Being Fully Human: An Introduction

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Editor's note: The following article is taken from the introduction to a new collection of essays on teaching human sexuality entitled Trailing Clouds of Glory: Essays on Human Sexuality and the Education of Youth in Waldorf Schools.

As a young boy I used to stand outside my grandmother's home on the sidewalk of a busy thoroughfare in Acton, a suburb of London, scribbling down the license plates of cars and trucks as they whizzed by. For hours at a time, I eagerly recorded pages and pages of letters and numbers, with never a thought as to the sheer insignificance of this exercise.

On some days a neighbor's daughter, about my age, would join me at the curbside, and together we would track the roaring traffic. She, however, preferred to spot the *shapes* of the cars rather than transcribe their identifying numbers.

Years later, as a university and then high school teacher, I learned from empirical studies that, in the pursuit of mathematics, boys are often more readily drawn to algebra, girls to geometry. This is but one of many examples illustrating the differences between the ways girls and boys learn. These studies have been used to bolster the case that, at least in their pubescent and adolescent years, the two genders should be educated in separate schools, and there is some evidence to suggest that boys and girls learn certain skills faster if they are taught in single-sex institutions. Indeed, well into the twentieth century, sexual segregation was the norm in education—as in many other cultural institutions and practices.

All the more radical, therefore, was Rudolf Steiner when, in creating the first Waldorf school out of the ashes of World War I, he suggested that girls and boys should share classes for all 12 or 13 years of their elementary and high school education. More radical still was his insistence that both genders learn the same skills: boys would learn to knit and weave, girls to build engines and survey plots of land. Both genders would receive instruction in first aid and hygiene. Far from learning more effectively by being separated, he argued, boys and girls could actually teach each other through example, especially during the teenage years.

This insight underlies a central tenet of Waldorf education: though as human beings we are essentially whole, as we grow and develop we have the tendency to become one-sided. Education helps redress this imbalance.

Steiner's deeper motive for promoting coeducation, though, was to help the two genders achieve a measure of balance by modifying in each other the excesses of what he called the boys' adolescent "loutishness" and the girls' teenage "coquetry."[1] This motive hints at one of Rudolf Steiner's key insights into the mysteries of human sexuality and underlies a central tenet of Waldorf education: though as human beings we are essentially whole, as we grow and develop we have the tendency to become one-sided. Education helps redress this imbalance.

In the earliest beginnings of prenatal embryological unfolding, we do indeed develop the rudiments of both genders, despite our

genetic configuration, and thereby we preserve a certain wholeness for at least a few weeks. At some point, however—usually around the seventh week—it is as though a decision is made, and in each of us the sexual organs of the one gender typically continue to be developed while those of the other remain arrested. And though our sexual organs are of course present from before birth, it is still hard to tell the gender of young children for quite some years, especially if they are dressed in gender-neutral clothing.

That situation changes, rapidly, with the advent of puberty. In fact, at no time of life are the two genders more different—physically but also psychologically—than during the years of adolescence and early adulthood, even if almost all of them don the familiar costume of T-shirts and jeans.[2] Rudolf Steiner describes the virtual explosion of the girl, the implosion of the boy at this age as being extreme outer expressions of profound inner changes. It will be some years before these extremes begin to moderate themselves.

Indeed, one might say that as adults it is only in our twilight years that we begin to reorient ourselves to the more androgynous state from which we originated. Just walk behind an old couple shuffling down the street and ask yourself: Who is the woman, who the man? The one, it seems, has lost the angular outline of his youth and is becoming less muscular, more rounded, with softer and more piping voice; the other has lost the more curvaceous outlines of her youthful figure and is becoming more grizzled, perhaps sprouting tufts of hair above her lip or chin and dropping the pitch of her voice.

For all of Steiner's careful and detailed attention to the needs of boys and girls as they grow towards puberty, a threshold he calls *Erdenreife* (literally "earth-ripening"), it is striking how little attention, at least until recently, Waldorf schools have devoted specifically to the subject of human sexuality. This was glaringly evident at a workshop of Waldorf teachers and physicians held during the Kolisko Conference of 2002, a world congress for educators and medical professionals named after Eugen Kolisko, the school doctor at the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart. Those participants who did report a course specifically on human sexuality at their school were in the distinct minority, and the curriculum they outlined was drawn largely from public school programs.

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Out of this workshop, therefore, a resolve went forth to raise awareness concerning this lack and to pull together shared resources on teaching human sexuality informed by an anthroposophical image of the whole human being. A first result was a collection of articles, compiled by Bart Maris, a homeopathic gynecologist, and Michael Zech, a Waldorf high school teacher, under the title *Sexualkunde in der Waldorfpädagogik* (Stuttgart: Edition Waldorf, 2006). An English-language version of this book, drawing partly on the German edition and partly on new material, is currently in production.

Lest there be any false expectations, it should be stated clearly at the outset that neither the German nor the English collection of essays was compiled with the intention of offering a single curriculum—far less individual lesson plans—for the classroom. Rather, the intention was to pull together material from a wide range of anthroposophically-inspired educators and health professionals that would stimulate teachers to develop their own curriculum based on an anthroposophical understanding of this subject.

Though the Waldorf schools may have been slow to formulate specific curricula on human sexuality, arguing that much of the

existing curriculum achieves this end by other means, Rudolf Steiner himself was remarkably outspoken for his time about sex and the teaching of human sexuality. On the one hand, he was dismissive of the conventional approach to sex education, which he felt ignored the deeper import of this subject. "The talk prevalent today about sex instruction," he told the first group of Waldorf class teachers shortly before the first Waldorf school opened in September of 1919, "is mostly meaningless."[3] Instead, he sought to embed the subject of sexuality in a broader context of nature studies, starting with the mineral and plant kingdoms, then over the years moving through the animal kingdom, and culminating in seventh grade with human physiology. In other words, right from the beginning he saw the need to place this subject in the widest possible context of growth and development.[4]

In describing the conundrums of sexuality, Steiner points to the deepest mystery of all: namely, that the most physical and bodily aspects of our nature conceal our most lofty and spiritual capacities.

But more than that, in remarks scattered throughout his lectures, Steiner sets out a radical picture of sexuality and its mission for the physical, psychological, and spiritual development of the human being.[5] This picture embraces, as does so much of his cosmology, very ancient images in which human beings enjoyed a primordial androgyny still recapitulated today in the earliest days and weeks of embryonic gestation. These ancient hermaphroditic beginnings may be glimpsed, for instance, in representations of the oldest Greek and Egyptian mythological figures. In Ancient Egypt, the very oldest of the primordial gods—for instance the river god Hapi, who holds two vases from which gush the twin sources of the Nile—are depicted as being both male and female. The oldest of the Ancient Greek gods likewise appear as male-and-female; even the mighty Zeus is pictured as being bi-gendered in some of the more ancient renderings.

In describing the conundrums of sexuality, Steiner points to the deepest mystery of all: namely, that the most physical and bodily aspects of our nature conceal our most lofty and spiritual capacities. And what are these capacities? They are essentially two. On the one hand is the *capacity to metamorphose.* We witness this capacity most immediately—though indirectly, for the most part—in our organs of digestion and metabolism, which not only break down what we have eaten but also actually annihilate it so that we can build up our own substance. As one of my teachers was fond of saying, "You are not what you eat; you are what you have *destroyed* in what you have eaten!" What you cannot destroy you excrete or, in special cases, store in the hidden recesses of the body, usually in the fat cells (for instance radiation or the active chemical ingredients of mind-altering drugs, such as the THC in marijuana). Inasmuch as the sexual organs belong to the metabolic functions of the human body, we exercise these capacities of metamorphosis in the creation of every new infant. Though it receives its genetic inheritance from a long line of parental ancestors, in no way is the child simply the combination of its parents. Especially today we witness in youngsters—and feel powerfully in ourselves—the conviction: I am my own person!

The other capacity linking our most lofty spiritual aspects of consciousness with our sexual nature is the *capacity to conceive.* As in any creative act, both contain the potential to create anew, whether physically in the act of sexual union or metaphysically in the act of thinking.

In short, any curriculum concerning sexuality needs to take into account not only physical but also metaphysical—that is, psychological and spiritual—levels of the human being. If it ignores or dismisses any one of these levels, education of human sexuality is likely to exacerbate the very one-sidedness it is singularly equipped to heal. In the potent powers of *metamorphosis* and of *conception,* physical and metaphysical realms—initially sundered in the human being starting with birth and reaching a point of crisis in adolescence—find the possibility of reunion.

In this light, there are two simple yet crucial questions which any comprehensive program concerning human sexuality needs to ask, but I would suggest that these two questions need to be asked at three levels of human nature—physical, psychological, and spiritual. For at each level the answer to these questions will be different. In other words, the following two overarching questions can provide the foundation for planning and assessing any program on the teaching of human sexuality:

a) What is the *purpose* or *desired outcome* of a program on the teaching of human sexuality?
b) What shall be the *method* or *approach* to fulfill this purpose?

Let us pose these two questions at the levels of physical, psychological, and spiritual development of the human being.

Any curriculum concerning sexuality needs to take into account not only physical but also metaphysical—that is, psychological and spiritual—levels of the human being.

I. The physical or mortal body perspective

a) From the physical point of view, the *purpose* or *desired outcome* of a program on the teaching of human sexuality, to put it simply, is twofold:

- *prevent pregnancy*
- *avoid sexual disease*

At the bodily level, the purpose of such a program is, in effect, a negative one: that is, the *absence* of change or metamorphosis and the *absence* of conception. Put positively, one could say that the purpose of this program is *sexual health*, but in the context of Western medicine sexual health means little more than the absence of illness.[6] On this view, we can say that a program on the teaching of human sexuality will be deemed "successful" to the extent that young people do not contract sexual diseases and young women do not contract unwanted pregnancies. Indeed, this is how many sex education programs are evaluated: the lower the incidence of sexual disease and number of unwanted pregnancies, the more the program is regarded as having achieved its purpose or desired outcome.

b) As to *method* or *approach*, a quick survey of published sex education curricula suggests that the most common approaches combine

- *information*, including texts and charts
- *practical advice*, including the provision of contraceptives

The former method is intended to heighten a young person's awareness (capacities of consciousness or thinking), the latter the young person's behavior (capacities of action or willing).

It should come as no surprise to learn that these courses, taken on their own, have at best only limited effect. For one thing, sexual behavior lies deeply rooted in our life of feelings, desires, and habits, and we all know that these levels of our being are barely reached, far less changed, merely by exposure to information, and that they can be impervious even to the most persuasive practical advice. We engage in all manner of activities driven by a host of desires (not just sexual ones), even though we may be very well informed about their consequences and may

have been given (or, as some teenagers might say, been subjected to) all manner of practical advice. Something more, much more, is needed.

Put differently, what is evidently missing in an approach to sex education based on information and practical advice is attention to the young person's capacities of emotion or feeling. And this may be why so many schools find their sex education programs to be inadequate, perhaps even ineffective. At least this is what students tell us. Either they wish to be left alone or they hunger for something more. They yearn for a program on the teaching of human sexuality that addresses them not simply at the bodily but more at the psychological and spiritual levels. To these levels we must now turn.

II. The psychological or soul body perspective

Some public schools report that their sex education courses seem to be more successful (based on the evaluative yardstick previously described) if students who are enrolled in such programs also take part in courses on social and emotional wellbeing. If one thinks of sexual development from a more all-embracing perspective, this observation should make good sense.

Though the answers will be different, the questions posed at the physical level remain the same at the psychological level, namely:

a) What is the *purpose* or *desired outcome* of a program on the teaching of human sexuality?
b) What shall be the *method* or *approach* to fulfill this purpose?

a) In response to the first question, I would suggest that, to be successful from the perspective of social and emotional health, the purpose or desired outcome of a program on the teaching of human sexuality needs to cultivate in students a sense of self-worth, confidence, security, empathy for others, reliability, trustworthiness, and freedom from fear and anxiety. We know that a lack of any one of these can translate into risk-taking behavior, including risky sexual activity. Recklessness, likewise aggression, can be the outer sign of deep fear or self-loathing. The class bully at recess may very well be the most deeply scared kid on the playground.

Briefly put, then, the purpose of a program on the teaching of human sexuality, seen from the psychological perspective or from the needs of the soul, is to develop a sense of *self-esteem.* Because this term is grossly overused, I prefer to call it something else, drawing upon a celebrated conversation between Saint Francis and one of his fellow Franciscans, Brother Leo. These two holy monks, it is said, struggled to come up with a word to capture the emotional state of "enduring humiliation and [yet] keeping one's countenance, in accepting and bearing the tasks that life provided. To keep one's dignity, equanimity, and patience and to preserve tranquility in the face of attacks from the outside… ."[7] This condition, they determined, deserved to be called *Saelde,* a term hard to render in English but sometimes translated as "joy" or "bliss" or "blessedness." It is the condition Parzival achieves at the end of his quest for the Holy Grail. It is the moment when, in full modesty and quiet certitude, one feels one's own steadfastness, even in the face of threat or danger. It is the moment when one feels, not out of any inner compulsion or external coercion but purely out of one's own free initiative, "Yes, I can do this!" Emerson might call it "self reliance."

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Saelde: This, I suggest, may be used as a term to describe the purpose or desired outcome of a program on the teaching of human sexuality, seen from the perspective

of the soul. It is important to realize—as the example of Parzival attests—that this condition, far from entailing the absence of change or metamorphosis, actually *requires* an effort of inner metamorphosis. Like Parzival, we may come into the world filled with the innocent joy of childhood, "not knowing better." Like Parzival, this naïve innocence needs to be brought low, destroyed—catabolized, one might say—so that it may emerge transformed as self-esteem, self-confidence, or *Saelde.* This entails a metamorphic process of self-transformation.

b) And what could be the method or approach by which this search, this quest resulting in *Saelde,* would be undertaken? In programs concerning the development of self-esteem, the value of drama and role-playing is well known. In a broader sense, the disciplined practice of any of the arts will help to bring about this confident state of soul. Class teachers attest to the quantum leap in maturity that children will manifest after they have prepared and performed a class play. A ballet dancer or gymnast knows the feeling of "Yes, I can do this!" that may arise from an exceptional performance or a perfect score. A painter or sculptor knows the feeling of achieving a certain communion with paint or clay in that moment when the particular genius of the medium is released and put at the service of a skilled hand.

For all of their talk about independence and rebellion, teenagers feel immense social and emotional pressures to conform to the expectations of their peer group. Like any skill, the ability to resist peer pressure, to act instead out of one's own convictions, has to be learned, and learning requires practice. The arts offer perhaps the most potent way for a student to practice this skill of self reliance without bearing the full brunt of its consequences: to act in a play, after all, is to pretend, and no actors will be punished for carrying out their scripted words and deeds onstage. To fail at drawing a landscape or to fall off a horse while learning to ride does not constitute failure or disgrace. One can always turn the page, remount the horse. Start again.

Though it may sound strange to put it this way, I can think of no better program for the teaching of human sexuality at the level of the soul than the regular and disciplined practice of the arts. We know that engaging in the arts helps to calm aggression and prevent violence (for instance, among prison communities). This is because the practice of the arts builds confidence in oneself, and self-confidence dissipates the urge to violent aggression or desperate recklessness. The same applies to sexual activity. We need to remember that the aggressive "stud" or promiscuous "slut" is as likely, at a deep level, to be as unself-confident as the most awkward "nerd" or timid "wallflower." To the degree teenagers develop, not the swagger of conceit but the quiet ballast of self-assurance, they will find in themselves the strength to stand in and act out of their own convictions.

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But herein lies the problem. What *are* these convictions? And are they clear or consistent or tested against experience? Probably not. In other words, it is not enough to develop a measure of self-confidence. At the same time one needs to work at getting clear what one is self-confident *about.* Put differently, whereas a course that develops self-confidence, ultimately *Saelde,* constitutes a necessary aspect of any program concerning human sexuality, it is not a sufficient condition. Something more, something to do with questions of meaning and life's purpose is needed.

And that is why I believe it is necessary to come at the question of a program on the teaching of human sexuality, not simply from the perspectives of the healthy physical life and of self-confident psychological life but also from a third perspective: namely, that of the student's spiritual life. This takes us beyond questions of behavior and questions of feelings to questions of guiding ideals; from what we *do* and *like*—perhaps fleetingly—to what we lastingly *value.*

III. The spiritual or immortal being perspective

Back in the 1960s, it was fashionable for educators to speak of "value-free education," perhaps because they wished to instruct children and teenagers without inculcating into them the values and customs of older generations. By now, we have generally come to recognize that education, by its very nature, is laden with spoken and unspoken values and cannot simply be sanitized of them any more than air can be cleansed of oxygen. Education without values is simply no longer education.

The reason for this is simple. In the end we teach *students*, not subjects, and students are beings, and beings embody spiritual values. That is why it's a crime to kill, assault, threaten, or discriminate against them. To the degree we truly educate, we are working with true spiritual values.

When it comes to the education of human sexuality in a Waldorf school, we need to be clear which values—not to confuse values with ethical norms or codes of conduct—we employ in our understanding of what constitutes a human being. Here we come to a third formulation of guidelines concerning a program on the teaching of human sexuality, seen now from the perspective of humanity as spiritual—that is, as immortal—beings.

And so we pose our two questions one last time, now from the viewpoint of the spirit or self or eternal "I":

a) What is the *purpose* or *desired outcome* of a program on the teaching of human sexuality?
b) What shall be the *method* or *approach* to fulfill this purpose?

a) As in the previous responses to this question, the purpose of a program on the teaching of human sexuality remains health, but what is health from a spiritual perspective? In their original meaning, the terms "health" and "wholeness" share the same ancestry (Old English *hal*), which already hints at a deeper meaning of health than simply the absence of disease or a feeling of wellbeing. What does it mean, then, to be whole? With regard to sexuality, it means knowing oneself to be a full human being of body, soul, and spirit that embraces all human traits including those of both the masculine and the feminine. In this sense we transcend the one-sidedness of sex, which even in the very origins of the word "sex" means "to sever or divide" (from Latin *secare*, "to cut" or "to split").

Being whole, with regard to sexuality, means knowing oneself to be a full human being of body, soul, and spirit that embraces all human traits including those of both the masculine and the feminine.

This is precisely the archetype of the human being that Rudolf Steiner describes in his account of human development, if one includes both its physical and metaphysical aspects. As already mentioned, even in our earliest physiological beginnings we are both female and male, and as one gender develops in the physical or material body, the other gender develops in what he calls the life or etheric body. From the perspective of our sexual nature, then, we are—and remain—"whole" human beings to the degree we think of ourselves as being endowed with both physical

and etheric bodies. Only when we focus on one body at the expense of the other do we arrive at a one-sided picture of male or female. Indeed, once we get beyond physical and etheric bodies and speak of the human soul (or astral body) and self (or eternal "I"), according to Steiner, we are dealing with aspects of the human being that transcend gender altogether, even though they inhabit gender-specific physical and etheric bodies and hence are influenced by them.

In other words, the purpose or desired outcome of a program on the teaching of human sexuality, seen from a spiritual perspective, is to arrive at an understanding of the human being as a whole human being. This goes well beyond merely embracing both genders in oneself to considering the much larger question of the human being as a microcosm of the entire macrocosm.

The relation between this image of wholeness and a state of health has been documented by the Israeli physician Aaron Antonowsky, who in studying survivors of the Holocaust noticed significant differences among his patients, even though they had endured similar hardships before they had emigrated to the Middle East. Briefly stated, those patients who were unable to integrate into some kind of cohesive worldview the horrors they had experienced in Nazi Germany during wartime were much more likely to suffer an endless string of physical and psychological ailments than those who had found a way to accept into their universe, into their *Weltanschauung,* all the events that had befallen them.

Antonowsky singled out "coherence" as the key difference between these two groups of patients: the latter were able to formulate a coherent world view in which each one of their experiences, however grim and tragic, was integrated into a sense of wholeness, whereas patients in the former group were unable to achieve this sense of life's coherence. In brief, to the degree we embrace our circumstances with a sense of wholeness, or coherence, we enjoy a greater measure of all-embracing health. To be healthy in body requires being whole in spirit.

This entails a lofty act of spiritual conceptualizing in which we attempt to give birth to the idea that we are agents, co-creators—not victims—of our circumstances and that in so doing we act out of utter freedom.

To the degree we embrace our circumstances with a sense of wholeness, or coherence, we enjoy a greater measure of all-embracing health.

b) As to the method by which this sense of wholeness can be cultivated, we come to what is perhaps one of the more subtle yet potent remedies that Waldorf education has to offer. It has to do with developing the capacity to discern the meaningfulness of the cosmos and of one's rightful place in that cosmos. It involves a sort of spiritual seeing, or intuition. It begins with the cultivation of a phenomenological approach in the study of science or a symptomatological approach in the study of the humanities: these two approaches share the ability to see in any one part a whole—in the words of the poet, to perceive "a world in a grain of sand… ."

This way of knowing goes by many names: living or etheric thinking, ecological or morphological thinking, emblematic or metaphorical thinking. In each case the attempt is made to stretch cognitive powers beyond the limitations of fixed spatial constructs to a more flowing context. In its essence, it is a form of metamorphic thinking, in which our thoughts grow with what we see rather than trying to set or fix it. This was the intention of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who viewed precisely his scientific studies as having more lasting value than even his greatest works of literature because, he said, in his studies of

nature (especially of plants) he had not merely discovered new facts and events but had exercised a new way of perceiving them.

When asked what he considered to be his most valuable and creative work, he set aside thick volumes of his poems and mighty dramas—including the 12,000 lines of his life's magnum opus, *Faust*—and pointed instead to a slender volume with an unprepossessing title, *The Metamorphosis of Plants.*

A way of perceiving phenomena and conceiving thoughts that is metamorphic in nature: this is the method by which we can begin to experience the human being as a whole human being.

Summary Outline

In considering a three-layered approach to a program on the teaching of human sexuality, it will become apparent that the first level, having to do with health of the physical body, is focused primarily on *volition, deeds.* Not surprising, then, that the appeal at this level is pitched to the human will in terms of instructions: *what to do.* This builds physical *strength.* The objective at this level is *care of one's own self.*

At the second level, having to do with the well-being of the soul, the focus shifts from deeds to *emotion*—ultimately the sublime sense of *Saelde.* Here the appeal will be aimed more to the life of the human heart through artistic experiences that inspire: *how to feel.* This builds psychological strength, or *courage.* The objective here is *care of oneself in relationship to one's social surroundings.*

Finally, at the third level, having to do with the wholeness of the spirit, the focus shifts once again from feelings, however lofty or blessed, to the world of *cognition.* Here the appeal will be aimed more to the discipline of ecological consciousness: *how to think in whole images.* This builds powers of spiritual insight, or *wisdom.* The objective at this level is *care of the other.*

We can summarize these layers in the following way:

At the physical level, the purpose of a program on the teaching of human sexuality is: to offer protection and prevention for the purpose of physical health, promoted through information and practical advice for habits of will. This builds **volitional strength**. Desired outcome: to care for *one's self.* Sign of success: stable, predictable growth, with no conceptual or metamorphic activity.

At the psychological level, the purpose of a program on the teaching of human sexuality is: to build a sense of well being or Saelde, promoted through the practice of the arts to enhance the life of feeling. This develops **emotional courage**. Desired outcome: to care for *one's relationships to others.* Sign of success: unexpected quantum leaps in development, with movement towards metamorphosis and conceptual activity.

At the spiritual level, the purpose of a program on the teaching of human sexuality is: to develop a sense of wholeness, promoted through the practice of living or morphological thinking. This cultivates **cognitive wisdom**. Desired outcome: to care for *the other.* Sign of success: unpredictable maturing, rich in conceptual and metamorphic activity.

To be sure, in designing a program on the teaching of human sexuality, it is important to incorporate all three levels while still keeping them distinct. For the teacher, it comes down to three basic questions: What do my students need in order to train sound habits of volition? What do they need to develop

artistic expressions of emotion? What do they need to open in themselves windows to higher cognition?

Two Final Questions

In matters of sexuality, most young children have only two basic questions of their adult guardians:

"Where did I come from?"
"How did I get here?"

As teachers and parents, we need to know at which of the three levels—physical, psychological, or spiritual—our children are posing these questions. As adults we may hear them more easily as arising at the material or physical level, but the younger the child, the more likely she or he is to be posing these questions at the spiritual or metaphysical level.

More precisely, the first of these questions—"Where did I come from?"—may be heard as a question concerning our spiritual conception: that is, of our far distant spiritual origins. The second—"How did I get here?" —may be heard as a question concerning spiritual metamorphosis: that is, of a long prenatal journey of metaphysical transformation.

As one youngster said, in a moment of inspired frustration when his parents began to answer the second question with a basic lesson in gynecology: "I don't want to know how I came out of there, I want to know how I got *in* there!" Clearly a question of metaphysical ontogeny, not of physical anatomy!

As children mature, so do their questions become more particular and our answers need to become more specific. But there is no need to rush. After all, we have to remember that in olden times these mysteries were guarded in strictest secrecy and revealed only in disguised images or fables. As recently as the last century the secrets of embryology were still not openly discussed, indeed not even widely known.

With the wonders of modern technology, we are able to peer into worlds previously reserved for the very few and the very wise. To the degree we approach these realms with a clear mind and open heart, we may discern through our modern methods of research an empirical endorsement of a timeless wisdom previously masked in legend and metaphor. For instance, when we now observe under the electron microscope the swirling interaction of male and female gametes during the hours leading up to fertilization—in what the language of empirical language calls the "preconceptual attraction complex" or PCAC, what in the language of mythology might be called the "dance of angels"—it is no longer empirically defensible to speak of the sperm "penetrating" the ovum. Rather we can see, in magnified picture form, what ancient wisdom depicted in veiled image: namely, that conception is no random victory of male seed over some hapless female egg, but rather it is a conversation, a collaboration, a resolve of two polar opposite living beings to create—or not to create—a uniquely new organism, which we call the zygote.[8] Here physical events are elevated to the level of metaphysical parable; eternal truth, ideal reality, is made manifest through the transient processes, the physical reality, of a material organism.

As one youngster said, in a moment of inspired frustration with a basic lesson in gynecology: "I don't want to know how I came out of there, I want to know how I got *in* there!"

In bringing our students gently, gradually—yet confidently and without apology—to appreciate and understand these material events and transcendent truths, we provide an education that can satisfy both their need to know about their sexuality and their yearning to know themselves as whole—and

hence healthy—human beings. In the words of a verse that Rudolf Steiner circulated among young medical doctors he was training, in most ancient times education served as

> …a healing process,
> Bringing to the child, as it mature[s],
> Health
> For life as a whole, fully human being.[9]

One should expect, then, that the education of youth on questions of human sexuality will be similarly healing, to the degree that it cultivates in them a sense of human wholeness.

Endnotes

1. Cf. Rudolf Steiner, *Education for Adolescents*, CW 302, Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1996, Lecture V, Stuttgart, 16 June 1921.
2. Even in their shared costume, differences are evident: the girls generally in v-necked tops and tightly fitted bottoms; the boys generally in round-necked tops and baggy bottoms so loose as to be in danger of succumbing to the force of gravity.
3. Rudolf Steiner, *Study of Man,* London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1975, Lecture XIV, 5 September 1919, p.186.
4. For a bulleted summary of Steiner's ideas concerning sexuality, see the Afterword at the end of the collection of essays from which this article is taken: *Trailing Clouds of Glory: Essays on Human Sexuality and the Education of Youth in Waldorf Schools* (in production).
5. Many of these references have been skillfully compiled by Margaret Jonas in a new collection of Steiner's comments on sexuality entitled *Sexuality, Love and Partnership: From the Perspective of Spiritual Science,* Forest Row, Sussex: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2011.
6. At least in contemporary Western cultures, managing pregnancy is typically treated in ways comparable to fighting disease: we conduct diagnostic tests, administer drugs to suppress symptoms and discomfort, sterilize the environment, give preference to surgical procedures (such as the increasing number of caesarian births). The most obvious exception to this approach to pregnancy is the "home birth" movement, which falls back on the "disease" paradigm only in cases of acute or life-threatening pathology.
7. Cf. letter of 1 September 2009 from Hartwig Schiller to the Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of Waldorf education. Reprinted in *The Journal of the Pedagogical Section,* Number 37 (Christmas 2009).
8. For a fascinating description of this complex, see Jaap van der Wal's essay, "Human Conception: How to Overcome Reproduction," in the collection of essays from which this article is extracted.
9. Rudolf Steiner, "Circular Letter for the Young Doctors", 11 March 1924 [translation by the author of this article]. In the original German: "…Und Erziehen ward angesehen / Gleich dem Heilprozess, /Der dem Kinde mit dem Reifen / Die Gesundheit zugleich erbrachte / Für des Lebens vollendetes Menschensein."

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