The New Impulse of the Second Teachers' Meditation

Elan Leibner

Introduction

The aim of this article is to demonstrate that the Second Teachers' Meditation represents an essential, new dimension in Rudolf Steiner's guidance to teachers, and that this new dimension adds a crucial layer to what had already been given in the First Teachers' Meditation. It builds from basic concepts of anthroposophy, through the First Teachers' Meditation, to the lectures Steiner gave the teachers in 1923, and concludes with a profound mystery implied in the Second Meditation. I am convinced that this mystery lies at the heart of both the challenges and the opportunities facing the Waldorf movement as it nears the 100th anniversary of its founding.

Background

When the first Waldorf school opened in 1919, after the initial lectures and seminar that constituted the original teacher preparation course, Rudolf Steiner gave the teachers a professional meditation (here called the First Teachers' Meditation). During the years that followed, as he came to visit the teachers in the classrooms and offered them further instructions and guidance during faculty meetings, he sometimes gave them images and short verses, but not a second full-length meditation.

In October of 1923, after visiting the classes in the new academic year, Steiner gave the teachers three lectures and on the following morning brought them a new professional meditation, referring to it as a condensed form of what he had brought in the preceding lectures. When pondered in light of those three lectures, the Second Meditation reveals a profound dimension that might go unnoticed.

I begin by introducing two familiar anthroposophical terms, "threefold" and "fourfold," and proceed to use those as navigational guides, so to speak, throughout the article.

Threefold and Fourfold

The entire foundational text of Waldorf education, *The Foundations of Human Experience*[1] (also published as *Study of Man*), is a meditation on the idea of the human being as a threefold being. This threefold-ness is composed of two contrasting gestures, with an active, dynamic mediating region between them. We see threefold-ness first in the life of the soul (thinking and willing as contrasts, and feeling as the mediating region), then in physiological terms (nerves and blood as contrasts, and the places where they meet as the mediating regions), in spiritual terms (waking and sleeping poles, with dreaming as the middle), and finally in the very shapes of the skeletal system (the round head and linear limbs as contrasting poles, and the ribcage as the middle). Throughout the lectures, and in innumerable lectures on other topics from sociology to medicine to cosmology, Steiner again and again presented pictures of threefold-ness as a fundamental principle in the universe, specifically in the realm of sentient and "I" beings. The Foundation Stone Meditation is the quintessential meditative treatment of the threefold human being. In it, human physiology, soul forces, and the

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spiritual Trinity are presented as an interrelated triad.

When I speak of a threefold gesture in this article, it is in this sense of two contrasting tendencies and a dynamic middle element. While being principally its own gesture, each of the three elements in a threefold structure contains aspects of the other two. For example, Steiner describes the head as being principally head (round, contained) while having a lower area (the jaw) that resembles a limb in its action and a middle area that has a rhythmic quality (two symmetrical eyes, ears, nostrils), resembling the rhythmic quality of the ribcage.

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In the interplay between the three regions, and particularly in the middle realm, new possibilities arise. Towards the end of the Foundation Stone Meditation this is pointed out:

> That good may become
> What from our hearts we found
> And from our heads
> Guide with steadfast willing.

The meditative path yields new possibilities arising out of the inmost heart forces, and the roles of the head and the will are to guide and execute what arises in the heart. In this sense, when we consider the threefold gesture in meditation, it is an inward gesture. It directs the meditative effort towards the transformation of the soul forces of the meditant.

A characteristic feature of the fourfold is that it is composed of a pair of opposites that together form a balance.

When the initial training course for the first Waldorf teachers moved from the spiritual fundamentals to the application of principles in classroom situations (*Discussions with Teachers*[2]), Steiner introduced a new, fourfold element: the temperaments. He related them to the four elements, to the fourfold human being (physical, etheric, astral, and ego), and concurred with a teacher who related them to musical instruments and to the four gospels (Discussion 2). Steiner instructed the teachers to design their lessons in such a way that each lesson appealed to the four temperaments, and he gave examples for how this could be done. A characteristic feature of the fourfold is that it is composed of a pair of opposites that together form a balance. We can think of fire (warm, dry) as the opposite of water (cold, moist) and earth (cold, dry) as the opposite of air (warm, moist). Similarly, the temperaments can be seen as two pairs of opposites (sanguine-melancholic and choleric-phlegmatic).

As with the threefold gesture, the fourfold is not unique to the pedagogical lectures. In the four elements, the four seasons, the festivals, the four compass directions, and in numerous other connections, fourfold-ness is a principle that is also fundamental in the universe, specifically to the world around the human being (rather than to the soul). When I speak of the fourfold gesture in this article, it is in the sense of a balancing pair of opposites.

From a spiritual-development perspective, the threefold and fourfold gestures direct the soul either inward or outward. Historically, the spiritual streams originating in India tended towards the inner life of thought and meditation. Buddhism, for example, is a path of inner refinement that, while also manifesting in outer conduct, is not focused on knowledge of the outer world. There is nothing of the outer world mentioned in Buddha's Four Noble Truths or the Eightfold Path. By contrast, the spiritual streams of the Middle East (Persia, Egypt, Babylon) focused on knowledge of the starry and earthly worlds, while creating systems of laws to regulate conduct (rather

than leaving conduct to be refined by each striving soul). Those cultures created outer edifices that still stand thousands of years later, and we are rightly awe-struck by the precision with which the Egyptians designed a pyramid so that the internal chambers would facilitate observations of specific stars at night, to say nothing of the fact that they (the pyramids) have proved to be so durable.

These two gestures—the threefold and the fourfold—appear in many aspects of anthroposophy. For brevity's sake, I will limit my discussion here to what is most pertinent to the Teachers' Meditations. We will see how the two gestures find expression in them and in what way the second meditation brings a new element not present in the first.

The First Teachers' Meditation encourages making one's spiritual (inner) life and professional (outer) life one life.

The First Teachers' Meditation

In shine of sense being
There lives the spirit's will
As wisdom's light outpouring
And inner power concealing.

In the I of my own being
There shines the human will
As thinking's revelation
By its own power supported.

And my own power
With light of cosmic wisdom
Mightfully united
To selfhood shapes me
Who turn myself to high divinity
Seeking powers of illumination.
(translation by Arvia M. Ege)

In this meditation we see a threefold gesture come strongly to the fore, while within this gesture, knowledge of the fourfold world is also present. First there is a turning outward and a striving to see the *manifestation* of the world of the senses (the German *Schein*, variously translated as "shine," "glory," "appearance," and "semblance") as a revelation of divine will. Then there is a turning inward to seek the mystery of one's own "I" and will. This denotes a center-and-periphery relationship. In the third stanza the two powers unite to form a new selfhood, rooted in spiritual striving.

This meditation is a powerful inspiration for connecting one's work (or will) with the striving for true knowledge. The Self, in a higher sense, arises out of joining together outer and inner striving. Each part of the meditation (and all of them together) can be remarkably fruitful as one prepares to teach a block or contemplate a child. This meditation can strengthen one's imagination of the teacher as a spiritual striver for whom the horizontal centripetal (striving for self-knowledge) and centrifugal (striving for knowledge of the world) join with the vertical (spiritual practice as a search for higher knowledge) to form a cross of "true north." It encourages making one's spiritual (inner) life and professional (outer) life *one life*.

Lectures of October 1923

In October of 1923, Rudolf Steiner once again came to visit the first Waldorf school. After observing the classes, he gave the teachers three lectures. Those have been published in English as *Deeper Insights into Education: The Waldorf Approach* and more recently as the last three lectures in the new edition of *Balance in Teaching*.[3] The lectures are rather startling in the directness of the criticism leveled at the teachers.

Lecture 1: In the first lecture, Steiner surveyed the history of education from Greece (the gymnast and gymnastics) through Rome (the rhetorician and oratory) to modern times (the professor and abstract science), and he proceeded to demonstrate to the teachers how

events in nature need to be taught in order to overcome the deadening effects of modern intellectualism. He talked about the life cycle of the butterfly, connecting the stages of egg, larva, chrysalis, and butterfly with earth, water, air, and fire. He likewise discussed the life cycle of frogs. Steiner demonstrated the need to connect and weave concepts so that a broad context is given to each individual phenomenon.

It is clear that he was not telling them to continue to do what they had been doing. He was telling them, in effect, that their teaching had become overly intellectual. He demanded that the new pedagogue be a union of the gymnast (educating through the will), the rhetorician (working through the feeling), and the professor, so that the full human being, not just the head, would be addressed by education.

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Lecture 2: In the second lecture the criticism became more direct. Steiner flat-out talked of a heavy, depressed mood in the classroom, hinted at artificial enthusiasm, and threw down the gauntlet by speaking of the absolutely crucial need to develop the "Waldorf teacher's consciousness … which, however, is only possible when, in the field of education, we come to *an actual experience of the spiritual*." (Emphasis mine.) He then proceeded to say that genuine enthusiasm, the most potent force in education, develops only when the teacher acquires an understanding of the healing potential of education.

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Again, we must consider that, had the teachers been properly enthusiastic, spiritually insightful, or cognizant of the healing potential of education, there would not have been a need to speak about those topics. The fact that Steiner chose to bring those particular themes (and to add a second teachers' meditation) tells us that, however potent their inner work had been, he clearly saw a need to bring something new.

Faculty meetings from the same period, as well as teachers' recollections, point out that Steiner saw significant problems at the school.[4]

Next came a discussion of the fourfold complexes of forces in the human being: movement, nourishment, breathing, and perceiving. It is a fascinating study, but for our purposes we have to leave most of it out. Important for this discussion is the fact that Steiner presented the four complexes of forces as two pairs, with breathing tasked with healing the illnesses brought about by nourishment, and perceiving having to heal the more subtle illnesses brought about by movement. Steiner specifically discussed the ways in which carbon, entering the body through breathing, can unite with various substances in its movement downwards towards the metabolism or upwards towards the head and thinking. These relationships that carbon forms in the body can lead to either health or illness in the human being. He discussed with the teachers how pedagogy could enhance or undermine the health-giving potential of carbon.

[It is very interesting to compare this lecture with a lecture given a week earlier in Dornach at the conclusion of a cycle known in English as "The Four Seasons and the Archangels"[5] (lecture titled "The Working Together of the Four Archangels").

Steiner describes how during each season there is one archangel working cosmically on one half of the earth, while from below, through the earth, the partner archangel works directly into the human being. For example, during the summer Uriel works from above, bringing a sifting, discerning judgment to bear on what human beings have been doing on earth. At the same time, Gabriel works through the earth into the human being's digestive system. The four archangels rotate around the earth through the seasons, taking turns working from above and from below.]

Altogether, both lectures bring a forceful fourfold-ness to the fore. The balancing and healing of the earth and the human being are presented as processes of opposite pairs of forces. In a subtle way, however, Steiner brings a combination of the fourfold and the threefold to bear in both instances, since a healthy, balanced condition is an active, dynamic balance of contrasting forces.

Lecture 3: The third lecture to the teachers was given on the evening after the second one. In it Rudolf Steiner once again took up the theme of carbon's "behavior" in the body and in nature, but with a startling, new twist. He told the teachers that proper pedagogy sows seeds of health and truth that can bear fruit many years later, even if outer circumstances offer great resistance. He went so far as to say that, even under tyranny, a teacher working with the right thoughts and the proper enthusiasm can sow the seeds of future health for the child. He ended by calling this health-giving pedagogy a union of the teacher with the task of the archangel Michael, and contrasting it with the dry, intellectual scientific knowledge that is practiced under the auspices of Ahriman.

We know that Michael, as the countenance of the Christ, is not merely opposed to Ahriman but stands between Ahriman and Lucifer. We will come to the pedagogical aspects of the Luciferic danger later. In this lecture, however, Steiner contrasted the Michaelic education for which he was advocating with the intellectual, Ahrimanic tendencies he had witnessed in the classrooms.

Intellectualism can be overcome by pedagogical enthusiasm; enthusiasm is born of an understanding of education's healing potential; the healing consists of helping to balance opposing forces within the human constitution.

On the following morning, Steiner gave the teachers their new professional meditation. We should bear in mind the thread: intellectualism can be overcome by pedagogical enthusiasm; enthusiasm is born of an understanding of education's healing potential; the healing consists of helping to balance opposing forces within the human constitution.

The Second Teachers' Meditation

Spirit beholding
Turn deeply seeing within.
Heart-warm touching
Touch upon tender soul being.
In expectant spirit beholding,
In strong-hearted, fine soul touching,
There, weaving, is consciousness-being.
Consciousness-being,
Which from the above and the below
Of the human being
Binds cosmic brightness
To earthly darkness.

Spirit beholding
Heart-warm touching
Behold and touch
In Man's inner being,
Weaving cosmic brightness
In reigning earthly darkness
My own

Human formative force
Engendering
Power creating
Will sustaining
Self.

The gesture presented in the first part of this meditation is similar to the one in the first teachers' meditation. Two contrasting gestures—spirit beholding (though the German word *blicken* means something closer to "glancing" or "glimpsing" than to "beholding") and heart-warm touching—allow for a third (uniquely human) element: consciousness-being, to bind cosmic brightness and earthly darkness. It is actually two threefold gestures, one of human effort and one of cosmic-earthly relationships, with consciousness-being common to both.

With the second part of this meditation, however, an essentially new element is introduced: the two activities—beholding (or glancing) and touching—are again invoked, then intensified,[6] and now directed in a wholly surprising direction (Man's inner being) in order to find "my own … Self." The sentence there would read:

Behold and touch [both on the intensified level]
In Man's inner being…
My own
Self.

In between "My own" and "Self" are three effects that the meditant's activities can generate, thereby "weaving cosmic brightness in reigning earthly darkness," engender human formative forces, create power, and sustain the will. A critical question is: generate in whom?

When we consider what Steiner said about the healing potential of education in the context of the four complexes of forces, this sentence assumes a remarkable meaning:

The "ordinary" spiritual striving of the human being brings about the birth of a higher Self; when that Self is sought in the inner being of the other, it generates *in the other* (the child, in this case, or perhaps one's colleague) those three healing effects, and weaves cosmic brightness in earthly darkness in a whole new way. This healing dimension is not present in the First Meditation, and I would argue that it is an essential, new quality in the Second Meditation. It is a manifestation, within pedagogy, of the central task of humanity.

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The True Self

At this point it would be helpful to introduce a differentiation of the three selves in Rudolf Steiner's work: the lower self, the higher Self, and the True Self.[7]

The lower self is the familiar "me-consciousness" that is based on our identification with our physical body. It is the self that has to be transformed, the aspect susceptible to temptations of all kinds.

The higher Self is the source of our capacity for creativity (the "I"). It can be thought of as an opening rather than a "thing," the psycho-spiritual vortex, so to speak, that allows us to bring something new into the world. In inner development this vortex is cultivated consciously, while in other situations it can beget new creations spontaneously. (Not all creative people are spiritual students.)

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The True Self is the archetypal capacity for love, referred to in Steiner's work as The Christ. Steiner describes how the Christ event

brought together the Buddha stream (which is connected with what we have called the inward, threefold soul gesture) with the Zarathustra stream (which is connected with what we have called the outward, know-the-world-in-its-fourfold-ness gesture). Before Christ, a human being could undergo initiation in one of those paths, but not in both during one lifetime. The Christ event united the two streams, and since that time it has been possible to find the higher Self through both paths in one lifetime. When that is done, when the world's wisdom and the essence of the Self are both reached so that the human being is in its inmost Self and at the same time in the depths of world being, the True Self can also be reached if, in that moment, what the higher Self brings into the world is love. The capacity to actuate love through the innermost uniting with the depths of the outer is the moment when "Not I, but Christ in me" is realized.

Here my higher Self is found in the depths of the inner being of the other. The innermost and the depths of the outer are one. Creativity practiced as Love. The True Self.

If we look at the Second Teachers' Meditation with this perspective in mind, we see in it two gestures coming together: on the one side, the threefold inner path, uniting above and below through transformed human consciousness; on the other, an intensification of the initiation efforts leading to a new gesture: the enhanced beholding-touching effort joining with the self-higher Self union to meet the fourfold reality of the other human being.

By turning towards the other (the child, with his need for healing, in this case, or perhaps the colleague) and seeking my Self in his inner being (not, crucially, in *my* inner being), the possibility arises that my creative capacity, my Self, can be brought into service of the needs and being of the other. Any creative activity that is generated out of *that* Self is the healing, redemptive activity that Steiner exhorted the teachers to practice as the source of genuine pedagogical enthusiasm. Here my Self is found in the depths of the inner being of the other. The innermost and the depths of the outer are one. Creativity practiced as Love. The True Self.

Historical Anecdote

In his book *Rudolf Steiner: A Biography*,[8] Christoph Lindenberg relates that in 1922 a government inspector came to visit the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart. The inspector's report was quite critical of the school, pointing to several deficiencies. The teachers reacted bitterly, but Rudolf Steiner would have none of their complaints. He said that the state inspector clearly wanted to avoid harming the school, but that what he (the inspector) had seen could not be ignored. Steiner further stated that he was in agreement with much of what the inspector had written. He brought up the notion that what is good (the curriculum) also has to be applied well, and that this application required a certain enthusiasm, an inner engagement that had disappeared from the school little by little. We can note that in the lectures delivered the following year, and described above, the theme of pedagogical enthusiasm is taken up vigorously.

Steiner died in March of 1925. In the late fall of that year, the state once again came to inspect the Waldorf school. This time, the report (as quoted in Lindenberg, p.528) stated:

> Anyone who comes in contact with the Waldorf school recognizes immediately that a unique group of teachers is leading this school. Their connection to one another appears to be exemplary. They serve each other in love; each radiates energy and receives energy in return; there is no indication of trivial in-fighting,

> jealousy, or envy. …The students sincerely love their teachers, who, rejecting all forms of physical punishment, work to form the body, soul, and spirit of each child entrusted to them through love, goodness, and wisdom, and their own exemplary actions.

The fact that the two reports, so different in what they describe, came before and after the giving of the Second Teachers' Meditation is, of course, not in itself proof of anything. But we can take the second report as a description of what we should all strive to create in Waldorf schools. And we can approach the Second Teachers' Meditation knowing that it played at least a part in moving the first Waldorf school from the impression it made in 1922 to the one made in 1925.

Practical Considerations

Many Waldorf teachers practice creativity. It is common to find teachers writing poetry, music, or pedagogical stories; making beautiful chalkboard drawings and paintings; creating new games; designing projects of various kinds; and so forth. This tradition is commendable and certainly preferable to stale and set-in-their-ways teachers who only repeat what they themselves (or others) have done previously. Creativity, as discussed earlier, is often a manifestation of the higher Self. (There are darker sources of creativity as well, but what may inspire a heavy metal band is not what Waldorf teachers draw upon.)

Teachers who create are more apt to look forward to seeing their students; they yearn to share what they have done, and one senses in their whole demeanor freshness and youthful vigor. If there is a shadow to this creative effort, it is that it can supersede pedagogical considerations because the teacher is caught up in the joy and satisfaction of his/her creation. The act of "birthing," which is selfless, is followed by a sense of ownership, which is not.

An example is a teacher who is so keen to produce a play (he has written) exactly according to his artistic imagination that rehearsals become either tyrannical or ecstatic in mood. The outcome may look wonderful to the audience, but the process did not serve the students as well as it might have. The students became secondary to the play; this may be justified in a professional theater production, but it is not a pedagogically sound process. We see here how a creative impulse is marred by the egotistical shadow that can often accompany such efforts. Similar situations (in which students become secondary) can be seen whenever the teacher becomes personally invested in the outcome of the children's artistic endeavor rather than focusing on the children themselves. This can be true of the beauty in the lesson books, the sound of the class' choral singing and/or recitation, especially when preparing for a performance, or even the way in which the children are led through the hall during an assembly.

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Whenever the teacher's self (as opposed to Self) guides the action, the me-consciousness of the teacher overcomes the good intentions that his/her (self-less) inner pedagogue had in the first place. What begins as an exciting creative process veers away from service and towards egotism. I believe that if heaviness and depression are the results of excessively intellectual teaching, then euphoric, ecstatic, and/or tyrannical moods, even if they appear only in subtle ways, are the results of creative efforts placed too much at the service of the teacher's own need for self-fulfillment.

American Waldorf schools, at least the grade schools, do not often suffer from the depressive, overly intellectual mood described in Steiner's lectures of October 1923; the opposing danger to which I refer above is a more common phenomenon. I leave it to my high school colleagues to assess the situation in their domain. However, if we consider these depressive-ecstatic dangers as being two poles of a threefold picture, then the two types of un-pedagogical modes are not as far apart as they might seem, at least not when what we are after is a healing education. As Steiner says in the second of these lectures, healthy or unhealthy should replace true or false as the quintessential question in education. Unhealthy in one mode can have a hidden partner in the other unhealthy mode, and the finger that points at the overly intellectual may belong to the excessively ecstatic artist. Health-giving does not point fingers, but rather draws the necessary contributions from either pole—"necessary" for the child, that is.

When the teachers' meditation itself includes turning towards the inner being of the other as the source of one's creative potential, Michael, the countenance of the True Self, is at hand.

The Second Teachers' Meditation provides the counter impulse to both the first (depressive) and second (ecstatic) modes. When the inner life of the teacher is divorced from the needs for healing of his/her students, the twin dangers (and others besides) have an easier access to both his inner life and his outward conduct. When the teachers' meditation itself includes turning towards the inner being of the other as the source of one's creative potential, Michael, the countenance of the True Self, is at hand. If we place the child's need for healing at the mainspring of our creative action, what comes thereof may well be the water of life. It is in this sense that we can come to an actual experience of the spiritual in our pedagogical work, finding the genuine, healing enthusiasm of which we and the world stand in such great need.

Endnotes

1. Rudolf Steiner, *The Foundations of Human Experience*, Great Barrington, MA: Anthroposophic Press, 1996.
2. Rudolf Steiner, *Discussions with Teachers*, Great Barrington, MA: Anthroposophic Press, 1997.
3. Rudolf Steiner, *Balance in Teaching*, Great Barrington, MA: Anthroposophic Press, 2007.
4. Rudolf Steiner, *Faculty Meetings with Rudolf Steiner*, Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1998.
5. Rudolf Steiner, *The Four Seasons and the Archangels*, Forest Row, UK: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1996.
6. There is no English equivalent to the difference between *blicken* and *erblicke* or the similar difference between *tasten* and *ertaste*, but the "er" points to an intensification of the activity, usually from within outwards.
7. For this distinction I owe Sergei Prokofieff gratitude. He presents a thorough description of this theme in his book *The First Class of the Michael School and Its Christological Foundations.* This book is available only to members of the First Class of the School for Spiritual Science through the author's secretary: sekretariatSP@goetheanum.ch. The description of the three selves in this article is my own; Prokofieff's treatment of this important topic is far deeper and more thorough than what is presented here.
8. Christoph Lindenberg, *Rudolf Steiner: A Biography*, Great Barrington, MA: SteinerBooks, 2012.

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