

D I S C O V E R
E U R Y T H M Y

“movement that speaks and sings”

-- excerpt --

Supplementary Notes
on
Anthroposophical Contexts

by

J o h n R a l p h

*"If a human being reveals through eurythmy-gestures
what his being inherently possesses as language,
and enables the entire soul experience to become visible,
then the mysteries of the world may be artistically expressed."*

-- Rudolf Steiner

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This is an extract from the printer-friendly ebook of **Discover Eurythmy** that contains all the information about eurythmy available online at www.eurythmy.org.uk. More background information, further reading and resources are available online, with explanations of anthroposophical terms.

Discover Eurythmy aims to encourage more interest in eurythmy, to inform and support dialogue between enthusiasts, audiences and eurythmists, and to generate more questions!

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Supplementary Notes on Anthroposophical Contexts

Explanatory notes on topics mentioned in **Discover Eurythmy**. Before the daughter the mother and father; before eurythmy – Anthroposophia and Rudolf Steiner.

"It is the task of Anthroposophy to bring a greater depth, a wider vision and a more living spirit into the other forms of art. But the art of Eurythmy could only grow up out of the soul of Anthroposophy; could only receive its inspiration through a purely Anthroposophical conception."

-- Rudolf Steiner

What is anthroposophy?

There are many definitions of anthroposophy – literally: *human wisdom* – and here is mine. Anthroposophy is a sensitive practical ethical activity. The aim is to work in the world towards the highest ideals that an individual can recognise through spiritual insight. Spiritual understanding is translated into good and practical purpose. Some people dismiss anthroposophy as a library of knowledge bequeathed by Rudolf Steiner, but I see it as the ongoing endeavours of all who embody spiritual ideals in ethical co-creativity. Anthroposophy lives in our initiative. Steiner showed us what is possible.

How does one gain spiritual insight? Rudolf Steiner wrote a basic manual for anyone aspiring to replicate his spiritual research – **How to Know Higher Worlds**. These methods are supplemented in several of his other books and in many of his lectures. The essential needs of our time require spiritual ideals of global responsibility that transcend national or racial differences. In this context anthroposophy has many friends in spiritually striving peoples around the world.

"Anthroposophists have a need to find answers to certain questions about humanity and the world that is as urgent as the need to satisfy their hunger and thirst."

-- Rudolf Steiner (Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts)

Anthroposophy is an individual path of learning that leads the human spirit towards community with the spirit in the world. It answers the heartfelt need to truly understand what needs to be done in the world, and its existence is justified in how it satisfies that need. What moves us in life can become more real than the facts of our situation.

Rudolf Steiner's book **A Philosophy of Spiritual Activity** presents an ethical framework for such personally experienced ideals. Far from being an aloof intellectual, Steiner supported the practical initiatives of those who gave to him for advice. He embraced the creative arts and inspired their renewal as an integral element within the healthy development of our culture. Although Steiner's proposals of a Threefold Social Order have not found universal appeal, they retain a remarkable relevance in the developing European and World society. A number of anthroposophical communities, such as Camphill, continue to live and explore these social ideals.

The insights that Rudolf Steiner conveyed as a result of his own spiritual research were always shared on the understanding that they would be tested in active life and verified by anyone who took up his suggestions. There were never any commands from 'on high' and personal freedom was fully respected, each person being encouraged to act out of their highest ideals.

In anthroposophy we are free to choose how we take up spirit work in the context of our life experience. The vocation of Eurythmia, daughter of Anthroposophia, is no exception. I believe that it is a core task of eurythmy to raise our awareness to the spirit that moves through all things.

Who was Rudolf Steiner?

Rudolf Steiner (1861 - 1925) was born in Austria. From his youth he was aware of the elemental beings in nature and he trained and refined his spiritual observation to enable him to make objective studies of spiritual life and also to propose a method of spiritual development (How to Know Higher Worlds) which is suited to the modern western constitution. Respecting the traditions of the past, he pointed towards future tasks within the challenges facing humanity. He brought a disciplined rigour to the investigation of spiritual worlds.

'I never speak of anything spiritual that I do not know by the most direct spiritual experience.' (Rudolf Steiner: letter of 1903)

Rudolf Steiner began his public spiritual teaching in the most suitable environment he could find at the time – the Theosophical Society. His spiritual insights brought him into conflict with the theosophists when Krishnamurthy was proclaimed as the reincarnation of Christ. He could not countenance such a claim and quickly departed from those circles. Steiner often spoke of the essential role of the being of Christ in human evolution. He continued to develop his work independently under the name of anthroposophy.

He worked with others in specialist fields, giving new directions from spiritual principles in Education, Medicine, Architecture, Biodynamic Agriculture and the Arts. The new art of eurythmy developed in 1912.

In 1923 Steiner founded the General Anthroposophical Society which has its headquarters at The Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland.

What is an etheric body?

We all have a 'life' or etheric body as one part of our constitution. Plants and animals also have an etheric body but minerals do not. Our etheric body keeps our physical corpse alive and binds the soul or astral body to it. The life processes and forces in our etheric body heal and maintain our physical body, and can also be recognised within language and music. The Word that created us keeps us alive through etheric forces.

I like to think of it as the *vital body* or *organ of enlivenment*. When we sleep, the physical and etheric bodies are free to regenerate while our soul and spirit dissociate from our physiology. The etheric body progressively detaches from the physical body at death, during the time when the various organs can still be successfully removed for transplant operations. When that spirit that moves through all things has departed, it is no longer possible to make use of body parts.

Four-fold Constitution of the Human Being

The human constitution, according to anthroposophical spiritual science, can be considered as having four distinct members. These are the physical body, etheric or life body, astral or soul body, and the ego organisation.

The physical body remains as the corpse after death. It has solid, fluid and gaseous elements, and warmth.

The etheric body is the totality of the life forces that activate, heal and maintain the physical form. Our nourishment not only provides physical substance but also sustains our life forces. The etheric body has a fluid nature.

The soul, or astral body is the bearer of experiences, our inner life. Its threefold nature comprises thinking, feeling and will. The astral body has a gaseous nature.

The ego the self or the I is the spiritual human being who experiences and penetrates into the human constitution, remaining partly awake and partly beyond normal consciousness during earthly life. The ego is not our selfish enemy in anthroposophy. This term is used specifically to refer to that part of our being that has the capacity to develop and transform the soul. What the I has made of the soul, etheric and physical in childhood and youth become the I-organisation. This continues to develop in healthy adult life as the self-made individuality, existing in warmth.

As we sleep, the physical and etheric components of our constitution separate from the soul and spirit, reuniting on waking.

The Three-fold Human Constitution

Anthroposophy views the human being from a variety of perspectives, having body, soul, and spirit.

The organisation of nerves and senses supports our perception and thinking.
The middle system of rhythmical breath and blood supports the feeling life.
The metabolism and limbs combine to support our active will.

The spirit can be seen in terms of consciousness. Our varying levels of awareness can be broadly clustered into wakefulness, dreaminess and sleep. Unconsciousness and coma can be considered as profound levels of sleep. Our feelings are generally more

changeable and dreamy than our thinking. Higher levels of consciousness are also threefold. Steiner calls them Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition.

What is Waldorf Education?

The first Waldorf School opened in 1919 in Stuttgart. A curriculum was developed by Rudolf Steiner that organised the main subject lessons into a sequence which supports the healthily developing child. The sensitivity of the teachers leads them to tailor the curriculum to the receptivity of the classes. At best this work offers a natural therapeutic progression towards robust adulthood and individual self-actualisation.

Eurythmy is an integral part of the curriculum with specific indications for all age groups including aspects which support the various main lesson themes.

What is Anthroposophical Medicine?

With the help of Dr Ita Wegman, Rudolf Steiner developed new remedies based on a spiritual understanding of the human being. The breadth of this original approach to complementary medicine is beyond the scope of **Discover Eurythmy**. Anthroposophical medicine is practised alongside and in addition to conventional medicine. There are various artistic therapies used, including eurythmy therapy, for which Steiner gave extensive indications. Anthroposophical Therapeutic Art has a different approach to Art Therapy, using specific qualities within the medium, forms and colours.

What is the trinal method of training practitioners?

Theory, practice and the arts make three. The training of anthroposophical curative educators and social therapists has shown that the arts make a significant additional contribution to learning in these fields. The integration of theory and practice is leavened and deepened by suitable artistic activities that promote creativity and initiative that leads to new insights in a complex learning environment. Individual reflection on ideas and experiences ties the knot that binds these three.

Other aspects of adult education in relation to personal life processes and destiny are considered by the New Adult Learning Movement (NALM).

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