

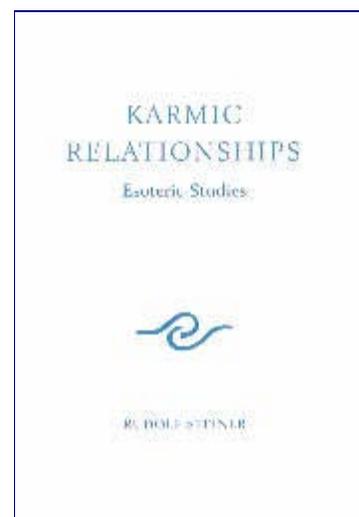
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*A READER'S JOURNAL*

**Karmic Relationships, Volume 3, GA# 237,  
by  
Rudolf Steiner**

The Karmic Relationships of the Anthroposophical  
Movement  
Eleven Lectures, Dornach, 1924  
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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©1999



*We not only live in our body, we live in our karma.*  
**Rudolf Steiner**

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One of the consequences of the evolution of consciousness is that we are always stuck with our present state of consciousness when trying to understanding the past, up until now. You may know some adults yourself who you would swear were never children because they come at every new experience as the proper adult of whatever age in years they are, e.g., the thirty seven year-old who must always act thirty seven years old. Yet we know full well they were a child once, and as a child, they had a consciousness that was much different than the consciousness they possess now. Perhaps you know other people who, while eminently adult, can quickly recover a childlike state in a moment of levity, jest, or fun. Rudolf Steiner is like the latter when it comes to consciousness — he is a scientist of the present time who can recover, when appropriate, the consciousness of a prior stage of the evolution of consciousness.

**[page 13-14] People who study history nowadays generally project what they are accustomed to see in the present time, back into the historic past, and they have little idea how altogether different men were in mind and spirit before the present epoch. Even when they let the old documents speak for themselves, they largely read into them the way of thought and outlook of the present.**

What do these people of today think when they read the beginning lines of the *Iliad* where Homer writes "Sing, oh Muse, the wrath of Achilles, son of Peleus."? I imagine that they think Homer was speaking metaphorically, *as if* a Muse were speaking to him. These people would certainly not think that (page 15) "In the Ether which reaches up to the Moon, there are the thoughts. We perceive the thoughts, receive them into ourselves." And yet that is what Homer thought in his time, what led him to open his books in such a fashion.

"Where is the tree from which comes the fruit that appears in mind's basket?" Jane Roberts asked in one of her books that I read some twenty years ago. This quote has haunted me as an unanswered question all

these years, and now Rudolf Steiner points to the tree as the Etheric space between the earth and the Moon.

Before the 14<sup>th</sup> Century people considered themselves as living in an ether of thoughts just as we today consider ourselves as living in an atmosphere of oxygen. We know that we breathe in oxygen to live as they knew back then that they breathed in thoughts to think. If we breathe in thoughts, where do the thoughts come from? From the out-breathing of others.

**[page 17-18] What then is this out-breathing? It is the very same, my dear friends, of which we speak when we say: In the three days after death the etheric body of man expands. Man looks back upon his etheric body, slowly increasing in magnitude. He sees how his thoughts spread out into the cosmos. It is the very same, only it was then conceived — if I may say so — from a more subjective standpoint. It was indeed quite true, how these people felt and experienced it. They felt the cycle of life more deeply than it is felt to-day.**

If, in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, a young priest came to an older priest "telling of the inner tortures which he was undergoing in remaining true to his religious faith" he might express himself this way, "I am pursued by the specters of the dead." (Page 20) And how might a Post-Structuralist historian interpret such a statement? Lacking an understanding of how consciousness existed in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, the historian would consider the statement as a trope, not as a literal description of the young priest's experience.

While it is true that every word was once a living metaphor as Emerson claimed, it is not true that every metaphoric expression in the past was a mere metaphor when it was first used. To put it bluntly, in the beginning, a "horse's ass" was a part of a horse. To distinguish metaphoric prose from literal descriptive prose, one must calibrate or align one's consciousness according to the evolution of consciousness at the time the prose was written. One must, in effect, make a trip, time-travel into the past. If this seems incredibly difficult to you, I would agree, and would suggest that you study the evolution of consciousness with a knowledgeable guide such as Owen Barfield or Rudolf Steiner before you attempt such a trip.

Let us take such a trip with Steiner and eavesdrop on an imaginary conversation between an older and younger Dominican, in which we discover why "the Anthroposophical Movement must speak without reserve in forms of living thought":

**[page 25-26] The younger man said, 'Thinking takes hold of men. Thought, the shadow of reality, takes hold of them. In ancient times, thought was always the last revelation of the living Spirit from above. But now, thought is the very thing that has forgotten that living Spirit. Now it is experienced as a mere shadow. Verily, when a man sees a shadow, he knows the shadow points to some reality. The realities are there indeed. Thinking itself is not to be attacked, but only the fact that we have lost the living Spirit from our thinking.'**

**The older man replied, 'In Thinking, through the very fact that man is turning his attention with loving interest to outer Nature — in Thinking, to compensate for the former heavenly reality, an earthly reality must be found once more.'**

**'What will happen?' said the younger man. 'Will European humanity be strong enough to find this earthly reality of thought, or will it only be weak enough to lose the heavenly reality?'**

What is instinct in animals and humans? Where does it originate? Animals on earth are not self-contained beings, but have a Group-soul *standing behind them* as Steiner likes to say. The Group-souls exist in the spiritual world and when animals act instinctively, they are operating out of the full consciousness of their Group-soul. And humans? Contrary to animals, humans are self-contained beings.

**[page 30] For man however it is different. Man too has instinct, but when he acts through his instinct, he is not acting out of yonder Spirit-realm, but out of his own former lives on earth. He is acting across time, out of his formerly earthly lives, out of a whole number of former lives on earth.**

**As the spiritual realm works upon the animals, causing them to act instinctively, so do the former incarnations of man work on his later incarnations in such a way that he instinctively lives out his karma. But this is a spiritual instinct — an instinct that works within the Ego.**

**It is just by understanding this, that we shall come to understand the absolute consistency of this instinctive working with human freedom. For the freedom of man proceeds from the very realm out of which the animals act instinctively, namely the realm of the spirit.**

What does all this mean? It means, as Steiner succinctly states on page 30, that here in our life on earth, our "inner experience of karma is instinctive." Like the weaverbird knows how to weave a basket nest for its young without previous instruction in this life, so do we humans know how to act so as to balance out our karma without having taken any lessons in how to do it in this lifetime. Our thoughts are woven into our karma instinctively, out of our awareness, or unconsciously — these are our "living thoughts." On the other hand, the thoughts that we are conscious of are "dead thoughts." In the period between death and a new birth, these living thoughts spring forth into the Ether of the Moon space and are breathed in by the Angels, Archangels, and Archai, the Third Hierarchy of the spiritual world. From this process comes this prayer which we can say when we think of someone who has recently passed the gates of death [page 32]:

*Angels, Archangels, and Archai in the Ether-weaving receive the human being's Web of Destiny.*

The Second Hierarchy, or Powers, Might, and Dominions, named by Steiner as the Spirits of Form, Movement, and Wisdom, draw into themselves the "Negative of human deeds" and the prayer about them goes [page 35]:

*In Powers, Might, and Dominions, in the astral feeling of the Cosmos the righteous consequences of the earthly life of man die into the realm of Being.*

In the next phase the human's deeds on earth are received by the First Hierarchy, the Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim, the Spirits of Will, Harmony, and Love. The prayer is [page 35]:

*In Thrones and Cherubim and Seraphim, as their Deeds of Being, the justly transmuted 'fruits of the earthly life' of man are resurrected.*

Steiner was able to see the working of destiny among humans as a "clear, radiant light" beaming its way heavenward.

**[page 37] The individual man experiences his destiny. But as soon as two human beings are working together, something more arises, -- more than the working out of the individual destinies of the one and of the other. Something takes place as between the two, transcending the individual experiences of either. Ordinary consciousness perceives no connection of what happens between man and man, with what goes on in the spiritual worlds above.**

My wife and I have the following saying framed on the wall aside the door to our bedroom:

**From every human being there arises a light**

**that reaches straight to heaven  
and when two souls  
that are destined to be together  
find each other,  
their streams of light flow together  
and a single brighter light goes forth  
from their united being. — Baal Shem Tov**

What Steiner is saying above and Baal Shem Tov is mirroring is clear: It is into the First Hierarchy that this light of our deeds on earth flow, individual and collective alike.

One of the most frustrating experiences for any master chef is to prepare an exquisite meal only to serve it and have the diners talk about food that they have eaten elsewhere, particularly bad-tasting food! It is with this in mind that I offer this quotation from Steiner.

**[page 40] How happy men are when they can somehow contrive to cover up the *New*, that is coming forth in Anthroposophy to-day, with some *old* saying. How contented they are, if in some lecture that I give something occurs of which they can subsequently prove: 'Look, here it is in an old book!' In reality, of course, it is there in quite a different form, coming out of altogether different foundations of consciousness. The people of to-day have so little courage to receive what grows on the soil of the living present. Their minds are set at rest as soon as they can bring something forward out of the past.**

To "receive what grows on the soil of the living present" is only possible when someone focuses on process, that is, on what is happening in the "living present." If my readers would like a simple test by which to determine how close to the "soil of the living present" they live, take a minute away from reading this review, use a pen and paper if one is available, and write down a description of what you are doing. Then continue reading from this spot.

Some of you will write, "I'm reading a review." — but you stopped reading the review to write this. Others will write, "I'm interrupting my reading to take this test." Others will write, "I'm following instructions." Others, "I'm describing what I'm doing." Each of these examples get closer and closer to the soil of the living present which, when you reach it, you can only write in infinite recursion, "What I'm doing is describing what I'm doing which is describing what I'm doing which is describing what I'm doing which is . . ." That is one way of experiencing the soil of the living present, one way of getting completely into process.

Words are content — canned, preserved, crystalized process. Nouns are the primary example of content, which is why nouns are the first words to disappear when one passes the gates of death. Verbs are words, true, but words that at least point to process. Every word has a content and a process meaning according to how the word is used. Want an example? "The same thing happens to happen." In the previous sentence the word "happen" appears first as process and secondly as content. Rightly understood content is but another form of process. Content can change the internal state of a human being as easily as process. Pouring ice water over someone's head can stop a bickering, pointless conversation faster and more effectively than a thousand words, but words, carefully chosen, can also do the job.

In the process of understanding the content of words, one's inner state can change. Content to the brain is like a CD-ROM is to a Personal Computer — the CD is all content, but insert it into a PC and things begin to happen in process. Materialistic science has taught us that nouns are things, that content exists independently of process, that the material world is independent of the spiritual world, which if it exists at all, must exist somewhere else. At least that's what materialistic science taught me. I came to believe that the spiritual world existed somewhere else, in another dimension, in another reality disconnected from the one I lived in, up until now. I was disoriented and the question, "Where is the Christ spirit?" would have

been a meaningless one to me. If pressed I would have answered with some cliché like "in heaven" which was all my Catechism taught me. Through my study of Steiner's works I have come to understand that the highest spiritual beings reside in the most brilliant sources of light, so that Christ is a being of the Sun in our solar system. Simple, elegant, and true. By recovering that insight, first promulgated by Zarathustra aeons ago, the spiritual and the material worlds have come into alignment for me again, and I feel oriented in the world once more in this lifetime. I look around me and I find human beings now incarnated — and I wonder about those who are currently not incarnated on earth.

**[page 44] And the others who are not on earth, where in the universe shall we find them? Whither must we look in the great universe if we would turn our soul's gaze to them, — assuming that a certain time has elapsed since they went through the gate of death? The answer is: We look in the true direction when we look out upon the starry heavens. There are the souls — or at least the directions which will enable us to find the souls — who are spending their life between death and a new birth.**

Can anyone who has read the story or seen the movie of Antoine St. Exupery's classic *The Little Prince* ever forget the souls in the stars laughing along with the little Prince? This great mystical writer enabled our souls to do what Steiner says that his Anthroposophy is to attain for the souls of all: to feel ourselves "united even in a human way with the whole cosmos."

Have you ever felt like you jumped out of your skin when something startled you? Have you ever listened to a motivational speaker and felt carried away, transported? These ways of talking metaphorically today were once living experiences. These living experiences disappeared about the 11<sup>th</sup> Century.

**[page 81] Until that time, when a man listened to another, who, filled with divine enthusiasm, spoke out of the Spirit, he had the feeling as he listened that he was going a little out of himself. He was going out a little, into his etheric body. He was leaving the physical body to a slight extent. He was approaching the astral body more nearly. It was literally true, men still had a slight feeling of being transported as they listened. Nor did they care so very much in those times for the mere hearing of words. What they valued most was the inward experience, however slight, of being transported — carried away. Men experienced with living sympathy the words that were spoken by a God-inspired man.**

But after the 9<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> Centuries this way of hearing became replaced by mere listening and the direct experience of the spiritual world was replaced by rote learning by Catechism. Those trained in the Catechism were allowed to attend Mass only till the Gospel was read. To receive communion required a deeper training and preparation. This practice has also passed into history and nowadays anyone can attend the entire mass and the preparation requirements for receiving communion has been almost completely eliminated. Yet even in the depths of the materialistic world we have not completely lost our moorings from the Christ spirit for in every Monstrance is the symbol of the Sun with its golden rays beaming out into the universe. If one wishes to know where to find the Christ in the universe, one need only look upon the Blessed Sacrament as it is exposed in the middle of the golden rays of the Sun in the Monstrance.

If one wishes to understand why the cycle of sevens is so pervasive in Steiner's works, and is not satisfied with the explanation that musical octaves are seven tones following a repetition of the base note as the eight note, then one can look at the days of the week. In a typical week, we live through a passage through seven heavenly bodies as follows: Sunday [Sun], Monday [Moon], Tuesday [Mars, Mardi in french], Wednesday [Mercury, Mercredi in french], Thursday [Jupiter, Jeudi in french], Friday [Venus, Vendredi in french] and Saturday [Saturn]. On Sunday we go to church to worship the Sun Being, Christ. On Saturn's day we spend together with our family, recalling the origin of our solar system when all the planets were collected together in the body of Saturn. In french Saturday is *samedi* and in German it is *Samstag*. *Sammlung* in German means a collection and *Samen* means a seed -- the root of our word *semen*. Is it not interesting that so many family reunions occur on Saturday?

Another appearance of the cycle of sevens occurs in the seven ages of the Archangels that recycle after the seven Archangels of Raphael, Anael, Samael, Zachariel, Oraphiel, Gabriel, and Michael. From the age of Alexander to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century we passed through the seven ages of the archangels. At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the Michael age returned once more, but with a dramatic and important difference. Previously Michael had brought Cosmic Intelligence to humans, but on this trip, during this Michael Age, he is bringing both Intelligence and Freedom, for it is only when humans have achieved Intelligence on the earth, separate from Cosmic Intelligence, that Freedom is truly possible for them.

How is the influence of Michael different from those of the previous age of Gabriel?

**[page 133] The rulership of Gabriel is connected with forces that go through the line of physical inheritance. The forces of Michael are the very opposite of this. The rulership of Gabriel is characterized by the fact that his impulses enter strongly into the physical bodily nature of man. Michael, on the other hand, works intensely into the spiritual being of man.**

I was having a conversation over electronic mail today and someone sent me the following message, "Individuals can inspire but groups of kindred spirits change the world." I made the point forcefully that it is individuals that change the world, not groups of any kind. Emerson once said that if you get a large enough business, it will display the intelligence of a very dumb animal. Steiner seems to agree in the following quote.

**[page 152] Every public meeting, every mass meeting to which we go, only fulfils its purpose as such, if the initiative of the individual human being, with the exception of the speakers and leaders, is undermined. Nor does any newspaper fulfil its purpose if it does not create an atmosphere of opinion, thus undermining the individual's initiative.**

If we add television and the Internet for the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, we have here the means by which the undermining of initiative by materialistic thinking has become so widespread today.

To summarize, the world of humans once comprised physical body, immortal soul, and the spiritual world. In 869 A. D. the 8<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council declared that there were only two bodies, physical body and soul and that the soul possessed certain spiritual qualities. There! Steiner has pinpointed an event that led to my disorientation in the spiritual world some 1200 years later. He has diagnosed the cause of my dis-ease in the spiritual world and pointed to my cure: I am to raise my eyes to the stars, to the planets and the Sun from which cometh my help. I am to understand that "Intelligence means the mutual relationships of conduct among the higher Hierarchies." I am to consider the hierarchy closest to me with the same reverence and deference that a plant points its new colored leaf, its flower, to the sky in hopes of attracting the astral energy without which its seed will fall infertile to the earth, the same reverence and deference with which my Schnauzer looks up to me as he strives to reach Ego-hood. That hierarchy for me is the Third Hierarchy, the Angels, Archangels and Archai. I am to look upon a physical planet as a gathering of Spiritual Beings from now on. When I do all this and even more, when I do it in concert with my fellow humans, a light, a Cosmic Ray will go forth that will restore the truth in karma and make it live in our souls.

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