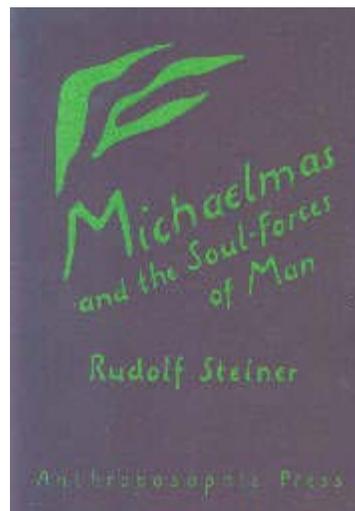




A READER'S JOURNAL

Michaelmas and the Soul-Forces of Man, GA# 223 by **Rudolf Steiner**

Four Lectures, Vienna, Sept-Jan, 1923
Originally: *Anthroposophy and the Human Gemüt*
Introduction by Stewart C. Easton
Translated by Samuel and Loni Lockwood
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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2007



This series of lectures answers the question, "How shall man, the earth citizen, once more become a citizen of the cosmos?" It also answers the question, "How shall humanity rightly address the chaos of our social systems?" A hint: the answers will not come about from an intellectualized view of the spirit world, one that does *not* fill the human heart with *warmth* which is the essence of the German word "gemüt" in the original title of these lectures. Gemüt has no direct equivalent in English as it refers to a blending of thinking, willing, and feeling that one can feel with one's whole body, but is centered in the region of one's heart. The translator gives this poetic translation, "the mind warmed by a loving heart and stimulated by the soul's imaginative power" and this more intellectual one, "the soul in a state of unconscious intuition arising from the working together of heart and mind." Steiner was speaking to his native Austrians in these lectures and was undoubtedly filled with gemüt as he celebrated his last Michaelmas festival in Vienna before his death.

To counter the claim that anthroposophy is too intellectual, Steiner gave these lectures, and begins Lecture 1 with these words:

[page 1] It is true that today one never tires of insisting that man cannot stop short at what the dry, matter-of-fact intellect can comprehend. Nevertheless, when it is a case of acquiring knowledge people depend exclusively upon this intellect.

Then he proceeds to speak to the human *gemüt* in the remainder of the lectures, how one may achieve an understanding of one's place in the cosmos by a balanced celebration of the four key festivals of the seasons, Christmas, Easter, St. John's, and Michaelmas. Particularly he focuses on how the battle of Michael with the Dragon is to be understood, not as a fairy tale, but with the human heart. The forces of materialism would have us believe that if spirit exists, it is only because inert matter has evolved into life upward until spirit has been reached. Steiner says that the exact opposite has occurred (page 3), and anyone who has understood his description of the evolution of the Earth and humankind can not doubt the veracity of evolution from the spirit downward into matter as the proper and only reasonable direction of evolution.

What is the battle of Michael and the Dragon? I know Michael is an Archangel, but who is the Dragon? Where does the battle take place? How come I've never seen this Dragon? These are good questions and ones that immediately pop into my mind. This book answers these questions definitively, and in this review I will summarize the answers. Steiner's definition of sin is "a good out of its time." With that in

mind, let's review the great sin that occurred in certain divine spirits, one of which we know now as the Dragon.

[page 4] In superhuman pride, certain beings revolted because they desired freedom of will before the time had come for their freedom to mature; and the most important one of these beings, their leader, was conceived of as the being taking the shape in the Dragon that Michael combats - Michael, who remained above in the realm of those spirits that wanted to continue molding their will to the divine-spiritual will above them.

This rebellion took place long before the form of humans or even higher animals came into being; as a result, a unique form that did not correspond to any animal on Earth was created, the form we know as a dragon, "a cosmic contradiction," in Steiner's words. This being could no longer remain in the realm of the higher hierarchies and had to be "placed among beings that would evolve in the course of physical development." (page 5)

[page 5, 6] It was Michael's deed, this bestowing of a form that is supra-animalistic: supersensible, but intolerable in the supersensible realm; for although it is supersensible it is incompatible with the realm of the supersensible where it existed before it rebelled.

The Dragon found its only home, not in the divine realm, not on the physical Earth, but in the heart of man, the *gemüt* of the human being, in the human nature. Whereas formerly, in pre-human times, the battle between Michael and the Dragon occurred in outer objectivity, now the battle has moved inside to the struggle with human nature. The imaginative picture Steiner says an 18th Century human would have drawn is the Dragon "coiling through the animality in man, thereby representing an earth-being." But a change settled into humanity around that time so that thenceforth "the intellect has become the only recognized autocrat of human cognition." The evolution of consciousness which accompanied humanity's fall into materialism obscured our ability to perceive this Dragon that constantly pulls humanity down into a sub-human condition. And the remedy for this sad state of affairs is to buttress our *gemüt* with the help of Michael in order to overcome the forces of the Dragon that wraps itself invisibly around our hearts.

[page 15] So the content of the human Gemüt can be this: The power of the Dragon is working within me, trying to drag me down. I do not see it — I feel it as something that would drag me down below myself. But in the spirit I see the luminous Angel whose cosmic task has always been the vanquishing of the Dragon. I concentrate my Gemüt upon this glowing figure, I let its light stream into Gemüt, and thus my illumined and warmed Gemüt will bear within it the strength of Michael. And out of a free resolution I shall be able, through my alliance with Michael, to conquer the Dragon's might in my own nature.

Every year on September 29, Michaelmas occurs. During Michaelmas festivals around the world, the battle of Michael and the Dragon is re-enacted and the Dragon is slain during the ceremony. Children are given toy swords, and they are encouraged to slay the Dragon, chop its head off, dismember its limbs, and completely destroy the Dragon. These are powerful images that work in the *gemüt* of children. In the unfortunate event that the instructions to slay the Dragon are abridged by squeamish adults who would instruct the children merely to *subdue* the Dragon, not kill it, such children are taught to live with a temporarily subdued Dragon wrapped around their hearts. Such folly no doubt pleases the Dragon enormously, up until now.

In my essay [*The Childhood of Humanity*](#) I discuss the evolution of our human memory capabilities, how our cognitive memory developed into full bloom around the same time our abilities to perceive supersensible realities faded. Early humans possessed a native clairvoyance that allowed them to bring to mind pre-natal experiences, especially the events of previous lifetimes. With the loss of that clairvoyance, we have become as "hermits" — isolated in one lifetime, unaware of the connection of this lifetime with our previous lifetimes and thus of the very nature of our spiritual reality in the cosmos. While there was

something lost, there was also something gained in the process.

[page 18] This phase of human evolution was indispensable for the development of what we experience in the consciousness of freedom, the feeling of freedom, in order to arrive at full self-consciousness, at the inner strength that permits the ego to rise to its full height; but necessary as was the hermit life of man in relation to the cosmos, it must be but a transition to another epoch in which the human being may find the way back to spirit, which after all underlies all things and beings.

The *all things* needs a bit of elaboration, of specification, and Steiner attacks this task on page 21 when he tells us that "in every plant there is concealed - under a spell, as it were - an elemental spiritual being." We only observe a plant rightly, he says, if we realize that the beauty of the plant is only the sheath, the outer and visible covering, the vesture of a spiritual being in the plant, a spiritual being low on the scale of cosmic beings, but one intimately related to human beings. When we stop and smell the roses or closely admire any plant or flower, we move the elementals in that plant a step closer to breaking its spell and moving on its way into the spiritual worlds. In essence we perform for those spiritual beings the favor that was bestowed on us as human beings in earlier stage of our evolutions by spiritual beings higher than us.

[page 22, 23] All about us are these elemental spirits begging us, in effect, Do not look at the flowers so abstractly, nor form such abstract mental pictures of them: let rather your heart and your Gemüt enter into what lives, as soul and spirit, in the flowers, for it is imploring you to break the spell. — Human existence should really be a perpetual releasing of the elemental spirits lying enchanted in minerals, plants, and animals. . . . In the present epoch of civilization - that of the development of freedom - man's attitude towards the flowers is a mere sipping at what he should really be drinking. He sips by forming concepts and ideas, whereas he should drink by uniting, through his *Gemüt*, with the elemental spirits of the things and beings that surround him.

If one sips, but does not drink, what is the result overall? The plant elementals, instead of being released, are captured by the Dragon in one's lower nature where they perish. People talk about big plans to create an improved society and civilization on the Earth, but there is another equally important aspect of our life on Earth, and that is furthering the development of the elemental beings by entering into an intimate relationship with them. Part of our slaying of the Dragon is starving it. We can do this by cutting off its nutrients in the form of the elementals that we have thrown careless into the maw of the Dragon by our careless disregard of the beauty of minerals, plants, and animals, up until now.

If we do not slay the Dragon, but instead allow it to gorge itself on elemental beings, three things happen to human beings: spiritually, psychically, and physically. 1: Spiritually - humans arrive at a belief in a materialistic world to the exclusion of a spiritual world. 2: Psychically - humans become cowards, weaklings who are unable to do the right thing even when they know it is the right thing to do. 3: Physically - humans are beset by disease germs of all kinds. Attacked thus from three sides, millions of human beings are unable to experience the potency of their spirit within and lead debilitated lives, up until now. (page 25) Under this fierce, encompassing attack, we require Michael power; it is the only way that thoughts about spirit will grip us powerfully enough to win the day over the pervasive forces of the Dragon.

What are we to do if we experience a lack of Michael forces in our lives? Shall we implore them to assist us? Pray for Michael's help? As paradoxical as that might sound to some, such pleading will not suffice to ward off the Dragon. We must avoid the passive stance of prayer and take an active role in joining forces with Michael in this battle.

[page 28, 29] For the Michael forces do not want to be implored: they want men to unite with them. This men can do if they will receive the lessons of the spiritual world with inner energy. . . . If a man will saturate himself more and more with confidence in spirit . . . he

will acquire a feeling, a *Gemüt* content, telling them that every blossom bears testimony to the existence of an enchanted elemental being in it; and he will learn to feel the longing in this elemental being to be released by him, instead of being delivered up to the Dragon to whom it is related through its own invisibility.

Seen this way, each elemental being in a flower is like Sleeping Beauty in the fairy tale waiting for a prince to come along to admire her enough to kiss her forehead, by which act she will arise to a new life.

It is easy to imagine the clever ripostes of some readers of this review to the effect that these are mere flights of romantic fancy having no basis in reality. Here's how Steiner would counter such intellectual blather.

[page 31] Cleverness, then, has been furnished in abundance by the last few centuries; but what we need today is warmth of *Gemüt*, and this anthroposophy can provide. When someone studying anthroposophy says it leaves him cold, he reminds me of one who keeps piling wood in the stove and then complains that the room doesn't get warm. Yet all he needs to do is kindle the wood, then it will get warm. Anthroposophy can be presented, and it is the good wood of the soul; but it can be enkindled only each within himself.

During my physics studies in college, I learned things that none of my friends outside of physics wanted to hear about. How to compute the positions of planets that I learned in astronomy. The sounds patterns I computed on the head of a drum in acoustics. The interpretation of spectral lines from the stars. I was left feeling a little like a hermit when I went home on the weekends from college. As Steiner says on page 33, "But what have all the results of such methods to do with the intimate inner soul life of man?" I didn't even think about my inner soul life at the time, but I certainly felt the emptiness that accompanied my focused studies on such methods of the physical sciences.

[page 38] The nature of our present-day education is such that we are prone to apply to the whole cosmos what we consider true in our little earth cell; but it is obvious that truth cannot come to light in this way.

We perceive with our head the concepts of the physical sciences and all of materialism, but with our heart, our *gemüt*, we are able to experience the fullness of life in an intimate way. One could conceive of the heart as a sense organ that allows us to experience life to its depths.

[pag 44] . . . the human heart is really a subconscious sense organ: subconsciously the head perceives through the heart what goes on in the physical functions of the lower body and chest. Just as we perceive outer events in the sense-world through the eye, so the human heart is in reality a sense organ in its relation to the functions mentioned. Subconsciously by means of the heart the head, and particularly the cerebellum, perceives the blood being nourished by the transformed foodstuffs, perceives the functioning of the kidneys, the liver, and other processes of the organism.

In the ancient Mithras cult the disciples were taught to have a conscious feeling of the above functions and from that to obtain a knowledge about the course of the seasons of the year. Later the Celts with their cromlechs were able to perceive the spiritual light that filtered into the darkened chambers and from its color determine the passages of the seasons of the year: a yellow tinge in mid-summer and a pale blue shade in winter. (page 41)

Everyone has seen that earthworms come out of the Earth when a heavy rain falls. Steiner compares materialists to earthworms living so deep in the earth that no rain in the form of rays of spiritual light ever reaches them. These "earthworms for whom it never rains" must emerge into the spiritual light of day, and the Michael Festival is right time for that to occur.

[page 67] *During the last three or four centuries mankind has simply acquired the habit of considering all nature, and human existence as well, in intellectual, abstract conceptions; and now that humanity is confronted with the great problems of social chaos, people try to solve these, too, with the same intellectual means. But never in the world will anything but chimeras be brought forth in this way. A consummate human heart is a prerequisite to the right to an opinion in the social realm; but this no man can possess without finding his relation with cosmos, and in particular, with the spiritual substance of the cosmos.*

In Easter we find death followed by the resurrection of the soul; in Michaelmas we find resurrection of the soul followed by death. To close out this review let us listen in as Rudolf Steiner closes out his lecture to his fellow countrymen in Vienna this way:

[page 68, 69] *Easter commemorates for us the Resurrection of Christ from death; but in the Michael Festival we must feel with all the intensity of our soul: In order not to sleep in a half-dead state that will dim my self-consciousness between death and a new birth, but rather, to be able to pass through the portal of death in full alertness, I must rouse my soul through my inner forces before I die. First, resurrection of the soul — then death, so that in death that resurrection can be achieved which man celebrates within himself.*

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