

Threshold Experiences of Children and Adults in the Present Time Helmut von Kügelgen

These notes were taken by Sandra Czernel-Södergren at the International Kindergarten Conference at Michael Hall on September 3, 1995. They were printed in Autumn/Winter 1996 by the Waldorf kindergartens in the United Kingdom in the third issue of their newsletter. They have been newly edited for this edition of Gateways. Dr. von Kügelgen was the deeply loved leader of the International Waldorf Kindergarten Association for many years. He took on this work after leading four elementary classes through the Stuttgart (Ühlandshöhe) Waldorf School. He died on February 25, 1998 at age 81.

Let us picture a certain third grade boy. His father is a physicist, mathematician, and Waldorf teacher. In some respects this boy is very awake, for he is interested in anything mechanical and he has great technical dexterity. But, this boy is also a dreamer. When in the woods he still seems to live with the elemental beings. The doll he made in handwork class is alive for him, and he holds it tenderly and takes it to bed with him at night. This child exists in a continually mobile present. One moment he is wide awake, and the next he is dreaming.

What is the present? It comes towards us from the future. If we want to take hold of it, it is already past. We cannot grasp it, for the present is a process of constant transformation. It is part of the challenge of the consciousness soul to always be in the present. Children are generally more able than adults to shift instantly from one mode of being to another. Yet it is also demanded of us adults to be fully present in every moment.

If we can see that a moment has neither beginning nor end, we can come to understand that all of eternity is but a moment. To live in this eternal present moment is to embrace lawful transformation and change. The most important moment in my life, the most important book, the most important person, is always the book that I am currently reading, the person whom I am with, the moment in which I now find myself. In this age of consciousness soul it is our task to cultivate the present, and it is the spirit of our time who presents us with this challenge. He stands before us in the image of Michael: evil under foot, the radiance of heaven above, the gaze directed into the future, the past always in the background.

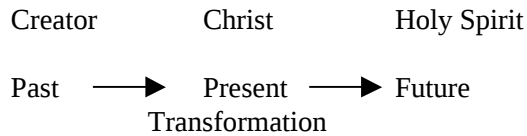
In the spirit of the consciousness soul, let us think for a moment about the past and the future. The more we go back into the memory of our past the closer we come to our true origins. If we travel with our spirit into the past of the world, we come to God the Creator. If I hold something in my hand and begin to think about it, I get in touch with the Creator of what I hold in my hand. If we bring stones, shells, wood, fruit, and so forth into the kindergarten, these things will communicate something to us about the One who created them.

The same principle applies to plastic toys and other manmade objects; we also become connected with the creators of these things. The creators of these objects may want to produce as fine a thing as possible, but there is usually another motivating element involved as well in that this creator wants to make a profit from selling his goods. Through the objects we connect ourselves with these attitudes and motivations. In such small daily things we can choose to cross thresholds of consciousness, and we put the children in our care in touch with certain beings and forces through the objects we offer them.

The thoughts we have are also important. They determine the mood, the spiritual atmosphere in which the children breathe. When we speak about the Christ child or Saint Nicholas, for example, it is important that we ourselves are inwardly connected with these real beings and forces. The children of the consciousness soul age do not want to be deceived. Indeed, they soon awaken and find out that they believe in the Christ

child only to please their parents. We ourselves should not pretend. We must rather be convinced of the reality of these beings.

The force of transformation in the eternal present moment streams to us from Christ through the power of love and the strength of truth. When we look into the past we find the Creator. When we seek, or look into the future, we find the Holy Spirit.

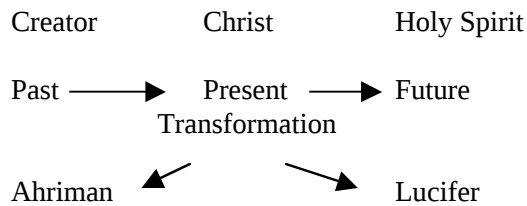


This trinity of past, present, and future is expressed in the Foundation Stone Meditation, a meditative mantram that Rudolf Steiner gave at the refounding of the Anthroposophical Society in 1923. There are three parallel verses or panels in the meditation. The Christ verse is in the middle, while the verse devoted to God the Creator is on the one side, and the verse devoted to the Spirit, the future, is on the other side. In the Foundation Stone Meditation we turn towards the past and the Creator God in reverence and gratitude for the blessings streaming from above. In the present, we are guided by Christ, protected by the inner radiating power of love. Future world thoughts and aims turn towards the Spirit, pleading for light.

The future wants to become the light in our consciousness. For this to happen, we must live in such a way that we have the feeling of having to conquer the future. This relates our consciousness soul to the Holy Spirit through our will. In the past we find many wonderful experiences, ideas, and thoughts, but our will does not take hold of an idea if we do not connect it with the future. Without being connected to the future the idea actually weakens us. This can only be understood out of the consciousness soul: each idea that I do not lift up to the ideal weakens my will.

In the second conference when the Waldorf School was opened Rudolf Steiner said that a person who loses the connection with his past and cannot see the Creator any longer becomes an atheist. Fundamentally this is an illness. A person who does not carry the will of the future into the idea, who does not have a relationship with the Holy Spirit, becomes narrow-minded. But if a person does not find the Christ, this is a misfortune, a stroke of fate. But at the moment of death people who in life did not find the Christ or who rejected Him experience the image of the Ascension of Christ. They see Him streaming into the sunlight, light that exists for the whole of humanity, and they develop a yearning to find the Christ in their next earthly life.

We must also be active in the consciousness soul when we struggle to balance the forces of evil, Lucifer and Ahriman, who are always present in the picture of the human being. Lucifer and Ahriman are the two faces of evil, as described by Rudolf Steiner. Lucifer, the fallen angel, would lure us towards the spiritual but in such a way that our feet no longer touch the earth. Ahriman would bind us to the earth so that we no longer recognize the spiritual. The present age of the consciousness soul demands that we look at the human being in a threefold way. If we view the world from a fundamentalist standpoint, we experience what it is to have one God rather than a Trinity, and we look at the world in a twofold way, so that good and evil stand in polarity. But if we adopt a threefold perspective, we see that good is that which lets itself be transformed before it goes on to the extremes which are associated with Ahriman and Lucifer.



This threefold stance should be worked with as concretely and practically as possible. For example, when within a school factions develop for or against someone or something, the issue is cast in a twofold light and it becomes highly destructive. The more we are asked to decide either for or against, the more difficult it becomes to think in terms of a threefold dynamic, which would allow us to ask the question: How can this polarity be united on a higher level in love?

We can shed light on a further aspect of our modern struggle with evil by first looking briefly into history. During the fourth cultural epoch (the time of Greece and Rome), when humanity had the task to develop the intellectual soul, the primary riddle was how to deal inwardly with birth and death. The connection to and experience of life after death had been lost, and Hades had become a fearful place, a land of shadows, a place without light. The Greeks feared death and expressed this fear with the saying: "It is better to be a pauper on the earth than a prince in the land of the shades."

We now live in the fifth Post-Atlantean cultural epoch, which began during the Renaissance, in 1413. In this epoch we are developing the consciousness soul, and we are faced with the main task of dealing with the powers of evil in new ways. Whereas the ancient capital Greeks experienced death as a destructive force, now birth as well as death have become connected with the powers of destruction. The elemental beings responsible for the processes of birth and death were in earlier times in the services of higher spiritual beings who were devoted to the well-being of humanity. This is no longer the case, and now we meet these elemental beings from the other side, from the outside. For us they have become evil. The shattering truth is that the elemental beings of destruction are ahrimanic beings that now confront us from the outside.

Before the time of radar, television, and computers, Rudolf Steiner prophesied that these elemental beings would enter our time with an abundance of inventions. He told of the three forces of magnetism, electricity, and nuclear energy that these beings used. This does not mean that these inventions should be avoided -- they belong to the age of the consciousness soul -- but it is most important that enough weight be put on the other side of the scales. Recall the example of the boy given at the beginning of this article. He was very awake to everything technical, but at the same time he was a creative, playful dreamer. Today we are faced with a huge problem of balance. These inventions, which increasingly fill our world, need to be balanced by the faculty of imagination. This is the secret to how we can deal with the forces of evil.

Rudolf Steiner also describes the meaning of evil as follows. Only by leaning towards the ahrimanic beings of technology are we able to develop the forces we need for the consciousness soul. In this way we all have a leaning towards all forms of evil, towards all crimes. This does not mean that we are to do evil. Rather there is an inner path of schooling that enables us to be in command of this tendency and to guide these forces in such a way that they become consciousness soul forces.

In the sixth cultural epoch, which will begin at the end of the third millennium, these elemental beings will approach us ever more strongly. This whole development and the increased activity of these beings will work towards the destruction of the earth. It may be that the destruction cannot be prevented, but as the earth ages and goes towards her end, it becomes our task to ask the question: Who is the human being? This questioning constitutes the cultivation of an interest in the other person, and the more we

practice this active interest, the closer we are to insuring that an indestructible essence survives the general dissolution.

We must adopt a threefold view of each human being we meet, without judging too early. As teachers and parents, we must learn to look at the child in a way that enables us to gain a transparent picture of her. We must get to know her way of walking, the shape of her head, the position of her eyes, and so forth because all of this tells us something about her essential being. A person's gestures are the most individual, characteristic windows to her being, so we particularly observe the child's gestures and her way of walking. Are we able to recollect in the evening how the child places her foot on the ground? After we have grasped the broader features of her way of movement, observing the finer details brings us close to the essential being of the child. When we look at the human being in this way and try to penetrate the outer, we also come to the Creator.

We now live in a time that finds itself at the threshold between the world of the senses and the world of spirit. Humanity has crossed the threshold without being aware of it. The great danger at the threshold is that the ego loses its mastery over thinking, feeling, and willing. This crossing of the threshold happens as a major experience of the soul, but it also happens in our everyday life. The threshold is very close by, and we meet it constantly. If, for instance, I hold a glass of water in my hand and place it on the table, and if I am conscious of my gesture, then I bring something over from the spiritual world. This is also a threshold crossing.

Consciousness soul work must be performed in full presence of mind that then manifests outwardly. How do I peel an apple most skillfully? How do I arrange my domestic work most efficiently? Here thought is united with the will and the smallest deed becomes an ideal. To these daily situations belong, of course, the celebration of the festivals. What becomes important about a festival is not how big and grandiose the celebration is, but how penetrated each part is with consciousness. Likewise, if we carry the dead in our consciousness, if we celebrate a kind of festival when a grandmother has died, then not only do we experience death and destruction but we also come to understand how we live on with someone. What radiates through a festival of death is the consciousness we carry about death itself and the way in which we continue to relate to the loved one as being who is alive on the other side of the threshold.

If we constantly recognize the other human being as a child of God, if we treat everything with care and love, then we work in a way that will not let us fall prey to destruction. Where human beings are connected with each other in love, here we build temples in the realm of spirit where we will find each other again. It is the task of the consciousness soul to live in such thoughts again and again.

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