

Thoughts on testing and being tested

Life with its tests and trials

If we take a look at human life in general, we shall discover that crucial moments in a biography are always subject to trials; these appear where the upholding of intentions of previous earthly lives is at stake, which determine the soul and ego substance of the human being. The significance of the life that has been completed comes down to the question whether life's trials have been mastered or not. Indeed, the laws of karma are composed from what has been achieved and what has not. In this sense, we may speak of the trials of life, thus touching on, so to speak, the great span of life.

This span can be divided into two parts in relation to situations which put us to the test. If we describe this span as an arc, it has an apex. Before the apex, the forces of the body and soul are being built up; after the apex, the restorative physical forces begin to diminish; this means that the spiritual-moral forces are less supported by the body, they have to be more self-reliant. This can result in crises, crises which may take the form of a 'mid-life crisis', to name just one. This phase of life is accompanied by situations requiring decisions which put us to the test. "I have now been at this school for 15 years, it is all old hat, my colleagues I know only too well, after all, I can apply somewhere else for a change", is a type of situation that will crop up in this stage of life. We find ourselves forming judgements out of ourselves and not out of the objective situation. This is also the period when the karmic demands made on life should come to an end and the transition should found to the fulfilment of karma. By way of example, someone has completed three full-time courses of study and would be able to take up three professions at one go, yet he is still unable to make up his mind about an active work life and thinks he absolutely needs to take on yet another course.

The Rhythm of the body's development

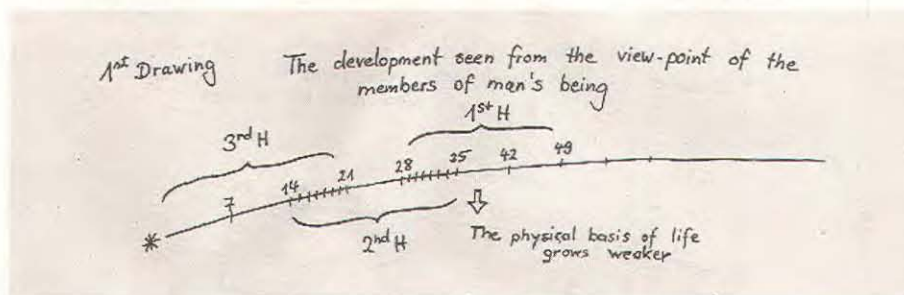
Another perspective opens up for us when we look at the development of the members of man's being, which follow seven year rhythms. Before we look at the transitions in the seven year rhythms with children, let us first take a glance at the whole life-span.

Whoever attempts to do this will notice that these rhythms are bound up with the effects of spiritual forces at work in man and on man. A four year old has quite different forces which help it to develop than a sixteen year old or an adult of forty-eight. There are various forces at work; it is not a linear progression of the same. The thought of the phases of life as spans of 21 years can assist our understanding of it. Generally speaking, the human being is subject to the forces of the third hierarchy in the first 21 years, he is involved with the building up of his

life. In the second span of 21 years, he is in the position of being vis-à-vis the forces of the second hierarchy. The human being is standing at the apex of his experience and what he has learnt. In the last 21 years, the human being is positioned in a confrontation, in a spiritual confrontation with the first hierarchy: can karmic fulfilment come about or must we try again?

Now the extraordinary thing is that these three great arcs overlap when they meet: between 14 and 21 the third and the second hierarchies work on man together. The individualising process of the metabolic forces requires the more powerful forces of the second hierarchy. A similar situation occurs between 28 and 35. The forces of the second hierarchy are joined by those of the first. Man has reached the apex of his life, he must learn to live from other forces than just the physical forces. The early thirties are subject to this double impact; this is the moment of trial in the mirror of the forces of conscience, which originate from the first hierarchy. Once we have an overview of this connection, then it becomes obvious that it is related to the development of the various bodies, physical, etheric, astral and ego-bearing bodies. From this point of view it becomes apparent that smaller but also greater tests and trials are prepared for the human being at various key points of development.

In this respect I would especially like to highlight this, as I hold the view that, in particular, the endurance and resilience of the physical body (in the widest sense) are influenced to the highest degree by education. This is tested in the case of this rhythm.



The rhythm of soul development

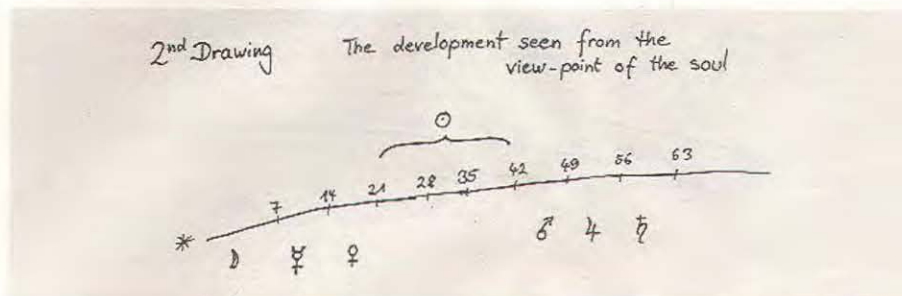
Another rhythm emerges when we focus on the soul development of the human being. This is also accomplished basically in a rhythm of seven years, to be sure, yet it turns out to have different dynamics and accordingly different situations as trials.

From the manner in which we view the soul life we can see that it has its macrocosmic archetype in the planets. Every soul is 'tuned' with a certain mood, has a 'colour tone' according to its age or life situation. The basic motifs, the ba-

sic colours of these moods we can recognize in the planets. They are the expression of the 'world soul' and are reflected in the human soul. The first 21 years in human development are related to the Moon, Mercury and Venus; we begin our soul's life journey accompanied by the geniuses of the inner planets.

The next thing at 21 is a big leap: for three times seven years up to 42, man lives in unison with the forces streaming out of the sun sphere. In comparison with the first way of dividing the human lifespan we can see that the sun supports us well and truly beyond the apex or turning-point of our lives. The tests and trials in this period are rather of a spiritual-physical nature than of a soul nature (whereby we need to consider as a matter of course the interweaving of both kinds). Nonetheless, it is a fact that the late forties are a kind of 'hot spot' for the occurrence of crises in the professional and the home life. The gifts of the sun are coming to a close, a new step towards independence is called for.

The next 21 years, up to 63, are 'shone upon' by the spirits of the outer planets. At this end of life's curve the trials tail off, although with the transition from the Mars to the Jupiter period often the ship of life will pull the rudder round again hard. The question is then: shall I do the same thing in a new way from before, or else shall I do something completely different? How is our perseverance in our home life situation or in our professional life? This too is connected to a large extent with the effect of our upbringing and education. Shall I find the right middle path between persistence with bearing my life's task and the urge for an (inner or outer) change, which is not meant to be an escape but a true taking hold of something new?



Transitions during school education

Let us turn our attention to childhood, to the time in which the demands of karma are dressed in the facts and tasks of *Nature Karma*, *Affinity Karma* or the *Karma of Ability* and the *Karma of Encounter*. The transition to readiness for school should not be seen as a test but rather as a transition which can be celebrated. Yet, it is a fact that the phenomenon of school readiness is becoming increasingly vague and confused; this does not just lead to problems but, as a re-

sult, in many countries proper tests or examinations are required at this threshold. At this point, we need to gain a new grasp of the task concerned: crossing the threshold from one phase to the next.

When the Karma of Interests or Abilities awakens, then the school child is in the healthiest phase of its life and a form of school education, which honours that and does not impose tests or examinations, will build up the resilience of the pupils for later life, for the period of the real tests and trials of life. Should not learning just at this time of life be possible purely through the enthusiastic example set? Should we not see added value in the approach of *not* burdening the pupils with tests and examinations, which isolate them, make them anxious and prematurely self-conscious? At this time, tests and examinations are a procedure that has a *debilitating* effect. We look for qualities with the class teacher who is able to manage this with conviction and enthusiasm, in other words, it means learning from the enthusiastic example of learning through life.

With the transition to the Upper School we can perceive two trends: one is the negating of the transition, the other the negating of a threshold. This same trend underlies Early Learning with the transition from kindergarten to school and the idea of extending the time of class-teaching to the ninth class. They are two phenomena, resulting from the same thought, that there are actually no transitions (any more).

The other trend artificially highlights the transition according to the pattern of earlier cultures, a kind of initiation ceremony is fashioned in the way it occurred with the transition from boyhood to youth among the peoples of prehistory. In some American schools we can see this inclination, also with some adherents of Education through Experience.

Rudolf Steiner describes this phase in two ways. He speaks about puberty and of the new faculty of being able to love the world in all its appearances. Love for the world and the ability to love ones fellow human beings awaken. In surveys of adults on their memories of the primary school period and the teachers who took them, the only judgements expressed were on whether the teachers were kind or not. This is receptive. When they were asked about their memories of the Upper School, they gave very varied reports of their teachers, how they were, what they were able to do, how funny or how phenomenally good they were, in brief, the encounters (sometimes encounters that shaped their choice of vocation) came to life again in their memories. The Karma of Encounter stepped into the lives of the adolescents.

As the faculty of judgement is a feature of the astral body, self-confidence can be supported, given a careful nurturing of the soul, through moral and socially sustainable forms of tests. The adolescent has indeed the need either to put his ability to the test or simply to know what he really can do.

Waldorf Schools actually contain everything to meet this need, for example, the final work at the end of an epoch or achievements that have a sporting rather than discriminatory character. The fact that these results are anticipated with a

certain amount of suspense will not harm any young person. But, if this is bound up with fear on the part of the pupil, or the teacher for that matter (because, for example, the future of a school depends on it), then we are beyond the domain of pedagogy.

Here too, the Waldorf Schools could make considerable improvements in the achievements of their aims with sensible forms, which could be communicated sensibly. The words of the Seventies 'act confidently, learn without fear' ought not to be forgotten. We are still caught up in the treadmill of the misleading thought: no tests = stupid pupils.

The rhythm of the year

A further rhythm which is connected with learning, intelligence and testing is the rhythm of the year. Why, for example, is the period leading into the summer traditionally the time of school examinations in many countries? This question became a real experience for me when I realised that writing reports actually is *the testing of the teacher* after a year's work. We can receive an answer to this question through the Imaginations of the Seasons.

Uriel is standing in the summer Heavens:

"When we direct our gaze into the Heavens, we have the impression of Cosmic Intelligence spreading itself out. At the present stage, man's intelligence is, as I have often said, not yet of much value. But in the height of summer, looking up into the Heavens, we have the feeling that weaving intelligence is everywhere. But we feel that this weaving Intelligence is not of a single being, but of many beings, who live within one another and with one another. Thus we have above the outstanding, weaving Intelligence suffused with light – the ever-active, living Intelligence shining forth with a yellowish glory of light, as the antithesis of the Will. While down below we feel: There the darkness is a deep blue, there everything can only be experienced as forces; above, we feel that everything is such that we are illumined as we perceive it, and we are permeated with a feeling of Intelligence."

And now there appears within this radiant activity (I cannot express it differently), there appears a Form. (...)

In summer-time Uriel makes his appearance within the shining Intelligence. It is deep seriousness that this representative of the cosmic weaving forces appears, in the summer-time, as if seeking his form in the weaving light. There are things which we can further observe, such as the deeds of Uriel accomplished in light – Uriel, whose own Intelligence is in reality composed of the inter-working forces of the planets of our planetary system, supported by the working of the fixed stars of the Zodiac – Uriel, who Himself preserves the Cosmic Thought in his own Thought."

It goes on to describe how this Intelligence engages with the will forces of hu-

man beings as they stream upward from the earth; this determines whether Uriel's robe is properly woven. It is this extraordinarily grave look which Uriel casts downward, as if inquiring about, scrutinising the actions of man to see whether they in combination with the light will enable the gold of his robe to appear. One form of this spiritual activity is the searching of the conscience with adult human beings. Another is the spiritual activity involved in the Historic Conscience: "*here at Midsummer appears the Historic Conscience, which seems to be peculiarly weak in its development during the present age*".

Life as a test

We may have the impression that one form of the weakness of the Historic Conscience is that we have lost the ability to actually see life itself as a test. All our efforts are directed towards certainty, efficiency and linear development. This is especially striking in the field of education. These efforts are for certainties, whereas there can only be development which is made through bearing responsibility. The unhealthy product of these efforts is, unsurprisingly, 'to make' the young person just the way society wants to have him by means of an examination system that is foreign to life. It is for the tests and trials of life that we have to prepare the developing young person. The way through more and more examinations ought not to be the way of the Waldorf Schools.

All this comes to expression in a formula which puts us to the test every year, a challenge for us to master:

Substances are hardened,
Errors are judged in righteousness,
Human hearts are seen and sifted.

*Es werden Stoffe verdichtet,
Es werden Fehler gerichtet,
Es werden Herzen gesichtet.*

*Christof Wiechert
translated by John Weedon*

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