

What is Anthroposophy

by Stephen Spitalny

Anthroposophy is a path of knowledge to guide the spiritual in the human being to the Spiritual in the universe. It arises in a human being as a need of the heart, of the life of feeling; and it can be justified only inasmuch as it can satisfy this inner need. He alone can acknowledge Anthroposophy, who finds in it what he himself in his own inner life feels impelled to seek. Hence only they can be anthroposophists who feel certain questions on the nature of the human being and the universe as an elemental need of life, just as one feels hunger and thirst

Rudolf Steiner, *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts*

Anthroposophy is the spiritual fount from which springs Waldorf education, the Camphill movement, biodynamic farming and gardening, Eurythmy, to name just a few of many scientific, artistic, and social initiatives. This name is derived from two Greek words, *anthropos* and *sophia* signifying "the wisdom of the human being", and expresses the lifework of Rudolf Steiner, 1861-25, Austrian philosopher, scientist, lecturer, and author. Dr. Steiner spoke on a wide range of subjects out of a great depth and breadth of wisdom, leaving us a handful of books and thousands of published lectures. Since his passing, many others have taken up his indications in their own work, adding to the body of knowledge known as Anthroposophy. Yet, the essence of Anthroposophy is the activity of self-education through which one can come to know one's self and the world, an activity in which the human spirit probes into the nature of itself.

The basis for all of Dr. Steiner's work was his own path of self development and spiritual research. He often advised not just to believe what he said and wrote, but to think about and meditate upon the ideas he brought, to do one's own spiritual research. Then one becomes active inwardly and can come to know for one's self the truth.

Anthroposophy makes no claims to be the only true path; it recognizes truths found in other spiritual paths. Rudolf Steiner said: "There is only one truth, just as the view revealed from the peak of the mountain is the same for all who stand there. There are, however, various ways by which the peak of the mountain can be achieved."¹ There is no body of knowledge that we must agree with, no doctrine, and no set of lifestyle rules.

Self-directed activity is the key to this modern path of development. It can only be done from the inside. No one can do it for us. Both the questions and the striving for answers must arise within us. Although it is a meditative path, it does not separate us from the world, but, rather, enables us to live more fully in the world and be truly present in experiences, feelings, and thoughts. It is a path of awareness and attentiveness in all aspects of life.

This path of self-education leads to a transformation of *thinking*, *feeling*, and *willing*, the soul's basic activities. Our everyday *thinking* is scattered and based on sense impressions, but we can transform it into an active, living thinking that is more flexible and more self-directed. This relearning of how to think can be attained through disciplined, diligent effort. The transformation of our *feeling* life begins with paying attention to feelings; we experience and observe them objectively. This helps us to not be controlled by them, and at the same time to not deny them. Our *willing* is the most difficult to transform because it is the least conscious of our soul activities. The will, our capacity for doing, is ruled by instincts, habits, and desires, which we must first be able to observe objectively and then overcome. Often we act or speak out of ingrained patterns of behavior without thinking. We can strive toward choosing our actions instead of following habitual patterns of reacting. Taking up this active work on our own soul is a path of initiation

leading to higher levels of thinking, feeling, and willing which Steiner described as *Imagination*, *Inspiration*, and *Intuition*.

There are a great many exercises that we can choose to practice on this path of initiation. They are not merely for our own development, but for the benefit of all.² Indeed, there is an inherent social element in the process of self-education. If we strive to make decisions and choose actions out of our highest intentions, then all of our social interaction may be lifted up to a higher level. Actions determined by our lower self separate us from other human beings; actions consciously chosen by our higher self serve to connect human beings. I believe this striving to raise our selves, our fellows and our world to a higher level is the essence of Anthroposophy.

Rudolf Steiner promises us: "Insofar as we unite ourselves with the spirit of the universe, we become whole human beings, we receive impulses to search as human beings for the other human being, rather than pass one another by without understanding. The more we merely describe physical matter and then apply such descriptions to human beings, the more social life will be torn apart; the more we unite ourselves with the spirit, the more our hearts will open to other human beings. In this way, an education which allows the spiritual in the other human being to be found, provides the foundation for human love, human compassion, and human service, in the true sense of the word."³

¹ *The Path of Knowledge and Its Stages*, 1906.

² See *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and Its Attainment*, for an excellent introduction to some basic exercises.

³ Describing the ideals and benefits of Waldorf education in *Anthroposophical Pedagogy and its Prerequisites*, April 17, 1924, Bern, Switzerland.