experience towards intuition

Finally we looked at our experience of this exercise with a view to how reflecting on a course of action affects our will. It became apparent that, in the repeated daily activity, we develop, apart from attention and presence of mind in our actions, also a deep sense of inner calm. Over and above that we realized how the activity could be altered, simplified or improved. Awareness in our doing, the will to improve and strength of conscience were awakened. We also noticed that, with this exercise, we step, with our thinking, out of ourselves and enter into the process of the activity, becoming one with it. This uniting with something outside us, with another being, if developed to the highest degree, is referred to as intuition by Rudolf Steiner.

With this <introspective observation based on a natural scientific method> (as it is described in the subtitle of Rudolf Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom*; Steiner 1975) we achieved an initial experience towards imagination, inspiration and intuition as spiritual tools for gaining knowledge.

Thinking with the will

Rudolf Steiner points us to two abilities that we can develop (Steiner 1989a): we can learn to enliven our thinking through the will and to illuminate our will through thinking by becoming aware of our will activity. The latter we achieve by learning to observe the will – with regard to which we are usually asleep – in action. We are all familiar with the first of the two abilities from meeting anthroposophy in the thoughts we find expressed in Rudolf Steiner's lectures and writings. They provide plenty of opportunity to exercise the will so that we

can grasp and comprehend these thoughts. Goethean observation of natural phenomena can be a wonderful help in trying to penetrate that world of thoughts: the metamorphosis of plants, the sensory-moral effect of colour, the forms and processes of the earth and the evolution of human life before birth that Friedrich Benesch² taught exemplary. This is one way of how we can learn to observe our thoughts.

Living with questions

In Rudolf Steiner's writings and lectures, which challenge our will to endeavour to understand them in feeling and thinking, we also find an overwhelming wealth of answers. Again, we meet the <principle of the missing link> because Rudolf Steiner rarely formulates the question to which he provides the answer. In the Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts (Steiner 1989b) we find, highly condensed and summarized, an abundance of answers. What are the questions to these answers? The first Leading Thought, for instance, speaks of anthroposophy arising in us as <a need of our heart, of the life of feeling> (p. 14). But what are my heart and will questions through which anthroposophy comes to expression in me? The second Leading Thought (p. 14) speaks of the limits of our knowledge. But what experience of such limits made it possible for suprasensible reality to illumine my consciousness? The Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts seem like nuts – to use a metaphor – with a hard and impenetrable (in itself incomprehensible) shell. We ask ourselves how we can penetrate to the inner core of these nuts. A nutcracker (such as the online version of Steiner's collected works) can break the shell but also the life inside the nut. Alternatively we can keep the nut protected in the warm, light-dark, moist earth in order to induce germination. The nut's strong life force will then open the shell with the gentle but persevering power that we also observe when a weed or blade of grass breaks through tarmac. Our first step towards awakening the life of the Leading Thoughts could consist in finding the questions to which they are the answer. It will still be difficult to work with them by oneself. But if we approach them in a group, together, the sprouting will begin at once. The Leading Thoughts seem to be written in a way that requires us to study and discuss them in a group.

The will activity of living thoughts

If it is true that these thoughts are shells for living forces that are active in us and in the world, we can ask what will activities or archetypal movements correspond to these living thought forces. In a lecture to the first Waldorf teachers on meditative self-development (Steiner 1994) Rudolf Steiner described that it is no longer the gods who imprint the thinking into the human brain. We have to do it ourselves. We must take up this task and carry it forward consciously. In the same context Rudolf Steiner referred to eurythmy as an activity that can facilitate this continued conscious imprinting of thinking into

the brain. Many years ago I already wondered if we can find will activities and archetypal movements – for instance in eurythmy, in the arts, in life – that are related to, or expressions of, these active living thoughts. Again I was able to experience how a missing link was added to the chain of cognition. I found an answer in Rudolf Steiner's efforts – in the months after his re-founding of the Anthroposophical Society at Christmas 1923 and his reformation of the way anthroposophy was presented and conveyed – to find ways of helping Waldorf teachers, physicians, eurythmists and priests to acquire the faculties necessary in their respective professional field. At that occasion Steiner particularly emphasized the <magic effect> that artistic activity can lend to their striving.

Sculptural activity as a bridge to imagination

If we apply the exercise described earlier of reflecting on an outer will activity to sculpting, for instance, we can observe the following: blindfold – in order to enhance our senses of touch, movement, life, balance and warmth – we shape a lump of clay with rhythmical-regular movements. We have the image of a sphere in mind and gradually the clay takes on a round shape. The clay gets warmer in the process. This can be made conscious beautifully if we hand the clay ball around the circle to our neighbour, receiving it back after a while.

If we want to give the ball an oval shape, we need to first change our mental image into that of an egg. In this way we can move from form to form by continuously changing our mental image to the next form while our hands mold the clay, until, in the end, for example a human shape emerges. The comparison of the form created with the mental image can be quite surprising. What do these processes do to our thinking? Because the mental images move, change, metamorphose our thinking gets on the way to become a living thinking.

Tone eurythmy and musical activity as bridges to inspiration

In a similar way, tone eurythmy movements to element of music can be recreated in thinking and our listening deeply into the musical elements can be discript. The world as it resounds begins to express itself in feeling and the development towards the faculty of inner listening, towards inspiration, becomes tangible.

Speech eurythmy and drama as bridges to intuition

When we deepen our perception of movement gestures in speech eurythmy, when we listen into the gestures of the spoken word or when we slip into a character of a play we practise identifying with another being. This is the beginning of a path that leads to uniting with beings, to intuition.

Artistic activity as a source for diagnosis and therapy in curative education

Against this background we understand what Rudolf Steiner meant when he emphasized that <if we experience art inwardly, we are imbued with something that enables us to see our true pictorial nature. [...] We must get to know our spiritual human essence through our pictorial nature. We will come to be transparent to each other in the future.> (Steiner 1982, p. 113)

Such exercises can help us to form a living picture of a person's appearance, movement and language, of their attitude to the world around them and of their perceptive and cognitive capacities. This living picture can reveal a person's need for complementation, for support or for encouragement of the potential that lies dormant within him or her.

Listening deeply and perceptively into this living picture might evoke or encourage a decision, which will allow both of us to grow in the encounter, grow closer towards the harmonious person, the person in balance, the archetype of the human being. The encounter with the other person becomes a teacher on the path of self-development and the true source for diagnosis and therapy in curative education.

Rudolf Steiner's living example

In a biographical article on Rudolf Steiner, Walter Johannes Stein wrote how Steiner, in the encounter with his highly revered teacher Carl Julius Schröer, envisaged taking up a task that was given to Schröer, who was, however, unable to carry it out (Stein 1920). In the moment of decision three aspects came together for Rudolf Steiner: the living image of the task through imagination; the voice in his heart that encouraged him (true inspiration) and the decision to enter a karmic circle that, without the decision, he would not have come into contact with (true intuition). Steiner's decision was an act of freedom and it allowed him to write his *Philosophy of Freedom*. (1975) It was also the birth of the spiritual being of Anthroposophia. This experience of a moment when imagination, inspiration and intuition came together, needed decades to gradually unfold in consciousness to what we now know as Anthroposophy. The process described here can be repeated in every meeting with another person. If our encounters become a schooling for self-development we will learn from them how to transform, harmonize and heal personal destiny, which is, in the most profound sense also task and object of curative education and social therapy.

The Foundation Stone Meditation and the path of the learner

From what has been said so far, we can, in summary, establish four steps on the learner's path: being active with the limbs, becoming aware, by speaking with each other, of experiences that will hopefully grow into living thought images which then become rooted inside, in the I. We also discover in this method the archetypal stages of early child development: walking, speaking, thinking, becoming an I. The same archetype seems to underlie the remarkable synopsis

of the anthroposophical view of the human being that Rudolf Steiner offered in the Foundation Stone Meditation, in the opening line of each of the four verses:

⟨Human Soul! You live within the limbs⟩

⟨Human Soul! You live within the beat of heart and lung⟩

⟨Human Soul! You live within the resting head⟩

⟨At the turning-point of time the spirit light of the world entered the stream of earthly being.⟩

(Steiner 2003)

In the light of these considerations it is possible to apply the word ⟨turning-point of time⟩ to any learning situation where the learning experience leads to inner transformation and becomes rooted in the I.

The Foundation Stone Meditation and the path of the mentor

The path of the mentor also has four stages. Rudolf Steiner described three of them in the fourth lecture of *Balance in Teaching*:

1. Studying the knowledge of the human being in the evening
2. Spiritually digesting through meditation what has been absorbed
3. On the next day, having taken what was studied into one's sleep remembering the knowledge of the human being in a particular life situation ⟨out of the spirit⟩ so that we can act in the moment, with true presence of mind (Steiner 1994, p. 51f.).

By studying the human being, by continuing to think and feel the ideas about the human being and by bringing them together ⟨we gradually live ourselves consciously into the spiritual world⟩, beholding the spiritual world as Steiner said about the Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts. (Rudolf Steiner 1989b, p. 54). We can call the activity ⟨spirit-beholding.⟩ Digesting spiritually through meditation we can call ⟨spirit-contemplating⟩ and the action we take in the life situation, with presence of mind, we can refer to as ⟨remembering out of the spirit⟩ or ⟨spirit-recalling⟩.

Again we find that a link is missing. The journey begins with the mentor's heartfelt wish to find what is right and good for the learner. But how do I find what may become good, what I long for in my heart and what I will direct with an enlightened head? The archetypal image of this path speaks also out of the Foundation Stone Meditation. We find it if we follow the soul exercises that reverberate in the four verses, in reverse order: It begins with the plea to the Divine Light, the Christ Sun, that good may become what I found from my heart and what I direct from my head. As a second step we are called upon to ⟨practise spirit beholding in quietness of thought.⟩ This is followed by the appeal to ⟨practise spirit contemplating in balance of the soul⟩ and finally we are told to ⟨practise spirit-recalling in depths of soul.⟩ (Steiner 2003)

We have thus two interpenetrating ways of awakening to the spirit in our will.

(Translated from the German by Margot M. Saar)

Bibliography

Stein, Walter Johannes (1920): *Rudolf Steiner als Philosoph und Theosoph.* A response to the 1st and 2nd edition of the essay of the same title by Dr Friedrich Traub, professor at Tübingen. *Der kommende Tag*, Stuttgart.

Steiner, Rudolf (1975): *Die Philosophie der Freiheit. Grundzüge einer modernen Weltanschauung. Seelische Beobachtungsergebnisse nach naturwissenschaftlicher Methode* (GA 4). Verlag Freies Geistesleben. Stuttgart. Published in English as *The Philosophy of Freedom* or *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*

Steiner, Rudolf (1982): *Geschichtliche Symptomatologie* (GA 185). Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Dornach/Schweiz. Published in English as *From Symptom to Reality*. London 1976, tr. A Parker

Steiner, Rudolf (1986): *Praktische Ausbildung des Denkens*. In: *Die Beantwortung von Welt- und Lebensfragen durch Anthroposophie* (GA 108). Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Dornach/Schweiz. Published in English as <Practical Training in Thought.>

Steiner, Rudolf (1989a): *Anthroposophische Gemeinschaftsbildung* (GA 257). Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Dornach/Schweiz. Available in English as *Awakening to Community*, tr. M. Spock

Steiner, Rudolf (1989b): *Anthroposophische Leitsätze* (GA 26). Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Dornach/Schweiz. English title: *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts*

Steiner, Rudolf (1994): *Meditativ erarbeitete Menschenkunde* (GA 302a). Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Dornach/Schweiz. Published in English as *Balance in Teaching*, Great Barrington 2007, tr. R. Pusch

Steiner, Rudolf (2003): *Die Grundsteinlegung der Allgemeinen Anthroposophischen Gesellschaft 1923/1924* (in GA 260). Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Dornach/Schweiz. *The Foundation Stone Mediation* can be found in various English publications.

¹ For instance: *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis* (GA12) or *Was wollte das Goetheanum und was soll die Anthroposophie?* (GA 84)

² Priest and former teacher at the Christian Community Priest Seminary in Stuttgart, Germany