

Early Childhood and the Consciousness Soul
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When Rudolf Steiner spoke of the human being, he not only described body, soul and spirit, but spoke of three levels of each. Thus within the body there is the physical, etheric and astral bodies, within the soul there is the sentient, intellectual and consciousness souls, and within the spirit there is spirit self, life spirit and spirit man (in its broadest sense.) This is described in more detail in the opening chapter of Rudolf Steiner's book *Theosophy* as well as in his introductory booklet, *The Education of the Child*.

What is particularly important for modern human beings is the development of the consciousness soul. This is the newest aspect of the human soul, for the two lower soul forces were developed in earlier epochs. It is our current epoch, beginning with the Renaissance and continuing for about 2000 years, that provides the conditions with which humanity as a whole can develop this higher soul capacity. It is the consciousness soul that carries a full awareness of the soul nature of the human being and also serves as a bridge to an understanding of the spiritual. In the future, humanity as a whole will be able to develop spiritual capacities in a much fuller way than is possible today. Nevertheless, each human being is able to develop soul and spiritual capacities to a large extent, if they so will, especially if their upbringing and education are supportive of it.

The following lecture was given at the International Waldorf Kindergarten Conference in England at Michael Hall School in September 1995. It was preceded by a lecture by Dr. Helmut von K gelgen that laid a foundation for it. Unfortunately, it is not yet possible to present that lecture in note form, but we hope the following is clear enough to help stimulate our thinking about the vital relationship between the first seven years and the development of the consciousness soul.

Yesterday evening in Dr. von K gelgen's talk we heard of the beautiful pattern of development through which the three seven year phases of the first 21 years are transformed into the three soul phases that develop between 21 and 42. Rudolf Steiner indicates that the growth forces and experiences of the first seven years play a vital part in the development of the consciousness soul between the ages of 35 and 42. The school years, between 7 and 14, serve as a basis for the development of the mind or intellectual soul between 28 and 35, and adolescence, between 14 and 21, prepares for the development of the sentient soul between 21 and 28. Later, these soul and body forces are again transformed into the three phases of spiritual development between 42 and 63. Now we want to look more closely at the relationship between the first seven years of life and their impact on the development of the consciousness soul between 35 and 42.

When one looks at the whole of human development in this way, then one can say that in the first 21 years the human being is concentrating especially on the body; in the next 21 years on the soul and in the following 21 years on the spirit. In the first 21 years the individual more or less follows the pattern of physical development implanted in one. This development is influenced by environment, education and other factors, but there is little the child can do to influence its own physical development. It works in accordance with the laws of development implanted within it, and as the Ego is not yet fully incarnated, there is less possibility for individual initiative and freedom.

After the birth of the Ego around age 21, the individual has the chance to transform the growth forces of the first 21 years into the three soul aspects. This is a challenge and is influenced in part by how well the development occurred in the first 21 years. If the Ego finds itself with an undernourished physical body, a

weakened etheric or a chaotic astral, then the task of developing the soul forces becomes much more difficult than it would otherwise be.

As the soul forces are developed, one sees that the greatest challenge is in developing the consciousness soul for it is such a new member of the human being. Humanity as a whole developed the sentient soul in the Egyptian epoch and the mind soul in the Greco-Roman epoch. Now in the contemporary epoch, which began in the 1400's, humanity is developing the consciousness soul, that vital gateway to spiritual awareness.

One might wonder, why should it be so difficult to develop the consciousness soul. After all we have already experienced nearly 600 years of the consciousness soul epoch. Until the beginning of this century, however, two situations existed which served as hindrances in the development of the consciousness soul. They are now removed and humanity is in a more active, intense period of development. One hindrance was that the Kali Yuga, the Dark Age which lasted for 5000 years, only ended in 1899. During this period, humanity was increasingly separated from the forces of spirituality and light. Some strong individuals stood out and reached toward the light, but, in general, humanity felt the strength of spiritual darkness. Now humanity as a whole can experience the light of spirituality much more fully, and one is continually astonished at how widespread a basic recognition of spirituality is becoming.

The second change was the beginning of the Michaelic period in 1879. The Archangel Michael strengthens individuality, a quality much needed by the consciousness soul. During the first few hundred years of the consciousness soul epoch, the Archangel Gabriel took the lead in guiding humanity. Gabriel is the Archangel associated with birth, childhood and family. Under his influence all relations based on blood ties are especially strong. Under the Archangel Michael, blood ties become less important as individuals seek a new, more conscious basis for community building.

These two changes have allowed humanity to work much more intensively on the consciousness soul during the past hundred years. As kindergarten teachers we need to take seriously the relationship which Rudolf Steiner indicated between the first seven years of life and the years of 35 to 42 when individuals are working to develop the consciousness soul. If the difficulties of the first seven years are too great, then the individual can feel trapped in the lower soul bodies. He or she can find it very difficult to come into the new realm of the consciousness soul, and will find it nearly impossible to move beyond it into spiritual realms after age 42. Here one sees the problem of "mid-life crisis." This can be a tragic turning away from higher soul and spiritual development and a return to the familiar space of lower soul development. One grabs hold of youth and the sentient soul, or builds a fortress around oneself where the intellectual or mind soul alone is cultivated.

So much of human development hangs on the question of whether human beings can take the next step into the consciousness soul and then onwards into the spirit. Because this step is so important, the opposing forces of Lucifer and Ahriman do all they can to hold humanity back. We can see this throughout human life but their influence is especially marked in the first seven years. If the little child's development is seriously disturbed, the individual will find it much harder to break through later into higher soul and spirit realms. One could say that tampering with early childhood is the most efficient place for Lucifer and Ahriman to work if they want to interfere with the soul-spiritual development of the human being. A little interference then, so that the child is prematurely hardened or kept in a soft non-incarnated state too long, has tremendous consequences later.

One way that the opposing forces work on young children is to prematurely awaken the nerve-sense system. Modern children are often very quick and conscious, but they have difficulty staying in touch with the more dream-like consciousness through which they can learn and grow so actively. This change can be seen in children's pictures. Traditionally, children all over the world did the same motifs in

approximately the same sequence. These pictures arose from the child's being in touch with his or her own growth forces, as is well described in Michaela Strauss' book on children's drawings. However, in the foreword, written in the 1970's, Strauss pointed out that children's drawings were undergoing a change. Children of that time were less able to draw the archetypal motifs than were children before World War II, whose pictures were collected by her father. She points out that the phenomena have remained the same, i.e., the developmental patterns have not changed, "but the child's unconscious perception of the laws of development of his own being - which are mirrored in his drawings - appears to have become weaker. Should this fact be seen in connection with the nervousness and overstimulation of today?" (*Understanding Children's Drawings*, page 11.)

Today the situation has grown so severe that many children cannot draw the archetypal pictures at all. Their drawings are full of cars, machines, weapons, dinosaurs, or other motifs that seem to come from a more awakened relationship to the world and not from a dream-like relationship to their own inner growth forces. Helping children return to archetypal drawing is a challenge, for ultimately one needs to help them be less awake and more dream-like. It is generally not sufficient to simply tell them they cannot draw such and such a picture. Finding a way back to archetypal drawings is a research question for us all.

One also sees the attack on childhood through increased illnesses such as asthma and allergies. In general, children in America, for example, are much more stressed and nervous today than in previous times. Government statistics show that during the past few decades there has been a great deterioration in children's health. Previously, about 1 1/2% of American children were considered so handicapped that they could not participate in a normal way in school or in life, in general. That figure has now grown to about 6 1/2%, with low-income children at an alarming 10%.

Childhood today is under attack and young children do not have the forces to withstand the attack. We, as adults, have the strength and must find ways to help protect the children. All children need this help so that they can have a healthier childhood, but also a healthier adulthood with the possibility of healthy growth in the soul-spiritual realms. There are many children today who show signs of having come to earth with a special connection to this consciousness soul age. At a young age, one feels them shaping their own destiny. For example, I have met children who have decided to become vegetarians at the age of four or five. This is not a parental decision, for the parents are not vegetarians. It is as if the children feel this is what is needed if they are to grow and thrive in this lifetime.

On my recent journey in Asia, I also met children who were making decisions regarding what language to speak that seemed somewhat independent of what they would normally do through imitation. For example, a family with four children spent three years in America. There the older two children learned English in school, but the newborn twins were at home with their mother who spoke Thai to them. The family then returned to Thailand, and the parents seemed to mostly speak Thai with each other. The children were surrounded by Thai speaking people, and it would have been the most natural thing for the children to drop their English and speak Thai. Instead, they spoke only English to one another, and all four, even the little twins, were fluent speakers with little accent. It was as if the children recognized that as modern souls they would need English as well as Thai, and took it upon themselves to keep their English alive.

All children come to the world with their own intentions formulated during the time before birth. More and more one meets children whose intention seems to be to care deeply for the earth and to be at home with all people. It does not seem far-fetched to think of these souls as working strongly with Michaelic impulses, or to see that they will work strongly with the consciousness soul. For their sake, as well as for the sake of all children, one needs to be strong in providing protection for children today. Otherwise a generation of strong individuals who have much to offer to the earth and humanity may find themselves too burdened and unable to accomplish what they have set out to do.

It is probably no coincidence that during this century when early childhood is under such attack, kindergarten education has come to life. Previously, there was no need, not only because mothers were at home, but because the wisdom of the home sufficed to protect young children. Now the attacks are greater, and the wisdom of the kindergarten is needed to strengthen the children. Rudolf Steiner must have foreseen this need, for he placed much emphasis on founding a kindergarten. It was a great disappointment to him that it was not possible to start the kindergarten work during his lifetime. At a teachers' conference he said, "We need kindergartens! We need kindergartens!" One can almost hear him pounding the table.

In the Waldorf kindergarten we have so many means of helping and healing children - through play, through the work of the adult, through music, verse and gesture, through the arts, etc. One could look at every aspect of the Waldorf kindergarten and ask: how does this help prepare the child for later developing the consciousness soul? How does this provide healing and protection for the child today?

In the time available, we can only look at one aspect in relationship to the consciousness soul: the fairy tale. Fairy tales have much to tell us about the consciousness soul, and in their own way they provide a picture for the child to grow into. The consciousness soul lives at the boundary of soul and spirit. In the fairy tales, a common motif is the marriage of the masculine and the feminine, often in the form of prince and princess. This is generally understood to be a picture of the marriage of spirit with soul. In some fairy tales, the soul is enchanted or hidden away and waits for the spirit to come and awaken it. In other fairy tales such as the *Seven Ravens*, the masculine, or spirit, is enchanted, and it is the striving of the soul or feminine element which breaks the enchantment. In the awakening of the consciousness soul, one also gets both pictures. Sometimes the soul is more active, sometimes the spirit, and the individual seeks a balance between them, so that spirit and soul can be wed within.

One fairy tale which stands out as a wonderful picture of soul and spirit working together is a Zulu tale from South Africa called the *Winning of Kwelanga*. Kwelanga is the daughter of the Chief and is a princess-like figure. It is time for her to wed, and the Chief tests each young man by giving certain tasks. None can complete the tasks. Then Zamo hears of Kwelanga and wants to win her hand. His elderly parents try to dissuade him, pointing out that many have tried and failed. His response is, "I must whistle with my own mouth." He arrives at the village of the Chief who is surprised to see him alone. "Where is your retinue?" he asks, and the boy answers, "Among my people it is the custom to do such things alone." Already one senses that here is a youth on the path towards the consciousness soul, which often demands that we stand as an individual and act alone.

Then he sees Kwelanga and determines to win her hand. She also sees him and wants him as her partner. The tasks he is assigned are impossible, and each time he is at the point of failing when from somewhere, a song is sung and the task is accomplished. The third time he sees Kwelanga and realizes that she has sung the songs. They go to her father, and when he sees that his daughter wants to marry Zamo he agrees. In this story, the marriage of soul and spirit comes about because both are active and want the union. It is a beautiful story and suited for the kindergarten, especially when told in the latter part of the year when the oldest children are getting ready for first grade.

The fairy tales provide wonderful pictures which can live and grow in the children and help prepare them for the time when they may become inwardly active and seek the union of soul and spirit. Rudolf Steiner spoke of fairy tales as being a good angel which accompanies a child from birth onwards. He also spoke of the importance of puppetry and marionette work and called it a healing for the ills of civilization. Fairy tales and puppetry are only one example of the riches which are available in the Waldorf kindergarten. We have so many activities which lay a foundation so that later, in the time of developing the

consciousness soul, there will not be hindrances, but rather a base of experience which can readily be transformed into this highest aspect of soul life.