

The Elemental World and the Future of Mankind

Lecture by Dr. Rudolf Steiner

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TODAY I want to bring forward certain matters which concern mankind's evolution in so far as this evolution is dependent upon man's relationship with certain spiritual powers during the earth's future.

We have seen how it is possible, through exact observation, to gain insight into the fact that within the physical-soul-spiritual being of man something comes together which, in a certain sense, belongs to the external world, in so far as this world consists of etheric forces and beings. Man draws together these forces to form his etheric body as he descends to earthly life. We see also that with this entity, consisting of forces from the external etheric world, there unites the effect of man's earthly deeds, of everything he causes to happen — in short, his karma.

I have often mentioned that a new stream of spirituality is now ready to pour into man's earthly existence. The present forms a link in mankind's evolution between an era of mainly intellectual development which began in the first third of the fifteenth century and has now practically run its course — and a future devoted to the spiritual. The most important task for mankind in the era of intellectuality was the development of reason through the investigation of external nature and the development of technology.

In this direction great and impressive results have been accomplished in recent centuries. However, it must be said that the intellect has begun to lose its creativity, though we still live with its heritage. The most creative period was from the time of Copernicus, Galileo and Giordano Bruno right up to the nineteenth century. Especially in western civilization the greatest intellectual achievements have been attained in recent centuries.

It is obvious, even to an external unbiased observation, that the intellect has lost some of its creative power. In general, mankind has no longer the same enthusiasm for intellectual accomplishments. Yet the practice of centuries continues through a certain cultural inertia. Thoughts run along the old grooves

but the intellect brings nothing new of real importance to the fore. This is particularly noticeable in our young people. Not so long ago it was a real pleasure to listen to a young person who had studied some subject. It may not have applied to everyone but certainly to those who had achieved something; one was eager to hear what they had to say, and it was the same everywhere in western academic circles. But — when a change has come about in the last few decades, young person fresh from university speaks one is no longer curious about what he will say next. One is not curious because one knows it already; it comes out automatically; it is as if the brain itself has lost its vitality. One gets the feeling that the activity of the intellect has slid down from the head to some deeper region. That human intelligence has become something mechanical which no longer springs from the region of the head must be obvious even to external observation. This situation has come about because intelligence was originally a natural endowment which mankind was predestined to develop predominantly between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries.

However, in order to fructify the developed intellect, a stream of spirituality from higher regions of world existence now seeks entry into the earthly life of mankind. Whether this will happen depends upon man opening his heart and soul to what thus seeks entry, through many doors, as it were, into the earthly world from the spiritual world. It will be necessary for man not only to become conscious once more of the spiritual in all nature, but able to perceive it.

Consider how in the older civilizations mankind in general perceived — in all the kingdoms of nature, in every star, in every moving cloud, in thunder and lightning — spirit and soul. On the background of this general consciousness the yoga exercises evolved. As I explained yesterday, the yogi attempted to penetrate to his own self. Through inner exercises he sought to attain what today is taken for granted because we are born with it: consciousness of the 'I' the feeling of selfhood. This the yogi had first to develop in himself.

But, my dear friends, it would be a great mistake to compare the ordinary consciousness of self that we have today with that of the yogi. It makes a difference whether something is achieved through one's own human effort or whether one simply has it. When, as was the case with the yogi, one first had to struggle to attain consciousness of self, then, through the inner effort, one was transported into the great universal laws; one participated in world processes. This is not the case when one is simply placed into the sphere of self-consciousness. To belong willy-nilly to a certain level of human evolution is not the same as attaining that level through inner exercises.

You will realize from what was said yesterday that mankind must gradually acquire knowledge in a different way, — he must set his thought processes free from the breathing process. As I explained yesterday, this has the effect that thinking, by no longer being bound up with the subject, is able to unite itself with the rhythm of the external cosmos. We must go with our thinking out of ourselves into the external world, whereas the yogi crept into his inner being by hitching together, as it were, the systems of thought and breath. In so doing he identified himself with what his spirit-soul nature was able to experience on the waves of the inner rhythm of breathing. By contrast, we must give ourselves up to the world in order to participate in all the various rhythms which go through the mineral, plant, animal and human worlds right up to the realm of the Hierarchies. We must enter into, and live within,

the rhythm of external existence. In this way mankind will again gain insight into that spiritual foundation of nature which external knowledge does not reach.

The sciences of physics, chemistry and biology which are pursued nowadays provide mankind with a vast amount of popular information. What they actually do is explain how sense observation, interpreted by the intellect, sees the world. But the time has come when mankind must rediscover what lies behind the knowledge provided by external observation and intellectual interpretation.

If one has in mind their physical aspect only, when speaking about the four elements of earth, water, air and fire, then it makes no difference whether one uses these terms or prefers the more recent ones of solid, liquid, aeriform bodies and conditions of heat. When they are referred to today, all one has in mind is how the physical substances within them are either combined or mixed, or else separated. However, it must be stressed that everything of a solid, earthen nature has as its foundation an elemental spirituality. Today's 'enlightened' people may laugh when reminded that older folks used to see gnomes in everything earthy. However, when knowledge is no longer obtained by means of combining abstract, logical thoughts, but by uniting ourselves through our thinking with the world rhythm, then we shall rediscover the elemental beings contained in everything of a solid earthy nature. The outstanding characteristic of these elemental beings dwelling in solid earth is cleverness, cunning, slyness — in fact, a one-sidedly developed intellect.

Thus, in the solid earth element live spiritual beings of an elemental kind who are very much more clever than human beings. Even a person of extreme astuteness intellectually is no match for these beings who, as supersensible entities, live in the realm of solid earth. One could say that just as man consists of flesh and blood so do these beings consist of cleverness, of super-cleverness. Another of their peculiarities is that they prefer to live in multitudes. When one is in a position to find out how many of these astute beings a suitable earthy object contains, then one can squeeze them out as if from a sponge — in a spiritual sense, of course — and out they flow in an endless stream. But counting these gnome-like beings is a difficult task. If one tries to count them as one would cherries or eggs — i.e., one, two, three — one soon notices that they will not be counted that way. When one has reached say three, then there are suddenly a lot more. So counting them as one would on the physical plane is no use; nor is any other form of calculation, for they immediately play tricks on you. Suppose one put two on one side and two on the other in order to say that twice two makes four. One would be wrong, for through their super-cunning they would appear as seven or eight, making out that two times two makes eight, or something like that. Thus these beings defy being counted. It must be acknowledged that the intellect developed by man in recent times is very impressive. But these super-intelligent beings show a mastery over the intellect even where it is merely a question of numbers.

The elemental beings dwelling in the fluid element — i.e., in water — have particularly developed what is, in man, his life of feeling and sensitivity. In this respect we humans are really backward compared with these beings. We may take pleasure in a red rose or feel enchanted when trees unfold their foliage. But these beings go with the fluid which as sap rises in the rose bush and participate in the redness of the blossoms. In an intimate way they share feelingly in the world processes. We remain outside of things with our sensitivity, whereas they are right inside the process themselves and share in them.

The elemental beings of air have developed to a high degree what lives in the human will. It is splendid that the analytical chemist discovers the atomic weight of hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen, and that he finds out how hydrogen and oxygen combine into water to be further analyzed or else how chloride of lime is analyzed, and so on. But elemental spiritual beings are active behind all this, and it is essential that man should acquire insight into their characteristics. During the period in which man developed the intellect — as already mentioned, this was from the first third of the fifteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century — these elemental beings were pushed to one side, as it were. While the intellect played a creative part in man's cultural life there was not much they could do., and because the elemental beings dwelling in solids had, in a certain sense, to hold back and leave the intellect to man, they also held back the beings of water and air. But now we live at a time when the intellect has begun to decline within the civilized world; it is failing into decadence. If mankind does not become receptive to what streams towards him from the spiritual world, then the result of this dullness on man's part will be — and there are signs already of it happening — that these elemental beings will gather together to form a kind of union and place themselves under the leadership of the supreme intellectual power: Ahriman.

If it should happen that the elemental beings come under the guidance of Ahriman with the clear intention of opposing human evolution, then mankind would be unable to make further progress. The possibility would arise that the Ahrimanic powers in union with the elemental beings would divert the earth from its intended course. The earth would not continue what is described in my Occult Science: An Outline as the Saturn-Sun-Moon-Earth evolution. The earth can only become what it was originally intended to become if man, in each epoch, tackles his task rightly.

One can see already how matters stand. Those who have reached a certain age know that formerly one gained insight into another human being's inner thoughts and feelings simply through normal conversation and exchange of ideas. One took it for granted that a person's reason and intellect resided in his head, and what was in the head would be conveyed through the spoken word. There are many people today who no longer take it for granted that reason is located in the head of many of their contemporaries; rather do they assume it to have slid further down. So instead of listening they now analyze. This is just one example from one misunderstood aspect of the whole problem. But I would say that when one starts to psychoanalyze people instead of just letting them talk, then that is in fact an admission that reason no longer resides in the head. It is assumed to have slid down into deeper regions of human nature and must be psychoanalyzed to be brought up again to consciousness. In this age of a declining intellect there are already people who dislike it if one appeals to their intelligence; they prefer to be analyzed. This is because they do not want to participate with the head in what their soul brings to light.

Nothing is achieved by looking at these things merely from an external point of view. To see clearly what is involved they must be considered — as we have just done — in the wider context of world evolution. Certain aspects of psychoanalysis may do some good. There are conditions which formerly were simply accepted but are no longer tolerated and must be cured. However, as so many cures are needed, physical ones do not suffice, so one resorts to psychological ones. Why this should be so must be seen in a wider context.

Superficially judged, there is no point in objecting to all the good reasons and beguiling arguments put forward by psychoanalysts, not even from the wider viewpoint of world evolution. People want to avoid seeing things in their wider context, though it would lead them to the recognition that a spiritual stream is seeking to enter our present civilization to replace the declining intellect.

What we have considered so far amounts to one aspect of what in the future threatens mankind. There is another aspect — just as the lower elements of earth, water and air are inhabited by elemental beings, so are the higher elements of light ether, chemical ether and life ether. However, these beings of the higher elements differ considerably from those of the lower ones. The beings of light, and particularly those of life, do not aim at becoming multitudes. The ones who strive the most to become multitudes are the beings of the earth element. The beings of the etheric element strive rather towards unity. It is difficult to differentiate them from one another; they do not express any individuality and rather strive to amalgamate. Certain initiates in ancient times, through whom certain teachings of the Old Testament originated, turned their attention particularly towards the etheric elements. The strong tendency of these elements towards unification created an influence which resulted in the strict monotheism of Judaism.

The religion which is based on the worship of Jehovah originated mainly from a spiritual vision of the realm of the ethers. In this realm live spiritual beings who do not strive to separate from one another and become many individuals. Rather do they strive to grow together and disappear into one another; they seek to become a unity.

If these beings are disregarded by man — i.e., if he does not turn to spiritual knowledge and the insight that what exists up in the sky is not merely the physical sun, but that with the sun's warmth and light etheric beings stream down to earth if man's comprehension stops at the external material aspect, then the possibility exists that these beings will unite with Ahrimanic powers. In order for the earth to become what it was originally intended to become, man must wake up to the dangers that threaten from both sides — on the one hand, the danger that those beings who dwell in the lower elements will join forces with Ahrimanic powers, and on the other, that the Ahrimanic powers will unite with those of the higher elements in their striving for unity.

The significance of spiritual knowledge for man's earthly destiny cannot be emphasized too strongly. Unless man draws near to spiritual reality something completely different from what ought to happen will happen to the earth. No matter how far or how deeply our sophisticated sciences of physics and chemistry investigate the material world around us, the fact remains that what is investigated will all disappear along with earth existence itself. In the last resort, chemistry and physics have no value whatever beyond the earth. When the evolution of the earth comes to an end, all mineral substances will turn to dust and dissolve in the cosmos. Only what pertains to the plant, animal and human world will pass over to the Jupiter existence. Therefore, all the magnificent achievements of these sciences are related only to what is transitory. It is essential that knowledge is attained of that which endures beyond the earth.

As already mentioned, whatever physical laws are discovered, whatever is investigated concerning the atomic weight of individual elements or whatever chemical formulae are produced, all these things are concerned only with what has merely transient significance. Man must grow beyond earth existence through knowledge of the kind of things I have explained. These are matters of great import and significance.