

Site Map: [MAIN / A Reader's Journal, Vol. 2 Webpage Printer Ready](#)



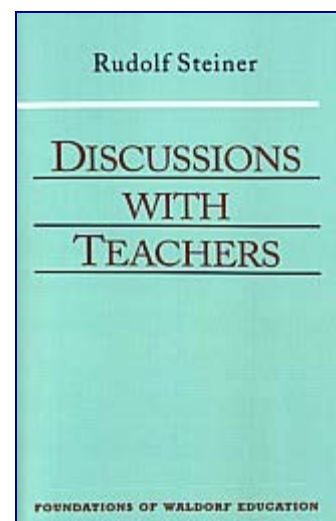
A READER'S JOURNAL

**Discussions with Teachers GA#295
15 Discussions at Stuttgart Waldorf School in
1919**

by

Rudolf Steiner Introduction by Craig Giddens
Translated by Helen Fox, Catherine E. Creeger,
and Maisie Jones

ARJ2 Chapter: Spiritual Science
Published by Anthroposophic Press/MA in 1997
A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2017



In my graduate course called College Teaching, I wrote a Final Paper titled *Teaching and Learning in the College Classroom*. In this paper I wrote of the importance of, that is, the crucial need for a live lecturer in the college classroom. You can read in the paper how I first discovered this truth. My discovery applies equally well to live lecturers or teachers at every level of study, from Kindergarten to Graduate Seminars. There is a communication which occurs from the soul of the live lecturer to the soul of the live student that is an essential part of learning. *Without* this soul-to-soul communication link, both the interest of the student in the material being presented and the worth of what is actually received suffers. Let a teacher start reading written material to a classroom, and the students eyes begin to glass over with disinterest. Let the same teacher stop reading and instead speak from the heart about the same material, and suddenly the students' interest perks up in what is being said, indicating that some real learning is going on in the students.

The author of our textbook for the college teaching course asked why have live lectures survived since the advent of print? His answer missed the soul-to-soul aspect of communication, but focused only the materialistic aspects. He wrote, in part, "one of the benefits of live professors is the tendency of people to model themselves after individuals whom they perceive as living, breathing, human beings with characteristics that can be admired and emulated." Yes, students can emulate their teachers as they are speaking, but more importantly students can receive directly into their souls the very meanings their teachers hold in their souls as they are lecturing to them.

Unless teachers are congruent, that is, their soul-feelings and contents of their lecture match each other, the students will tune out of their lecture. This will lead to class disruption and lack of learning, no matter how fine the content of the lecture is. The essential part of a lesson plan is for teachers to understand fully the content before the lecture so that their understanding will communicate directly soul-to-soul to their students. Their exact choice of words will be less important than their own feeling of understanding which will be communicated to their students.

Rudolf Steiner is the *first person* I have encountered who understood the nature of this soul-to-soul communication and its crucial importance in classrooms and lecture halls everywhere. It has been reported in several places that Steiner shaped his lectures to match the soul desires of members of his audience, which gives us evidence that this soul-to-soul communication operates in both directions. *Thus a Teacher, So Also a Learner* is a rule I intuited back in 1977, long before I first encountered Rudolf Steiner, whose

work corroborates that early insight of mine. Teachers are both teachers and learners, if they allow themselves to give and receive soul communications when lecturing.

Craig Giddens in his Introduction highlights material from page 20 of this book which focuses on soul-to-soul communication.

[page 11] The inner life, the life of the soul, is the most significant aspect in the child. Teaching and education depend on what passes from the soul of the teacher to soul of the child.

Note the focus of the above passage resembles the all-too-tempting *bank metaphor* of education: that the teacher passes something to the soul of the child, as one might deposit money in a bank vault. With a fuller comprehension of soul-to-soul communication, one can understand that good teaching *also* depends upon what passes from the soul of the child to soul of the teacher(1).

Steiner spoke on *The Art of Lecturing*, in Dornach on October 11, 1921, about two years after his *Discussions with Teachers* took place in Stuttgart, and he said in Lecture One:

[page 12, italics added] The intrinsic worth of the teacher, which surely rests in large measure upon speaking, depends upon what the teacher has *previously felt and experienced* about the things to be presented, and the *kinds of feelings that are again stirred up by the fact that the child is before him or her.*

Look at the above two italicized passages. They show us that Steiner recognized the two-way communication soul-to-soul between teacher and student. First: what a teacher previously felt during the development of a lesson plan the night before will likely be stirred up again the next day and those soul-feelings with their attendant insights will be communicated directly to the souls of the students who are tuned into the teacher in the classroom. Secondly, a teacher speaking, transmitting soul knowledge from the heart, will spark the interest of the students and ensure that all students are tuned in, and when the students are tuned in, the teacher will be able to receive from the students their soul-feelings and shape the lecture to address those feelings and questions.

It may seem strange to some of my Good Readers to think that soul-feelings about geology, for example, a very materialistic science, are even possible, but I know one geology professor personally and can report that she has soul-feelings when she talks geology. Soul feelings are our individual, deep understandings of a subject, and no matter how materially-based the subject may be, these soul-feelings will flow between teacher and student.

Teachers can use the soul-to-soul communication between students to help maintain order in even the largest-sized classroom. The four bodies of each human being are the physical body, the etheric body, the astral body, and the I. Each of these rule or predominate in a particular child, and a good teacher will notice how the *phlegmatic* child is ruled by its *physical* body (stays still, hardly moves), the *sanguine* child by its *etheric* body (always flitting from one thing to another), the *choleric* child by its *astral* body (blustery will-based responses), and the *melancholic* child by its *I* or *Ego* body (inner reflectivity).

By grouping students in a class by their various temperaments, each type of child will easily be able to receive soul-to-soul communications from those of like temperament in its group. If just one child in the sanguine group receives a soul communication from the teacher, for example, the other sanguines will quickly receive it from that child. This class grouping has several other important benefits to the teaching situation. First, it helps keep order as each child feels at home in his group. Second, it helps soul-learnings from the teacher spread quickly among like temperaments.

The third is this arrangement of groups in the classroom allows teachers to direct the class's attention, for example, the *sanguine* group when sharing something which appeals to the *physical* senses. "Show the *melancholic* children something they can *express an opinion* about, and show the *sanguine* something they

can *look* at; these two groups will complement each other in this way. One type learns from the other; they are interested in each other, and one supplies what the other lacks." (Page 16, *italics added*)

Steiner exhorts the teachers:

[page 16] You will have to be patient with yourselves, because this kind of treatment of children must become habit. Eventually your *feeling* must tell you which group you have to turn toward, so that you do it involuntarily, as it were. If you did it with fixed purpose you would lose your spontaneity. Thus we must come to think of this way of treating the different tendencies in the temperaments as a kind of habit in our teaching.

What do teachers typically do when one child stands out in some way? They try to force the child to conform to the rest of the class. If the child, for example, were the only sanguine child, the teacher would try to wipe out its sanguine qualities. This is an egregious mistake and should be avoided.

[page 17] You can see from the lecture I gave some years ago that, when we want to help a temperament, the worst method is to foster the opposite qualities in a child. Let's suppose we have a sanguine child; when we try to train such a child by driving out these qualities, we provide bad treatment. We must work to understand the temperament, to go out to meet it. In the case of the sanguine child, for example, we bring as many things as possible to the attention of the child, who becomes thoroughly occupied, because in this way we can work with the child's propensities. The result will be that the child's connection with the sanguine tendency will gradually weaken and the temperaments will harmonize with each other.

Clearly, a teacher needs grounding and insight into each of the four temperaments. Steiner describes how the four groups are best placed in a classroom. The most unlike groups should be on opposite ends of the room. Melancholics are polar opposite to sanguines; Choleric polar opposite to Phlegmatics.

[page 20] . . . it will be good to arrange your groups as follows: if you put the phlegmatics together it is good to have the choleric on the opposite side, and to let the two others, the melancholics and sanguines, sit between them.

And, once again, Steiner stresses the importance of soul to soul communication.

[page 20] The inner life, the life of soul, is the most significant aspect in the child. Teaching and education depend on what passes from the soul of the teacher to the soul of the child.

One key principle to understand the important of using temperament groupings is that "like defuses like". Steiner explains it this way:

[page 20, 21] But children also influence each other. And that is the remarkable thing about this division into four groups of similar temperaments; when you put those that are alike together, it does not have the effect of intensifying their temperamental tendencies but of reducing them. For example, when sanguine children are put together in one group, they do not intensify each others sanguinity but tone it down. And when in your lessons you turn to the choleric children, the sanguine profit from what you say, and vice versa. As a teacher you must allow your own soul mood to influence the children, while the children of like temperaments are toning down each others soul moods. Talking and chattering together signifies an inner desire to subdue each other, even the chattering that goes on during the breaks. The choleric will chatter less when sitting together than they would when sitting with children of other temperaments. We must avoid viewing and assessing these things externally.

My Good Readers should pardon me if I seem to focus most on the melancholic temperament. It is my own temperament and I am only now learning that to be case for me. It explains to me a lot of unanswered questions about my childhood such as my problems getting along with people in school, being a loner much of the time, and brooding about things a lot. Each of you have your own temperament and would do well to get this book and delve into your own temperament and explore your own unanswered questions about your childhood.

In this next passage, Steiner is answering a question about the treatment of melancholic and sanguine children.

[page 24, 25] The teacher should view the melancholic child in this way: melancholic tendency arises when the soul-spirit of the human being cannot fully control the metabolic system. The nerve-sense human is the least spiritual part of a human being — it is the most physical. The least physical part is the metabolic human. The spiritual human is most firmly rooted in the metabolic organism, but nevertheless, it has realized itself least of all within it. The metabolic organism must be worked on more than any other. Thus, when the metabolic presents too many hindrances, the inner striving toward spirit is revealed in a brooding temperament.

When we deal with a melancholic children, we should try to arouse an interest in what they see around them; we should act, as much as possible, as though we were sanguine, and characterize the world accordingly. With sanguine children, on the other hand, we must be serious, with all inner earnestness, giving them clear strong pictures of the external world, which will leave an impression and remain in their minds.

Steiner reveals that *free* spirit, that spirit which is not absorbed in physical processes, enters most into the nerve system and least into the metabolic system. Melancholics, to compensate for their inability to control their metabolic system, brood instead. The nerve-sense human is the least spiritual part of a human being — It is the most physical. The least physical part is the metabolic human. The spiritual human is most firmly rooted in the metabolic organism, but nevertheless, it has realized itself least of all within it. The metabolic organism must be worked on more than any other. Thus, when the metabolic presents too many hindrances, the inner striving toward spirit is revealed in a brooding temperament.

When we deal with a melancholic children, we should try to arouse an interest in what they see around them; we should act, as much as possible, as though we were sanguine, and characterize the world accordingly. With sanguine children, on the other hand, we must be serious, with all inner earnestness, giving them clear strong pictures of the external world, which will leave an impression and remain in their minds.

Steiner gives another detailed report on melancholics.

[page 33] You will find it very difficult to treat the melancholic temperament if you fail to consider one thing that is almost always present: the melancholic lives in a strange condition of self-deception. Melancholics have the opinion that their experiences are peculiar to themselves. The moment you can bring home to them that others also have these or similar experiences, they will to some degree be cured, because they then perceive they are not the singularly interesting people they thought themselves to be. They are prepossessed by the illusion that they are very exceptional as they are.

When you can impress a melancholic child by saying, "Come on now, you're not so extraordinary after all; there are plenty of people like you, who have had similar experiences," then this will act as a very strong corrective to the impulses that lead to melancholy. Because of this it is good to make a point of presenting them with the biographies of great persons; they will be more interested in these individuals than in external nature. Such biographies should be used especially to help these children over their melancholy.

To my recollection, no teacher said that to me; they always seemed impressed by my extraordinary behavior, so it wouldn't have occurred to them to tell me, "You're not so extraordinary." What saved me is that I spent a lot of time reading the biographies of great people, Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Ben Franklin, and many others. Trying to emulate their amazing achievements in my own young life kept me too busy to be melancholic much of the time. For example: I once made a telephone microphone out of chopped up carbon I salvaged from old D-cell batteries, after reading how Bell made his telephone. I also made a primitive earphone using tiny wires wrapped around a permanent magnet. After reading about a WWII POW who made a radio out of a pencil lead, a rusted razor blade, and a safety pin, I made one of those and it worked, but without a tuner, it wasn't much use except to hear the most powerful local radio station. None of my brothers or classmates were interested in such things which probably created some brooding in me as I wondered about their lack of interest in something that was so interesting to me.

My father-in-law was a great businessman and my daughter's friend Pat teaches economics, both of whom exhibit phlegmatic characteristics, e. g., Pat's favorite expression is "whatever" — a sure sign of a phlegmatic temperament.

Each of the four temperaments have an abnormal condition. For the melancholic, it is *insanity*; for the phlegmatic, *mental deficiency*; for the sanguine, *foolishness or stupidity*; and for the choleric, *rage*. Steiner explains how these abnormalities might arise.

[page 55] If the *melancholic* temperament becomes abnormal and does not remain within the boundaries of the soul, but rather encroaches on the body, then *insanity* arises. Insanity is the abnormal development of a predominantly melancholic temperament. The abnormal development of the phlegmatic temperament is *mental deficiency*. The abnormal development of the sanguine is *foolishness, or stupidity*. The abnormal development of the choleric is *rage*. When a person is in an emotional state you will sometimes see these attacks of insanity, mental deficiency, foolishness, or rage arising from otherwise normal soul conditions. It is indeed necessary that you focus your attention and observation on the entire soul life.

On September 6, 2016 I was reading *Discussion Six* of this book and one passage intended for teachers of small children resonated with me. I had started publishing my notes of how my poems were inspired and the circumstances of how each poem came into being, the date, where I was when I wrote it, into which book I wrote it, etc. Something didn't seem quite right to me when I added the Note following the poem, but it remained as an unanswered question until I read this next passage.

[page 70,71] I want to point out that you should never spoil the contents of a "passage" by first reading it aloud yourself, or reading it through with your students, and then pedantically explaining it, because this will destroy the powers of feeling and perception in the children. A teacher with insight will not work this way, but will feel that hearing a bit of prose or poetry should produce a sense of contentment in the soul — a satisfaction should arise from hearing a passage of prose or poetry read. The children will then fully understand every shade of meaning. Within their feelings, in any case, they will instinctively understand what the poem contains. It is unnecessary to go into subtleties or to make learned comments about a poem or prose passage, but through your teaching the children should rise to a complete understanding of it through feelings. Hence you should always try to leave the actual reading of a piece until last, first dealing with everything you can give the children to help them understand it. If you prepare for the reading as well as you can ahead of time, then you will not work like a pedant, but help make the whole piece clear and understandable, and thus enhance the children's enjoyment and satisfaction.

The last sentence sent an electric jolt through my body. AHA! I thought, Steiner was telling us to let the children take the soul-feeling of the story home with them! I had my answer: I needed to place the Note

for each poem ahead of the poem so that the Reader could take the good feeling of the poem home with them! I worked out a process for incorporation the Note for each poem into the heading of the poem in reduced a reduced font-size and a lighter color. The Reader can choose to skip over the Note, but if they read it, they will better understand the thoughts and especially the feelings of the poem after reading it and those soul-impressions will stay with them(2).

Steiner uses a droll metaphor to explain the importance of giving the explanation before you read a story to them.

[page 77] After the reading no more explanations of any kind should be given. You will agree it would not make sense if I were now to begin giving a lecture in Chinese. You would say, "That is senseless, because we never learned Chinese." But if you all knew Chinese when I gave my lecture, you would find it extremely dull if afterwards I wanted to explain it all to you. You should have the same feeling about a piece of reading and do everything you can to make it enjoyable.

Overeating is more endemic in our time than in Steiner's time a hundred years ago. Even so-called diets advertise, "You can eat all the X you want." Sometimes X is fats, sometimes proteins, sometimes carbohydrates, but it's patently ludicrous to try to lose weight on a diet which claims *you can eat all you want*, is it not? Yet that is the mentality of our time, up until now. At least the people heeding the absurd diet recommendations are adults or at least seem to be. In Steiner's time, foolish parents were over-feeding their children, youngsters who simply followed their parents' feeding routines. The effects on the educability of these overfed children was not lost on Steiner, but it seems to be lost on parents of today, parents who are often obese themselves and did not experience the food shortages that parents did in Steiner's time.

[page 103] Generally speaking, you should be very aware that the foolish ways many parents feed their young children contributes greatly to the lessening of their faculties, especially with phlegmatic and sanguine children. Perpetually overfeeding children — and this is somewhat different at the present time, but you should know these things — stuffing them with eggs, puddings, and starchy foods is one of the things that makes children unwilling to learn and incapable of doing so during the early years of their school life.

There is much bad information about diets even these days. Some people justify their love of red wine by claiming some medicinal benefit of a glass of their favorite wine each night. Few people stay around long enough for friends or doctors to observe the long-term effects of their dietary choices. Steiner was eye-witness to one person's consumption of wine over thirty years. He met this very talented young boy who was two years old.

[page 104] But the boy was pale; he had very little appetite and was rather thin. So, on the advice of an otherwise excellent doctor, this child was given a small glass of red wine with every meal. I was not responsible for him and had no influence in this extraordinary way of treating a child's health, but I was very concerned about it. Then in his thirty-second or thirty-third year I saw this individual again; he was a terribly nervous man. When he was not present I enquired what he had been like as a schoolboy. This restless man, although only in his thirties, had become very nervous, and demonstrated the lamentable results of that little glass of red wine given to him with his meals as a boy.

How is the soul of the Earth made visible? Steiner tells us it is through the plants which cover the Earth.

[page 128] The plant realm is the soul world of the Earth made visible. The carnation is a flirt. The sunflower is an old peasant. The sunflower's shining face is like a jolly country rustic. Plants with very big leaves would express, in term of soul life, lack of

success in a job, taking a long time with everything, clumsiness, and especially an inability to finish everything; we think that someone has finished, but the person is still at it. Look for the soul element in the plant forms!

Later he creates the image for us of a meadow full of blooms being raised into the air and resembling a tree. He allows us to understand a tree as a stiff shaft of Earth holding an egg-shaped volume covered with blooms. The plant world makes the soul of the Earth visible.

These thoughts inspired me to create this poem:

Dreams appear in Spring
with the flirting carnation
and the plodding sunflower.

Dreams appear in Autumn
with the falling leaves
and lusty acorns.

Dreams appear in Winter
with cones on conifers
And snowflakes on Christmas trees.

Dreams appear in Summer
as buttercups decorate waysides
and Crepe Myrtles bloom.

~^~

In *Discussion 15 Closing Words* Steiner outlines four things which characterize a true teacher [\(3\)](#).

[page 180, 181]

1. The teacher must be a person of initiative in everything done, great and small. Teachers must never be careless or lazy; they must, at every moment, stand in full consciousness of what they do in the school and how they act toward the children.

2. The teacher should be one who is interested in the being of the whole world and humanity.

3. The teacher must be one who never compromises in the heart and mind with what is untrue. The teacher must be true in the depths of being.

4. The teacher must never get stale or grow sour. Cherish a mood of soul that is fresh and healthy! No getting stale and sour! This must be the teacher's endeavor.

Next he charges his teachers with the responsibility for the life and growth of the Waldorf school system itself.

[page 181, 182] During these two weeks I have spoken only what can enter directly into your practical teaching when you first allow it to work properly within your own souls. But our Waldorf school, my dear friends, will depend on what you do within yourselves, and whether you really allow the things we have considered to become effective in your own souls. . . . For me this Waldorf school will be a veritable child of concern.

Looking back from our perspective, a hundred years after he spoke these words, we can see a remarkable

growth of the Waldorf School system around the world. Hundreds of schools in dozens of countries, increasing each year. The Waldorf school teachers were his pupils and he devoted the last precious years of his life inspiring and instructing them to foster an understanding of the world in their children that will lead them into maturity as adults able to perceive and understand both sides of reality: the material and the spiritual. The success of the Waldorf schools represents a proof the spiritual evolution of humanity which Rudolf Steiner worked so earnestly to move forward for the entire world.

~^~

----- *Footnotes* -----

Footnote 1. This reciprocal communication is less likely to happen if the teacher is reading material instead of speaking in a heart-felt manner to the child.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 1.](#)

~~~~~

**Footnote 2.** To see the before and after effects of this insight on my published poems, check this [DIGESTWORLD](#) for the *before* and this [ISSUE](#) for the *after*.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 2.](#)

~~~~~

Footnote 3. In [Human Values in Education](#) Steiner gives us 21 characteristics of a true teacher to expand on these four aspects.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 3.](#)

~~~~~

**To Obtain your own Copy of this Reviewed Book, Click on SteinerBooks Logo below:**





