

From the first lecture in the “Study of Man” series given by Rudolf Steiner on August 21, 1919:

“If you regard with an open mind the child who has found his way into earthly life, you will observe that here in the child, Soul-Spirit or Spirit-Soul is as yet disunited from the Life-Body. *The task of education conceived in the spiritual sense is to bring the Soul-Spirit into harmony with the Life-Body.* They must come into harmony with one another. They must be attuned to one another; for when the child is born into the physical world, they do not as yet fit one another. The task of the educator, and of the teacher too, is the mutual attunement of these two members.

Let us now consider this task more concretely. Amongst all the relationships which man has to the external world, the most important of all is breathing. We begin breathing at the very moment we enter the physical world. Breathing in the mother-body is still, if I may put it so, a preparatory breathing: it does not yet bring the being into a complete connection with the external world. The child only begins to breathe in the right sense of the word when he has left the mother-body. Now this breathing signifies a very great deal for the human being, for in this breathing there dwells already the whole threefold system of physical man. You know that amongst the members of the threefold physical human system we reckon, in the first place, the digestion and metabolism. But the metabolism, the assimilation, is intimately connected at one end with the breathing. The breathing process is connected with the blood circulation through metabolism. The blood circulation receives into the human body the substances of the external world which are introduced by another path, so that on the one hand the breathing is connected with the whole metabolic system or digestive system.

On the other hand the breathing is also connected with the nerve-sense life of man. As we breathe in, we are continually pressing the cerebro-spinal fluid into the brain: and, as we breathe out, we press it back again into the body. Thus we transplant the rhythm of breathing to the brain. And as the breathing is connected on the one hand with digestion and assimilation, so on the other hand it is connected with the life of nerves and senses. We may say: the breathing is the most important mediator between the outer physical world and the human being who is entering it. But we must also be aware that this breathing cannot yet, by any means, function so as fully to maintain the life of the body. This applies particularly to the one side of breathing. At the beginning of his physical existence man has not yet achieved the right harmony, the right connection between the breathing process and the nerve-sense process. Observation of the nature of the child will show us that he has not yet learnt to breathe in such a way that breathing maintains the nerve-sense process rightly. In this lies the finer characterisation of what we really have to do with the child. We must first gain an Anthropological-Anthroposophical understanding of the human being. Thus, the most important measures in education will consist in paying attention to all that rightly organises the breathing process into the nerve-sense process. In the higher sense the child has to learn to take up into his spirit what is bestowed on him in that he is born to breathe.

This part of education will, you see, tend to the side of the soul and spirit. By harmonising the breathing with the nerve-sense process we draw all that is soul and spirit into the physical life of the child. To express it roughly we may say: the child cannot yet breathe in the right inner way, and education will have to consist in teaching the child to breathe rightly.

But there is yet another thing which the child cannot do rightly, and this must be taken in hand, in order that a harmony may thereby be created between the two members of the child's being — between the bodily corporeality and the Spirit-Soul. What the child cannot do properly at the beginning of his existence is this: he cannot yet accomplish the alternation between waking and sleeping in the way proper to man. It will strike you that what we have to emphasise from the spiritual side generally appears to be in contradiction to the external world-order. Externally speaking it is of course possible to say: “But the child can sleep perfectly well: indeed he sleeps far more than the human being at a later stage of life. The child sleeps his very way into life.” Nevertheless, what inwardly underlies sleeping and waking, this the child cannot yet do. The child experiences all sorts of things on the physical plane. He uses his little limbs: he eats, drinks and breathes. He alternates between sleeping and waking, but he is not able to carry into the spiritual world in sleep all that he experiences on the physical plane — all that he sees with his eyes, and hears with his ears, and does with his little hands, and the way he kicks and tosses with his little legs. All this he is not able to carry into the spiritual world and work upon there, carrying the results of this work back again on the physical plane. The child's sleep is characterised by the very fact that it is a different sleep from that of the grown-up person. What distinguishes the sleep of the adult is that his experiences during waking life are then worked upon, are metamorphosed. The child is not yet able to carry into his sleep what he has experienced between waking and falling asleep again. Thus in sleep the child still lives his way into the universal world order without being able to take with him what he has experienced externally in the physical world. It is this that a rightly guided education must accomplish: it must enable the human being to carry over his experiences on the physical plane into what the Soul-Spirit or Spirit-Soul is engaged upon during sleep. We, as teachers and educators, cannot really teach the child anything about the higher world. For what enters the human being from the higher world enters in during the time between falling asleep and waking again. All we can do is to use the time which the human being spends on the physical plane in such a way that he gradually becomes able to carry over into the spiritual world what we have done with him here; and that, in carrying it over, he can receive and bring back with him power from the spiritual world which will help him to be a true human being in physical existence.

Thus you see that all our activity of teaching and education is first directed to a very lofty domain — namely to the teaching of right breathing, and to the teaching of the right rhythm in the alternation of sleeping and waking. Needless to say, my dear friends, in our educational practice there will be no question of direct training of the breathing, or of direct training of sleeping and waking. All this will only be in the background. What we have to learn will be concrete measures of educational practice. *But we must be conscious of what we are doing, right down to the foundations.* When we teach this subject or that, we must be fully aware

that we are working either in the one direction to bring the Spirit-Soul more into the earthly Body, or in the other direction to bring the bodily nature into the Spirit-Soul. Do not let us underestimate the importance of what has now been said. For you can only become good teachers and educators if you pay attention not merely to what you do, but also to what you are. It is really for this reason that we have Spiritual Science with its anthroposophical outlook: to perceive the significance of the fact that man is effective in the world not only through what he does, but above all through what he is. Truly, my dear friends, it makes a very great difference whether one teacher of the school or another comes through the classroom door to any group of children. There is a big difference; and the difference is not merely that the one teacher is more skilful in his practice than the other. No, the main difference — the one that is really influential in teaching — lies in what the teacher bears within him, as his constant trend of thought, and carries with him into the classroom. A teacher who occupies himself with thoughts of the evolving human being will work very differently upon his pupils from a teacher who knows nothing of all these things, and never gives them a thought. Once you begin to know the cosmic significance of the breathing process and of its transformation through education, and the cosmic significance of the rhythm between sleeping and waking — what is it that happens? The moment you have such thoughts something in you is combating your purely personal nature. The moment you have such thoughts the very basis of this spirit of personality is of less effect. In that moment all that enhances a personal spirit is damped down, all that man possesses through the fact that he is a physical man. If you have quenched this personal spirit, then, as you enter the classroom, it will come about through inner forces that a relationship is established between the pupils and yourself.

Now it may be that at first external facts will contradict this. You enter the school and perhaps you find yourself faced with scamps, both boys and girls, who make fun of you. Now you must be so strengthened with such thoughts as we shall here cultivate, that you do not pay any attention to their ridicule but accept it as something perfectly external. Accept it, shall I say, like the external circumstances that when you go out without an umbrella it suddenly begins to rain. Undoubtedly this is an unpleasant surprise. But we usually make a distinction between being ridiculed and being taken by surprise in a shower when we have no umbrella. *This distinction must not be made.* We must evolve thoughts so strong that the distinction is not made — that we take ridicule like a good shower of rain. If we are permeated by these thoughts and have real faith in them then (perhaps after a week, or a fortnight, or maybe longer still), we shall certainly find that however much the children may laugh at us, we have nevertheless established a relationship with them such as we would wish.

Through what we make of ourselves we must come to this relationship, even in the face of difficulty and resistance. And we must above all become conscious of this first of educational tasks: that we must first make something of ourselves, so that a relationship in thought, an inner spiritual relationship, may hold sway between the teacher and the children. So that we enter the classroom with the conscious thought: this spiritual relationship is present — not only the words, not only all that I say to the children in the way of instruction and admonition,

not only my skilfulness in teaching. These are externals which we must certainly cultivate, but we shall only cultivate them rightly if we establish the importance of the relation between the thoughts that fill us and the effects of our teaching on the children, in body and soul.

Our whole conduct and bearing as we teach will not be complete unless we keep this thought in our minds: the human being was born. Thereby the possibility was given him to do what he could not do in the spiritual world. We have to teach and educate first of all so as to give the breathing its right harmony in relation to the spiritual world. The human being could not accomplish the rhythmical alternation between waking and sleeping in the same way in the spiritual world as in the physical world. By education, by teaching, we must regulate this rhythm in such a way that the bodily nature in the human being becomes properly membered with the Soul-Spirit. Needless to say, this is not something that we should have before us as an abstraction, and apply it as such directly to our teaching, but this thought about the human being must be our rule and guide.

This is what I wanted to give you in this present introduction. To-morrow we will begin with the subject of education proper.