

Much Depends on Whether People Open Themselves A Conversation About Angels and Humans

(A conversation about angels and humans is a conversation about children and religion, education and self-education, about birth and death. Cornelia Haendler talked about this subject with Helmut von Kügelgen in Germany. The article and its translation was provided to us by the International Waldorf Kindergarten Association, and has been modified slightly for use here.)

Biographical notes on Helmut von Kügelgen:

In 1916, Helmut von Kügelgen was born in Tallin, Estonia. His first memories and kindergarten experiences were in Helsinki. His school attendance was mainly in Berlin, with two years in Bucharest studying journalism and graduation with a Ph.D. From 1939 to 1945 he was in the war, spending a half year as a prisoner of war.

After that, he spent 30 years as a teacher of the original Waldorf School in Stuttgart, edited the magazine, "Erziehungskunst" (The Art of Education), co-founded the "Freies Jugendseminar" (Independent Youth Seminar), and today is still active as a Board member of the "Bund Freier Waldorfschulen" (Association of Waldorf Schools in Germany) and the Anthroposophical Society of Germany. Since 1969 he has been especially active in the International Association of Waldorf Kindergartens, and for some time was director of the Waldorf Kindergarten Seminar in Stuttgart, a state recognized training. He has held many lectures, written many articles, and edited a collection of booklets on the festivals and the inner life of Waldorf teachers. His travels have taken him to kindergartens and schools around the world, where his rich insights into children and spiritual life are much appreciated.

Cornelia Haendler: In our time we are so oriented intellectually and materialistically, yet angels seem to be making their comeback again. To speak about angels today is no longer taboo. Although there is a danger of showing them in a kitschy, mawkish or even demonically distorted way, their true appearance touches us very deeply, especially in art. Has there not always been something mysterious about angels?

Helmut von Kügelgen: I think that the greatness and power of spiritual experiences touches the limits of human beings. What is experienced as suffering and destiny is one reality. The other reality is that time in human history has progressed. It is a fact that we originate from the spiritual world, from the heavenly world, from the world of spiritual beings - however we might wish to describe it. Yet we seek our incarnation and our destiny here on the earth. I think this becomes particularly apparent at the two gates: the gate of birth and the gate of death.

At the gate of death there gazes in from the spiritual world what can be called angels, or the world of beings, or of spirit. There are also beings at the other gate, the gate of birth. During my childhood it would have been impossible to talk so openly about birth and especially in the newspapers to talk about abortion, about being born or not being born, in such a way. On the one side come the voices that say, "My womb belongs to me!" On the other side, the language that we hear from Rome and the Pope also does not fit into our time anymore.

In modern destinies, where these kinds of questions thrust themselves into life, the experience of the spiritual world becomes so strong that it craves for a tangible form. A way emerges. There is a remembrance of the heavenly world as something orderly and containing the fullness of spiritual and of divine powers. It is a fact that the border of consciousness with the spiritual world is somewhat sore or chafed. It is actually a part of the human being to embrace the spiritual world, not leaving it outside or oppressing it, but trying to live with the awareness that there is something in the spiritual that belongs to the human being.

As human beings we are also open towards the earth. Through evolution we carry stones, plants and animals in us. Our physical nature includes the material nature, the peace of the mineral realm which you can see and touch. Furthermore, we have all the secrets of growth, development, death and of continuous change in us and can summarize this life as the secret of the plant world. Also, we have a kind of life in us that we share with the animal kingdom which is sensitive to feelings and passions. It has been a tremendous discovery for humanity that all physical life on earth developed during the course of evolution. Now it is important to see how the spiritual individuality is incarnating into it. It is this individuality that we call the "I". If you would observe this more accurately, you would get a trace of the angels. I don't mean exactly what appears in art and literature. What appears in art and in poems of Rilke, for example, are always overwhelming impressions.

Cornelia Haendler: In our conversation I would like to seek the entrance to the world of angels mainly in the immediate human, living experience. Do you know of angel experiences that refer to the time of expecting the arrival of a child?

Helmut von Kügelgen: There you can clearly notice the difference between humans who live with the reality of a spiritual world, and those who always dose their mind to the spiritual world by thinking: "This is all garbage." Of those who are simply open, you always hear that they know certain things, for example: "I conceived on this particular night." Women are generally more open to spirituality than men, and especially in this area, because they are the ones who conceive. They often know exactly when the human being is beginning its journey. Sometimes they hear the name of the child. It is amazing how this happens. Often you have to keep on seeking for the name and finally it is given through a godfather. Another time you are absolutely sure. Much depends on whether human beings open up if they want to experience something. It is hard for spiritual beings, if I may say it this way, to penetrate dosed doors. What little children tell sometimes or what you experience yourself does not enter into consciousness. There are far more spiritual experiences than you may suspect or realize.

Cornelia Haendler: What relationship does this little child have to the world of angels before self-awareness wakes up?

Helmut von Kügelgen: If you look at the little child, there is still a very simple way to see what happens. The child arrives in a little body that the hereditary stream provides. Into this comes the individuality from the spiritual world, even into the finger prints which serve to distinguish individuals. Then the little child experiences three large steps in becoming a human being which continue to repeat in life in certain ways. It learns to walk, it learns to talk, and it learns to think. The first is a tremendous willpower for life, for activity. Nobody taught the child all the secrets which establish a connection with the will. If you watch exactly, you can realize that movement always emerges from the spirit and not from the material. The question is whether you can explain everything as a reflection of the physical, or if you can experience it from the spiritual realm. Then you can see that something has been brought along from the time before birth.

If you think of the living Divine world, you can say that the incentive for the will has been given before the conception of this spiritual individuality. The power of the self is the will, the will that unites, the will to love and the will to live. And then it is strange that children, who have been born around a certain time, form a generation all over the world. Sometimes you see this very clearly, when you think of the movement of 1968 that went around the world as a youth revolt and changed the world. This will of the individual has something to do with the spirit of time. Every human being, no matter if he is a materialist, a Bolshevik, a nationalist or an idealist, talks about the spirit of time. This is understood by all, even those with no evident recognition of the spiritual world. It is of utmost importance for our subject right now to make yourself very clear that the spirit always emerges from an individual. Spirit is individual. The Divine Spirit, the heavenly hosts, as they are, called in the Christmas story, are present at the growing of

the seed as well as at the birth of a human being. The great, powerful creator of beginnings, in Greek, "Archai", the great spirit of time, is the initiating spirit. It is this being who bestows the will. Therefore the organs move, the first breath is taken. An activity begins, a will which nobody taught to the child. This has been brought along. This will has to be taken up through the working of the environment, by educators and parents, until the defiant age [of the two year old] is endured and then handled in such a way that this will can be implanted in the self.

In the same way we can perceive the second deed, the language emerging from children with an elemental force if they have not been damaged. The movement of the body leads to the movement of speech. In going back and forth between the environment and the child, the element of speech develops. Even there we are used to speaking of the folk spirit, of the speech spirit. Usually you say that communities have a spirit, a class spirit, a school spirit, who animates and inspires the group. This superpersonal being was called an "Archangel". And then it is astounding, over and over again, how fast children pass over to thinking. This is the third deed that actually has to do with the very personal: the relation of our thinking to our individuality or unique genius. Here we are in the sphere where all the other things are taken into consciousness, where we form our world view, where we are led to freedom more and more by our guardian angel.

And so the spirit of time watches over our decisions and activities, the spirit of community over our feelings and speech, and the spirit of personality over our thinking. Let me just use the names of the old tradition: the custodians of the three fountains of our daily life - will, speech, thinking - are the beings of the third hierarchy. These are the very first beginnings or Archai, Archangels, and Angels.

Cornelia Haendler: How do we stay in contact with our angels?

Helmut von Kügelgen: Well, you stay in contact with them by being found by them while sleeping. The world of angels leaves the human being more and more free as he grows up, because the human being is called to freedom. Freedom is most difficult. There the angels do not always intervene. Therefore it is easier to speak of guardian angels in relation to children. They continue to accompany you. The older you get, however, the more you are left to take your own will, your feeling, speaking and your thinking under your own responsibility, into your own hands. For this purpose you need the help of these spiritual beings whom you usually do not encounter while you are awake, but when you are asleep. And you only find them if you have gone to sleep worthily, if you have experienced some idealism in your thinking, something spiritual, and if your feelings and your speech have been touched by the center of your heart. If you have performed such good activities you encounter these angel realms in sleep.

Cornelia Haendler: You could gain rich experience with children at kindergarten age. Could you tell us something from your personal experience?

Helmut von Kügelgen: I want to tell what a mother wrote to me some time ago about her four year old child and his brother of a half year. The older one came creeping into the mother's bed one morning and said, "Last night I dreamed of an angel that was sooo beautiful". "Oh," said his mother, "you dreamt about your angel?" "No," replied the child, "I cannot see him, since he holds me in his arms. No, about your angel." That left the mother speechless, and she did not know what to answer. She paused for a moment. Then the child said: "You know, mother, we are all the same size over there. You and I and Frieder." The mother was simply shocked. She is a mother who doesn't speak much about angels. But she lives with the reality of the spiritual world, and that enables her child to talk about such dreams.

I have experienced something similar even in the school years in the first and second grades and in religion lessons. If you really listen inwardly to what the children tell, then the most incredible experiences come to light. This requires you to be open and not silence children, as happens frequently

when they tell such things. If they notice that the adult doesn't want to hear anything about it, they remain silent.

Cornelia Haendler: Can we, as so-called, well-informed parents, prevent children from having such experiences?

Helmut von Kügelgen: That's right. An attitude that denies the divine, spiritual world, or only accepts as reality what you can feel through the physical senses, lets the openness for other beings die. For children are completely open, and in this state they perceive our thoughts as well. We have to learn again to experience the reality of thoughts. In former times people used to pray for others or they cursed them. Everybody knew that when other people are thinking of me, they assist me, they support me. Thoughts are elemental beings. They are, so to say, those natural beings, who also have had names in the old tradition: sylphs, elves, and so on. And so thoughts are spiritual beings who come and go. Every thought has a reality. And when the reality of the spiritual world surrounds the children it has incredible value for the inner world of the child. For the child notices not only the outward activity, but also the thoughts and feelings one holds inwardly.

Cornelia Haendler: Before we talk about the duties resulting for the adult, I would like to take a look at the development of the child. How does the relation of the child to the spiritual world change during the development of the child? Could you relate a little more from your personal experiences?

Helmut von Kügelgen: Yes, the best way is to use this or that example for it. I am thinking of a boy, an "early bird", somebody who was born too early. These are children in whom you can experience certain things as examples. This one was incredibly awake and thin skinned in his childhood. His father was a physicist, and you had the feeling that very early the child was deeply familiar with all technical things. He possessed a quickly acquired, able and perfect way of speaking. You could think, now, this is a completely awake and well-informed child who knows all the tricks of the trade of adults. Then he reached the third grade and made himself a doll in handwork lessons. He developed a personal relationship to the doll, as you only see in little children. The doll had to go to sleep with him. He talked to it. There opened to him a world of angels, the possibility to encounter dwarfs, all kinds of questions concerning St. Nicholas, the infant Jesus, and so on, all these are living and inwardly moving realities in the feeling and fantasy life of the child. With this example, I want to say, you can experience that children do not have to lose the spiritual world. The child always experiences the living being in everything, in every plant, in every stone, in every little stick. A spiritual world is spread around the child. Today, and here are the duties for the adults, when we speak about St. Nicholas or the infant Jesus, we often do this for the purpose of fooling the child. For surely, we may think there is no world of angels, but I am talking to the child about it, as if it were true.

With children you can still celebrate Christmas, because then you can talk about the infant Jesus and related things. When children become well-informed this passes.

Nowadays very often it happens this way. You can talk about it, however, in a way that you feel the power, the love, to complete the doll house or the doll kitchen at midnight or later, from the one who is love. The infant Jesus is not just something, but the magic of the forces of love that I actually draw from in this world. So there is a transition for the child. Then the fact that they realize that father and mother made the things, is not the shock of enlightenment but something very natural. I experienced this with my own children. My oldest daughter said later on, "I knew everything already, you know, but I didn't want to know it. My little brothers and sisters should have it as beautifully as I had it!" You have to know that love is actually alive among us in the representative of humanity, the Christ. If I absorb this and then start talking about the infant Jesus, then it is just something very real. This accepting the spiritual world as real

is what I called openness before. Under this condition these beings of the spiritual world can really take part.

Cornelia Haendler: Yes, how you describe this is beautiful. You notice that as a child you don't find yourself in the situation of suddenly experiencing, "What I learned from my parents is not true." Your point of view changes, and spiritual things still can exist when parents have the right relation to them.

Helmut von Kügelgen: I think that this is the point. As an adult I have to acquire the truth of the divine, spiritual world, the truth of God's messengers, the world of angels. Today this is not granted freely to you any more. Tradition has become so dull and empty, ending up with Santa Claus in every department store. These are ghosts, this is terrible! We have to conquer the truth of the spiritual world. And there is the question how we are able to grasp the truth behind the image. God the Father is not an old man with a beard, who sits in a golden throne, after all. We have to re-conquer this. We have to get away from the compulsion and materialization of images in order to reach real experiences again. When the great poets had real experiences of angels, there were tremors shaking the foundations of being. If you are really allowed to look into the divine world of beings, you understand that the first thing which these beings tell you in the Christmas Story is always, "Do not be afraid! For lo, I come from a land of angels and want to proclaim something to you." These angels are not cute, they are not baroque puttoes. But when they become visible they stir and shake us most deeply in the depths of being.

This world, where children come from, is still very close to them. I think I can experience how close the world of angels is to children. When children imitate, they direct all their will power to see how we behave. They live in this will, "I just have to be and act like my surroundings, then everything is well." This is the habit from the spiritual world. There, in these spiritual beings, you found yourself in good hands, and it was good. You carry this habit along with you. It still echoes in the ability of imitation of children. When you observe this you are sad at not being an angel yourself. You feel you should try to be an example for the child. But it is not easy to guide the life of children in the way the angels have done. You have to be conscious of the fact that the responsibility is slowly transferred from the hands of the angel to yours. You guide the child to independence through education for some years, and then release it into maturity. How many things were given to you somehow impulsively in the form of changes and conversions when you were young. This slowly ends in the twenties. Then you have to work on these gifts. You have the feeling the angels still watch you and intervene into your fate from time to time. You get a push. But actually the point is to form a conscious contact with the spiritual authority that guides your destiny. And there it is not important that we have experiences of angels but that the angels experience us. This is important. You can hardly endure these angel experiences. But it is important to be open, so they can help you.

Cornelia Haendler: Can you tell us about a concrete event where the help of an angel appears?

Helmut von Kügelgen: I will tell you an example given by Rudolf Steiner. It was during the time of the foundation of Waldorf education. Rudolf Steiner was in Berlin. There were many questions concerning the foundation of the Waldorf School. Then Steiner said, "The relationship we have to our own genius, to our own angel, is different from that of earlier millennia, of earlier cultures. Since the arrival of the modern age, about the middle of the 15th century, when through the technical revolution natural science and technology began, the relationship to angels changed." Steiner thought that everybody, not just teachers, ought to know this. In fact, at this time, the interest of angels is directed more on what we do the next day, instead of what occupies us in our review of the past day, when you see all the things you did not do well. You should rather ask: What can I do better the next day? Our relationship to the spiritual world has such a quality that we prepare the next day with our angels during the night. Maybe we have an appointment the next day at noon, a very important conversation. Then in sleep you consult your angel and prepare something together if you are open to the supernatural world. Then you wake up next

morning having forgotten everything, of course. At this point Rudolf Steiner noticed that people became a little curious. How do you save what must not be forgotten? Then Rudolf Steiner said, "It does not matter if you forget it. The angel is the one who did not forget." And when you get into this situation, into this conversation later on, and you have this confidence, this attachment to the spiritual world, then the angel lets something "fall". Then you have an "idea", exactly the right word comes in the right moment. What is more beautiful and more important than to have the right idea at the right moment? The German language is marvelous when it speaks about an "Einfälle" (idea, literally: something falling in). Here you can ask, "Who let it fall?" This was the angel.

The relationship to the spiritual world is an acquired one. It has to do with the religious in general, which has a will-filled nature. Religiousness is either of will nature, which means it leads to action, or it is not religious. The will, the action, always moves towards the future. That is the interesting aspect of angels that they want to link you to the future.

Cornelia Haendler: The student looks into the future as soon as school releases him. He becomes independent and forms his own destiny. Questions are no longer answered by his teacher. Pain and suffering are part of the adversities in his life. Trials and strokes of fate often place humans before seemingly unanswerable questions of life. Can you say something about this?

Helmut von Kügelgen: I think the most important thing in dealing with your own fate is to notice that strokes of fate, pain and suffering, have to do with your own individuality. When pain and suffering occurs we have to tell ourselves over and over again, "This matters to me -- this is a call for me. I shall learn something from it." If we don't have this relation to the angels, who always accompany our fate, then when pain and suffering hit, we only look around and ask, "Who is guilty?" Then the guilt is always established with somebody else. We believe we can accomplish something by exposing somebody else, or even taking revenge, instead of saying, "Somebody else might be guilty, but this deed holds meaning for me. I have to accept it." If you look back in life, you often find out that in the moment it was not easy to accept this, but later the importance of that event becomes evident. If you look back you might experience something similar to the young man who lived on the fat of the land from the money of his father. Then the father was bankrupt, and the son suddenly had to care for himself. At first he was angry and cursed. But later, when he was 44 years old, he said, "For heaven's sake, had that not happened, what would have become of me! I would have drowned in the drug scene, or something else, if my father had not become bankrupt." What he cursed earlier, he blessed when he looked back on his life. In such a moment when you can bless pain and suffering, then it is as if behind the events you can feel the face of the angel, the flapping of his wings. Then you may be able to help the one who caused the problem by forgiving him. You walk straight up to him and forge links between him and you despite what has happened. Then you realize, how much salvation can result from this, because in this moment you accept the smaller outer pain and the greater deep suffering. These are also "Einfälle" (things falling in) from the realm of angels.

Often one speaks of the guardian angel and thinks, "When disaster comes, the angel will arrive and protect me." This is correct with little children, who don't have a conscious relation with the heavenly world. They have an angelic relation, or a direct relationship, which pertains to the will which is unconscious. Yet children are led into pain and suffering sometimes; they are not always protected. We should not see all this pain and suffering as enemies. Pain and suffering and ultimately death approach us from the spiritual world as helpers, as friends. Yes, you can always say, "My dear, you are sitting on a dry and beautiful chair right now, it is warm and it is easy to say something like this in such a moment." But you have to think about it calmly. When you have a look at your life in moments of composure, then such thoughts can become substance at your disposal. When pain and suffering fall upon you, then you can remember this. Be strong now and also accept the help of the angel. He doesn't ask more of you than you can bear. This is the forming of the right relationship.

Cornelia Haendler: This is the way the adult consciousness can deal with pain. But how is it with the child? How does the child experience pain and joy? What is the role of education in this?

Helmut von Kügelgen: Pleasure and joy are important for us as adults -- for children they are essential. But we must not make the mistake to think that we are entitled to pleasure and joy the same way we are to pain and suffering. We should think of them as gifts of "the gods", as grace. "Oh, what a blessedness to be loved and to love, gods, what a blessedness!" This exclamation of Goethe should flare up in thankfulness from the hearts of children. Thankfulness is the seed of all good habits. Thanks also to the help of angels, when you learn to accept and affirm pain and suffering.

Children still grab consciously for this help. Therefore it is important for us to cultivate some kind of composure before sending the children into sleep with a verse, a prayer, a song, with some calmness. If you do this, if you do this with all seriousness, then the child can have real experiences, such as the child who said, "No, I can't see my angel, for he holds me in his arms." Sometimes it is sad to hear parents say they don't pray with their child. They just want to let the child decide on its own whether it wants to or not. During the time when this bridge has to be built something is missing.

It is different in adolescence, a time when the young person has to build up distance and try out the most absurd things. The adolescent asks himself if something is still reaching in from childhood like a deep, inner being. This whole area of life which we earlier called the guardian angel, this spiritual world that we heard about in legends, tales, mythologies, the gospels and so on, now begins to appear as one's own deeper force.

Cornelia Haendler: You also spoke about the helping forces in relation to death. Could we, in conclusion, have a look at the angel of death?

Helmut von Kügelgen: As I told you, Rudolf Steiner spoke about the fact that in our times something has changed in relation to the spiritual world and the world of angels. Angels don't force themselves upon us when we become mature, they rather wait for us. You have to acquire a relationship to the spiritual world. This is not simply given to you as a gift. In this way of acquisition the dead are of great help, however. Conrad Ferdinand Meyer captures this in his poem, "Choir of the Dead", where he shows that the dead continue to be interested in what happens on earth, in the people with whom they lived together. Love can build bridges, for love has just this spiritual character. Here we can cultivate the relation to the dead and feel that they also can help us and that they still really seek the earthly context, as C.F. Meyer puts it. So it is something really wonderful when you can accompany people over the threshold of death. When you are allowed to accompany people at this crossing it is something incredibly marvelous. It is wonderful to experience this directly -- that just as there has been a first breath at birth, there is now the last breath at death, until suddenly the body is abandoned. Sometimes a last seal of individuality forms at death so that you just realize in this moment who has been living with you. The great difficulty we have is that we really don't have a proper sentiment for the moment of death. The same way as a new generation appears on earth through birth, so the further fate starts with the moment of death. Not to be able to die for years, to wait for the right moment, in all these mysteries lies the knowledge of angels if a fate has been accomplished. The angel of death is the angel of eternal life, of spiritual individuality. Therefore, you see, there are so many questions about the intensive care unit and about everything that relates to death, also about these widespread deaths in wars that continue to rage around us. This way, you have to say, the attempt to come to terms with it really requires a deep knowledge of fate. And we only gain this form from the relationship with angels. We have to acquire this, it will not be donated to us.

It is wonderful when you are shown so much through the Spiritual Science of Rudolf Steiner, from the research of this man. This helps you to open up to your own experiences and your own quest and research in the area of fate.

Now I want to summarize: The finding of the right relationship to the angels hinges upon how we will bring something to them. Only in this way can they form something in our life. Through such a relationship they have the opportunity to play a part -- and this we want to grant them.

Cornelia Haendler: This was a beautiful conclusion. Thank you very much!

Note on supplementary reading: If you would like to know more about angels from an anthroposophic point of view, Richard Lewis has collected many indications from Rudolf Steiner in a book called *Angels*. This is a large volume of 232 pages, and the cost is \$30 or \$32 foreign. Payment to be made in US dollars to: Richard Lewis, 3548 Eisenhower Dr., Sacramento, CA 95826, USA.

Also, Dr. von Kugelgen has written about working with the angels and about other aspects of inner life in a book entitled "Spiritual Gifts for the Educator." This will be published in 1997.
