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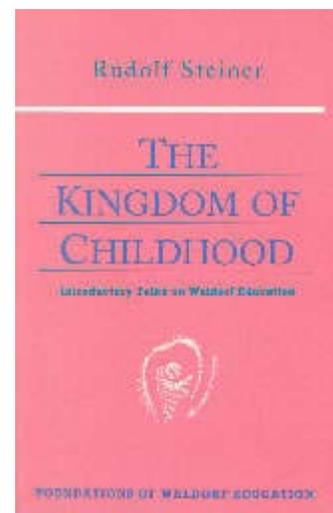
A READER'S JOURNAL



The Kingdom of Childhood, GA# 117 by Rudolf Steiner

Introductory Talks on Waldorf Education
12 Lectures in Torquay, England in
August, 1924
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Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©1999

Steiner was "then already a sick man"
Christopher Bamford tells us in his
Introduction to this book, but you couldn't
tell it from the vibrancy of his living



thoughts as expressed in these lectures. What is in our natures when we descend to our life on Earth? This is a worthy question for any teacher of small children to ask, just like a physiologist might ask what are the shapes and sizes of the organs of a human, how the sizes of lungs, livers, and hearts vary from a young person to an old person. We are all creatures of thinking, feeling, and willing, but for most people these are mere words without any sense of reality, up until now. Here's what Steiner tells us about thinking, feeling, and willing — these two sentences may not make much sense at first, but allow them to work on you as unanswered questions for awhile and the sense will grow out of them in time.

[page 3] . . . it is not known that willing, as it appears in the soul, is young, while thinking is old; that in fact thinking is willing grown old, and willing is a youthful thinking in the soul. Thus everything that pertains to the soul contains youthfulness and old age, both existing in human beings simultaneously.

After pondering this quote overnight, I picked up early this morning a computer printer that I bought from a company that is going out of business. It was hooked to a network box and I wondered whether I should take the box also — it might be useful later if I network my home office computers. I decided the moral thing to do was to leave the box. But that didn't stop the thoughts from bugging me all the way home. No, I thought, I didn't specifically buy that box, only the printer. No one would have objected, and the person I bought the printer from is now gone, so no one could check what we had agreed. Suddenly I thought, why are these thoughts bothering me? If it was a doyle bothering me, a physical body state that I'd stored from before I was five, I could simply trace and erase it, but what do I do with thoughts that are bothering me? All I can do stop them by the force of my will. That's when the unanswered question above popped into my head! Why, those thoughts are simply old willing converted into thoughts. What is pestering me is my old form of willing that would have made taking the box okay! I had originally thought that what Steiner referred to as old willing was previous lifetime willing now converted into our thoughts of this lifetime, but here I was this morning experiencing my former willing returning to pester me as thoughts I didn't want, thoughts that represented an earlier willing, an earlier me in this lifetime, now returned as shades from my past to haunt my present, up until now. I was experiencing the macrocosm in the microcosm of my daily life.

Unfortunately for us today, we are as handicapped if we do not distinguish these connected aspects of

young and old thinking, feeling, and willing, as is the physician who cannot distinguish a child from an old man – to borrow the metaphor that Steiner uses. He goes on to say that without the ability to make such a distinction, there is no science of the soul today, and that, "as for the spirit, there is no such thing!" We are left only with the word spirit, which is not much help. The disappearance of the spirit from the human being back in the 4th Century has hindered dramatically our ability to express the very concept of living spirit, up until Rudolf Steiner and his living science of anthroposophy which teaches a science of unified materialistic and spiritual worlds.

Steiner says so many people say, "Make me a good teacher" but when told to begin by making anthroposophy a basis for their pedagogy, they declaim, "Oh, is that *really* necessary?" Thus, he says, they are reacting like the old German proverb that goes, "Please wash me but don't make me wet!" (Page 4) They do not want to learn the effect that too much thinking has on their young charges, so that, for example, when the child becomes pale during the year, they will not have to take responsibility for having given the child too much rote memory work.

[page 7] I am constantly squeezing the soul into the ideas I give the child when I give concepts that are intended to be permanent; when I worry the child with fixed, unchangeable concepts, instead of giving the child concepts capable of expansion.

Without capability for the expansion, the child gets hardened into the concepts, just like arteries not capable of expansion are hardened. To feed the abstract too soon to the child is to freeze their development prematurely and to stultify their excitement over the subject being taught. Rightly understood, the prevalent dislike for mathematics and algebra in our public schools is a natural consequence of too much abstraction too soon, and leads to hardening of the arteries.

Steiner gives us readers a way of understanding the soul-spiritual nature of the child beginning with the birth to seven year old child. For the development of that age child he recommends that we do best if we "make the same impression on the child that its own arm makes." I take that to mean that we move when the child wants us to move and obtain things for the child that lie outside of its immediate surroundings. The child's arm would be incapable of hitting the child or causing it injury, so its caregivers would be well-advised to avoid such acts. He uses the metaphor of fingers pressing into a sack of flour to indicate how the impressions made by caregivers remain in the child — "because you yourself are really one with the child." (Page 14) With the knowledge provided us by the nascent science of doyletics [See ARJ: [The Trauma of Birth](#)], we can understand that this *oneness* is the primary mechanism of the transmission and acquisition of doyles before about the age of two or so when the child's environment consists mainly of close family and caregivers.

Being at one with its mother before birth is a physical connection, but for those first seven years, the child still contains some part of its mother's cells in its own body and thus is her etheric body yet associated with the child. When the mother suffers a trauma when the child is in her womb, the connection is via chemicals passing through the blood stream directly. When the mother suffers a trauma in the presence of her child for the early years after its birth, the child responds exactly as the mother does. I helped a woman trace a doyle that had led her migraines so strong that she had told a friend she thought she had a brain tumor. At three years old she saw herself holding her mother's hand and watching a house in flames burn down across the street from their home. I doubt that a three year old would have any natural reaction other than excitement at watching a large fire, but she was *holding* her mother's hand, and was still at one with her mother. Thus, she absorbed the intense tearful feelings of her mother, feelings so strong, that later as an adult whenever something triggered those experiences she had a flaming migraine headache. For the two years after that fifteen minute doyle trace in a group seminar with 17 other people, she has been free of her intense migraines, able to sidestep them when they seem to start up. Reuters Health News carried an article this morning that claimed, "Patients with cluster headaches may experience non-painful, premonitory symptoms several days to several weeks in advance of an attack." Perhaps research will lead us to confirm scientifically that the premonitory symptoms are doyles, and that removal of the doyles via a simple five minute self-administered trace prevents the cluster headaches from ever occurring again.

With the coming of teeth change around seven, the child begins to develop curiosity and fantasies. At birth it required *bodily milk*, and at age seven, Steiner tells us on page 14, it requires *soul milk*. The activities of reading and writing provides nourishment or soul milk for the child after teeth change, but these two essential activities must be incorporated together or it would be like separating the chemicals of bodily milk and giving it to a baby separately. (I note that commercial baby formula milks do that today with less success than their cost seems to justify.) How does one combine reading and writing and fantasy into one whole activity? By leading the child into an artistic activity in which they are all incorporated seamlessly, even with simple flourishes of arithmetic.

In the next critical stage of growth for the child, which begins at puberty, around age fourteen, Steiner says that they will require *spiritual milk*. That spiritual milk must be in its immediate family and caregivers or else the "boys and girls will be left to themselves during the difficult adolescent years." (Page 15)

Focusing on the need for fantasy and symbolism in the *soul milk* stage between seven and fourteen, Steiner writes about one of the terrible sins of our materialistic age and it sounds as if it were written today instead of seventy-five years ago in 1924:

[page 22] Take for example the so-called beautiful dolls that are so often given to children these days. They have such beautifully formed faces, wonderfully painted cheeks, and even eyes with which they can go to sleep when laid down, real hair, and goodness knows what all! But this kills the fantasy of the child, for it leaves nothing to the imagination and the child can take no great pleasure in it.

When I first shared this concept of Steiner's with her a while back, my artist daughter reminded me that when we gave her and her sisters some beautiful dolls when they were under ten years old, they responded by pulling out the hair and tearing away the doll's clothes so that the formerly "beautiful" dolls could become the raw material of their fantasy play. As she told me this, I envisioned the mother who insisted that her daughter's beautiful doll be kept in *pristine* condition on display in her room. That daughter will likely grow up to be a shell of a woman, all painted and pretty on the outside, and empty on the inside.

Steiner told his lecture audience if they wanted a *formulated* axiom, here was one: "You must be able to observe life in all its manifestations." (Page 21) One example would be for us to observe:

[page 27] In reading only the head is occupied and anything that only occupies a part of the organism and leaves the remaining parts impassive should be taught as late as possible. It is important first to bring the whole being into movement, and later on the single parts.

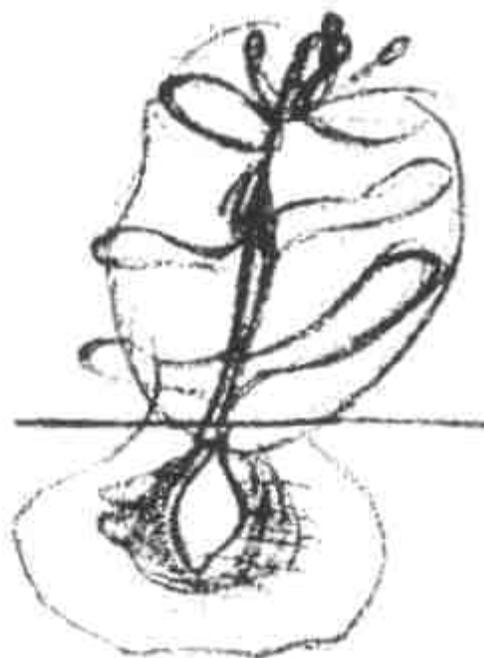
So why is the study of spiritual science, of anthroposophy, important when raising a child? We can't teach them such things while they are children, can we? So why not wait till they're older for us to learn such things, too? Through anthroposophy you learn once more that a spiritual world pervades the material world and this gives new life to otherwise jaded fairy tales and myths. When you read them to your children, the stories will be filled with a quality of soul. The alternative is to be like the scholarly teacher who believes fairy stories are foolishness and reads the story from a purely intellectual perspective. If such a teacher were to follow Steiner's maxim and observe life, they would note the crippling effect that the intellect has on children, and the enlivening effect that imagination has on them.

In Lecture Three, he goes on to explain the disastrous effect that pulling a plant from the ground to take inside for children.

[page 37] Here we have a plant (see drawing) but this alone is not the plant, for the soil beneath it also belongs to the plant, spread out

**on all sides and maybe a very long way. . . .
Something else is living besides the actual
plant; this part here (below the line in
drawing) lives with it and belongs to the plant;
the earth lives with the plant.**

Plants are like the hair of the Earth, and just as pulling hair from your head causes you pain, but getting your hair cut can bring you pleasure, so it is with the Earth. And examining a single human hair and trying to make sense of it is as meaningless as examining a plant pulled from the Earth of which it is a living, integral part.



In his description of the animal kingdom on page 44, Steiner says that "the animal kingdom is the human being spread out, and the human being is the animal kingdom drawn together." All of the animal kingdom is represented somewhere in that great synthesis of creation known as a human being — one needs only to become sensitive to how the various animals are combined into one's own body. When children are educated to understand this many-to-one relationship of animals and humans, they will laugh at the materialistic evolutionists who proclaim that humans descend from animals.

[page 48] For they will know that humankind unites within itself the whole animal kingdom, the human being is a synthesis of all the single members of it.

What is the proper way to teach mathematics has been a source of considerable thought and research and yet none of the new math approaches have ever achieved the simple goal of getting children to like doing math. Let's see what happens in the Steiner approach to teaching in his Waldorf Schools.

[page 52] In the Waldorf School we have had some very gratifying experiences of this. What is the usual method of punishment in schools? A child has done something badly and consequently is required to "stay in" and do some arithmetic for instance. Now in the Waldorf School we once had rather a strange experience: three or four children were told that they had done their work badly and must therefore stay in and do some sums. Whereupon the others said: "But we want to say and do sums too!" For they had been brought up to think of arithmetic as something nice to do, not as something that is used as a punishment.

As for the creative methods of discipline, no better example is available than the story Steiner tells of a Dr. Stein, who, upset by the students continually passing notes under the desk to each other during his teaching, changed to talking about the postal system. The students were puzzled at first, but soon realized the reason for the lecture on the postal system and stopped passing notes in class.

One of my basic rules of living is "Make my biggest mistakes first." I was amazed when I took military science and we did mortar sighting that we always overshot on purpose for the first shot, and then undershot on the second shot. Then, from the information that the forward observer relayed to us, we were able to pinpoint the target. The first two shots were always based on calculated and estimated data or mathematical maps that had to be correlated to the territory by the observations of a human in the field. Only when those two had been lined up could we proceed with "fire for effect" which is the unleashing of

the full firing capability of the mortar. Thus I learned, always aligns my internal maps with the territory before I unleash my full energies on a project. Making your biggest mistake first has the concomitant danger of getting you labeled as clumsy, but as Steiner points out, this is a necessary step towards progress.

[page 56] For you see, whenever you undertake a spiritual activity, you always must be able to bear being clumsy and awkward. People who cannot endure being clumsy and doing things stupidly and imperfectly at first never really will be able to do them perfectly in the end out of their own inner self.

In the next passage, he explains that "everything always turns out the way it's supposed to" which I like to remember by use of the acronym [EAT-O-TWIST](#). A bit of thinking will convince one that this applies to all the people that one meets in this life. It is only through avoiding clumsiness at costs that one remains clumsy throughout one's lifetime.

[page 57] You must say to yourself: Something is leading me karmically to the children so that I can be with them as a teacher though I am still awkward and clumsy. And those before whom it behooves me not to appear clumsy and awkward — those children — I shall only meet in later years, again through the workings of karma.

On page 58 is the story of the tiny violet who becomes frightened by the sky when it first opens its petals for the first time. When she asks the dog he frightens her more by telling her it's a big violet that is going to crush her. She becomes more frightened. The next day a lamb tells her that the big violet will not crush her, that "that is a great big violet, and his love is much greater than your own love, even as he is much more blue than you are in your little blue form." The children will want to know why the dog said what he said and why the lamb said what he said to the violet. This is the form of teaching that will lead to a deep understanding of spirituality in harmony with what the child is able to absorb at a tender age. Things great and small in that story will help them to understand the things great and small that they will encounter in later life. This is a story that a wise teacher can draw on again and again as appropriate as the child matures. The child will only understand later as an adult of forty what they took on authority from their teacher.

So many teachers of arithmetic become upset when they see children counting on their fingers. Steiner says let them do it as it "calls forth the greatest possible skill" in them. (page 77) For, he says, "sports do not really make people skilled", but only those tasks which involve the entire body, such as "holding a pencil between the big toe and the next toe and learning to write with the foot, to write figures with the foot." The head is simply a passenger being driven by the chauffeur which is the body.

One should not learn to count by placing five blocks and saying "1, 2, 3, 4, 5. . ." but rather by seeing a whole and dividing it in two parts and noticing how the TWO make up the ONE. Our atomistic basis of materialistic thinking began when we started teaching counting in the former way.

He tells a humorous and insightful story about two children Henry and Anna. The mother told Henry to divide it for him and Anna, but do it in the Christian way, which the mother explained, meant he must give Anna the bigger piece. Henry thought about it for a second and said, "In that case, let Anna divide it in the Christian way!"

The key to successful education is to draw out the child in the right way at the right time of its development. Steiner provides us with abundant insights as a spiritual scientist on how a child's development proceeds. When the child is born, its body is taken 100% from its mother and only after birth does the etheric body begin working on building up the second physical body, a process which consumes all the energies of the etheric body for seven years. Seven years, as you will remember from biology, is how long it takes for all the cells of the human body to completely replaced. The etheric body is the sculptor, rightly understood, of the child's body, and it begins immediately after its birth in that task. Ever wonder why a seven year old loves to model forms and paint them?

[page 92] For the first seven years of life the etheric body has been carrying out modeling and painting within the physical body. Now that it has nothing further to do regarding the physical body, or at least not as much as before, it wants to carry its activity outside.

All the while the etheric body is being drawn out of the child's body between seven and fourteen years old, the astral body is being drawn inward. Upon the completion of the drawing in process of the astral body, puberty with its human sexuality and capability for reproduction begins. This drawing in process takes place in an astral form of inspiration, a breathing-in that Steiner describes thus:

[page 96] So that during this time when the astral body is gradually finding its way into the physical body with the help of the air breathed in, it is playing upon something that is stretched across like strings of an instrument in the center of the body, that is, upon the spinal column. Our nerves are really a kind of lyre, a musical instrument, an inner musical instrument that resounds up into the head.

What does this tell the wise teacher to do for musical education for their children? The teacher should provide activities in which the children can come to feel what it means for "their own musical being to flow over into the objective instrument." He cautions that a piano is the absolute worst instrument for the child at this point. Instead, a recorder, or some other simple wind instrument, should be employed so the child may feel the music resonating within itself, just as its astral body resonates with its spinal column.

There was a situation comedy called *Happy Days* that ran on television for many years starring a character called Fonzie. In early episodes Rickie, Pottsy, Ralph, and the other boys who admired Fonzie's style, would exclaim, "AAA!" whenever the Fonz did something that astonished them. In later episodes, Fonzie adopted the saying "AAA!" as a sort of pre-emptive strike of the automatic exclamation he expected to follow. In his analysis of the natural meanings of sounds, Steiner said, some fifty years before Fonzie said his first "AAA!", "... in every language, English included, we find that the vowel A expresses astonishment and wonder." (Page 102)

Our grandchildren, Katie (9) and Weslee (7) were visiting a week ago as I began to grind some coffee beans. In astonishment, Katie asked, "Coffee comes from beans?" "Sure," I said, and she and Weslee gathered close to me as I showed them the beans. I put two half beans together to show how they formed an ovoid solid and explained how coffee was discovered. Some goats were seen cavorting on Turkish hillsides after eating the beans from this plant. Curious, the Turkish shepherds began to experiment with eating the bitter green beans and gradually discovered that if they roasted the beans, crushed them, and then boiled them, that the liquid made a delightful and refreshing drink which we now call coffee. The beans I had came from Costa Rica, so I asked if either of them knew where Costa Rica was. Nope. So we went over the encyclopedia and looked up Costa Rica on a map, then went to globe to look at where it existed relative to Louisiana where we were. This little adventure in learning went on delightfully for about twenty minutes. I hadn't read the following passage at the time, but it speaks volumes to the pedagogy of young children. Lessons that proceed, as mine did, from life draw children out, and they will pursue knowledge for its own worth and will never tire until they have exhausted all the possibilities.

[page 112] The golden rule for the whole of teaching is that the children should not tire. Now there is something very strange about the so-called experimental education of the present day. Experimental psychologists register when a child becomes tired in any kind of mental activity, and from this they decide how long to occupy a child with any one subject, in order to avoid fatigue. The whole conception is wrong from beginning to end.

He goes on later to point out that what the experimental psychologists observe is, not some basic datum about when children tire, but how badly the teacher has taught them. Another example of bad teaching can be found in the daily newspaper when, for example, it proclaims that five criminals were sentenced to a

total of 75 years in prison. Since all of them will be out of prison before the 75 years are over, Steiner tells us that is meaningless, and that we must avoid teaching anything to children in this foolhardy, unrealistic way that bears no connection to something that can be found in life.

[page 117] You must guide the child to think only about things that are to be found in life. Then through your teaching reality will be carried back into life again. In our time we suffer terribly from the unreality of people's thinking, and the teacher must consider this very carefully.

Finally, as much as it is urged that teachers learn from their students and share what they learn with other teachers, it is hard to find exemplary cases of such systematic sharing going on in either secondary or post-secondary educational institutions with the exception of Waldorf Schools. Such meetings were built into the very structure of Waldorf education by its founder Rudolf Steiner some eighty years ago, and it will be well to end this review of *The Kingdom of Childhood* with his words to the Waldorf educators in Torquay, England.

[page 118] To support this we have our teachers' meetings in the Waldorf School, which are the heart and soul of the teaching. In these meetings, all the teachers speak of what they as individuals have learned from their classes and from all the children in them, so that each one learns from the other. No school is really alive where this is not the most important thing, this regular meeting of the teachers.

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