

What is Spiritual Research?

David Mitchell

While natural science observes, studies, and makes conclusions about the practical, sensory, material world, the spiritual science introduced by Rudolf Steiner as exercises toward conscious supersensible experiences puts forward a discipline based on moral preparation and control of one's power of thinking. Beneath the world of our conscious thought is a majestic universe to be explored by those willing to prepare themselves properly. Through self-development and applied meditative work one can investigate that which is present beyond the senses. This supersensible sphere defines the realities of our everyday existence.

Steiner always emphasized the need for complete individual freedom and outlined a methodology one can take toward heightened spiritual perception in his book *How to Know Higher Worlds*. To be certain, it is not an easy journey and many falter along the way. The first parameter is to confront oneself with one's own moral path. The active taking on of the self is the foundation for all further spiritual work. During this process you actively create new organs for spirit cognition. As the practitioner delves inward he or she comes to a Rubicon where the inner and outer merge into one. Thinking is used to think about thinking and consciousness to explore consciousness. Pure objectivity, also referred to as "sense-free thinking," is approached. This state allows one to enter selflessly into phenomena; it allows the "world" to speak forth directly. The foundation upon which spiritual investigation builds is self-transformation, moral intuition, and the practicing of ethical individualism.

A major disappointment in Rudolf Steiner's life was how few individuals actually entered into this challenging activity with their entire being. He observed that most people preferred to live marooned on the isolated islands of their heads, prizing intellect above self-transformation and thus never following the path of true spiritual science.

He said:

We must become an anthroposophist with all our body and soul! . . . literally, become serious about anthroposophy! We must discipline our lives along the lines indicated in my book *How to Know*. Anthroposophy must become a life-exercise—a purification of one's whole being. Most people do not do this. It is so inconvenient and one cannot show off with this effort applied to one's own being for decades.



And with a sad, almost bitter expression he continued:

If I demand the oddest things of people, they would all do them, but conquering just one weakness of character, one bad habit, through years of effort—that is not interesting! People don't want to believe that just one attempt to bring about change in one's own being is important.

If, for example, a vain person merely admits his vanity to himself and is ashamed of it—this furthers him spiritually more than listening to a hundred lectures or knowing all the lecture cycles by heart.

With deep emphasis he said:

Anthroposophy is a dangerous thing, a very dangerous thing! It directly affects the human being, even if one absorbs it merely into the head. But then appear the illusions if the sense of self has been made unselfish, then arise deceit and vanity—then the Ahrimanic ensnarement is added to the Luciferic. Think about it! Be alert! Be alert!

He bitterly bewailed the fact that, while people "eagerly hoard" spiritual knowledge and "reproduce it from their heads," the most important thing, "the work we do on ourselves," is ignored. "Remind yourself every day that the most important thing is not what you say and do but what you are inwardly striving to transform."¹

There have been many discussions about spiritual research recently. The Board of the Research Institute for Waldorf Education has been in dialogue with its counterpart in the Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen in Germany (the equivalent of the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America), the Pädagogische Forschungsstelle, and the research arm of the Pedagogical Section in Dornach, Switzerland, asking each other to clarify their perspectives. SteinerBooks (the Anthroposophic Press) recently held a seminar in New York City. A report of this meeting is included in this edition of the *Research Bulletin*.

1. **Rudolf Steiner** (1914) Addressing the overriding importance of esoteric discipline. This is a translation of a lecture chronicled in Munich on December 3, 1914, in "Words of Rudolf Steiner from the Year 1914," as translated from German in *NS*, 6, S-2984.