

INTRODUCTION

In Rudolf Steiner's autobiography (chapters 35 and 36), he speaks as follows concerning the character of this privately printed matter:

"The content of this printed matter was intended as oral communications, not to be printed ...

"Nothing has ever been said that is not in utmost degree the purest result of developing Anthroposophy ... Whoever reads this privately printed material can take it in the fullest sense as containing what Anthroposophy has to say. Therefore, it was possible without hesitation ... to depart from the plan of circulating this printed matter only among members [of the Anthroposophical Society]. It will be necessary, however, to put up with the fact that erroneous matter is included in the lecture reports that I have not revised.

"The right to a judgment about the content of such privately printed material can naturally be conceded only to one who knows what is taken for granted as the prerequisite basis of this judgment. For most of this printed matter the prerequisite will be at least the anthroposophical knowledge of the human being and of the cosmos to the extent that their nature is set forth in Anthroposophy, and of what crisis in the form of 'anthroposophical history' in the communications from the world of spirit."

THE ALPHABET

An Expression Of The Mystery Of Man Dornach, 18th December 1921

For some time we have been occupied with gaining a more accurate knowledge of Man's relation to the universe, and today we would like to supplement our past studies. If we consider how Man lives in the present period of his evolution — taking this period so widely that it encompasses not only what is historical but also in part the pre-historical — we must conclude that speech is a preeminent characteristic at this moment of the cosmic evolution of mankind. It is speech that elevates Man above the other kingdoms of nature. In the lectures last week, I mentioned that in the course of mankind's evolution, language, speech as a whole, has also undergone a development. I alluded to how, in very ancient times, speech was something that Man formed out of himself as his most primal ability; how, with the help of his organs of speech he was able to manifest the divine spiritual forces living within him. I also referred to how, in the transition from the Greek culture to the Roman-Latin culture, that is to say in the fourth Post-Atlantean period, the single sounds in language lose their names and, as in contemporary usage, merely have value as sounds. In Greek culture we still have a name for the first letter of the alphabet but in Latin it is just 'A'. In passing from the Greek to the Latin culture something living in speech, something eminently concrete changes into abstraction. It might be said: as long as Man called the first letter of the alphabet 'Alpha', he experienced a certain amount of inspiration in it, but the moment he called it just 'A', the letters conformed to outer convention, to the prosaic aspects of life, replacing inspiration and inner experience. This constituted the actual transition from everything belonging to Greece to what is Roman-Latin — men of culture became estranged from the spiritual world of poetry and entered into the prose of life.

The people of Rome were a sober, prosaic race, a race of jurists, who brought prose and jurisprudence into the culture of later years. What lived in the people of Greece developed within mankind more or less like a cultural dream which men approach through their own revelations when they have inner experiences and wish to give expression to them. It might be said that all poetry has in it something which makes it appear to Europeans as a daughter of Greece, whereas all jurisprudence, all outer compartmentalization, all the prose of life, suggest descent from the Roman-Latin people.

I have previously called your attention to how a real understanding of the Alpha — Aleph in Hebrew — leads us to recognize in it the desire to express Man in a symbol. If one seeks the nearest modern words to convey the meaning of Alpha, these would be: 'The one who experiences his own breathing'. In this name we have a direct reference to the Old Testament words: 'And God formed Man ... and breathed into nostrils the breath of life'. What at that time was done with the breath, to make Man a Man of Earth, the being who had his Manhood imprinted on him by becoming the experiencer, the feeler of his own breathing, by receiving into himself consciousness of his breathing, is meant to be expressed in the first letter of the alphabet.

And the name 'Beta' considered with an open mind, turning here to the Hebrew equivalent, represents something of the nature of a wrapping, a covering, a house. Thus, if we were to put our experience on uttering 'Alpha, Beta,' into modern language we could say: 'Man in his house'. And we could go through the whole alphabet in this way, giving expression to a concept, a meaning, a truth about Man simply by saying the names of the letters of the alphabet one after another. A comprehensive sentence would be uttered giving expression to the Mystery of Man. This sentence would begin by our being shown Man in his building, in his temple. The following parts of the sentence would go on to express how Man conducts himself in his temple and how he relates to the cosmos. In short, what would be expressed by speaking the names of the alphabet consecutively, would not be the abstraction we have today when we say **A, B, C**, without any accompanying thoughts, but it would be the expression of the Mystery of Man and of how his roots are in the universe.

When today, in various societies 'the lost archetypal word' is talked about, there is no recognition that it is actually contained in the sentence that comprises the names of the alphabet. Thus we can look back on a time in the evolution of humanity when Man, in repeating his alphabet, did not express what was related to external events, external needs, but what the divine spiritual mystery of his being brought to expression through his larynx and his speech organs.

It might be said that what belongs to the alphabet was applied later to external objects, and forgotten was all that can be revealed to Man through his speech about the mystery of his soul and spirit. Man's original word of truth, his word of wisdom, was lost. Speech was poured out over the matter-of-factness of life. In speaking today, Man is no longer conscious that the original primordial sentence has been forgotten; the sentence through which the divine revealed its own being to him. He is no longer aware that the single words, the single sentences uttered today, represent the mere shreds of that primordial sentence.

The poet, by avoiding the prose element in speech, and going back to the inner experience, the inner feeling, the inner formation of speech, attempts to return to its inspired archetypal element. One could perhaps say that every true poem, the humblest as

well as the greatest, is an attempt to return to the word that has been lost, to retrace the steps from a life arranged in accordance with utility to times when cosmic being still revealed itself in the inner organism of speech.

Today we distinguish the consonant from the vowel element in speech. I have spoken of how it would appear to Man if he were to dive beneath the threshold of his consciousness. In ordinary consciousness memories are reflected upwards or, in other words, thoughts are reflections of what is experienced between birth and death. Normally we do not penetrate Man's actual being beyond this recollection, this thought left behind in memory. From another point of view I have indicated how, beneath the threshold of consciousness, there lives what may be called a universal tragedy of mankind. This can also be described in the following way: When Man wakes up in the morning and his ego and astral body dive down into his etheric body and his physical body, he does not perceive these bodies from within outwards, what he perceives is something quite different. We can get an idea of this by means of a diagram.

Let us say that here we have the boundary between the conscious and the unconscious, red representing the conscious, blue the unconscious. If a person sees something belonging to the outer world or to himself, for instance, if with his own eye he sees another Man's eye, then the visible rays which go out of his eye into the other Man are thrown back, and he experiences it in his consciousness. What he also bears of his own being beneath the threshold of consciousness he experiences in his astral body and his ego, but not in the ordinary waking state. It remains unconscious and essentially forms the actual content of the etheric and the physical bodies. The etheric body is never recognized at all by ordinary consciousness; it recognizes only the external aspect of the physical body. As I have mentioned in the past, we must plunge beneath memory to perceive the primal source of evil in human beings, but then something else can also be perceived, namely, an aspect of Man's connection with the cosmos.

We may, through appropriate meditation, succeed in penetrating the memory representations, as it were, to put aside what separates us inwardly from our etheric and physical bodies; if we then look down into the etheric body and the physical body so that we perceive what normally lies beneath the threshold of consciousness, we will hear something sounding within these bodies. And what sounds is the echo of the music of the spheres, which Man absorbed between death and new birth, during his descent out of the divine spiritual world into what is given to him through physical inheritance by parents and ancestors. In the etheric body and in the physical body there echoes the music of the spheres. In so far as it is of a vowel nature it echoes in the etheric body, and in the physical body in so far as it is of a consonant nature.

It is indeed true that Man, as he goes forward in the life between death and a new birth, raises himself to the world of the higher hierarchies. We have learned how Man in the world of the Angels, the Archangels, the Archai, joins in with their life and lives within the realm of the hierarchies, as here we live among the beings of the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms. After this life between death and a new birth he descends once more to earthly life. And we have also learned how on his way down he first gathers to him the influences of the firmament of the fixed stars, represented in the signs of the Zodiac; then, as he descends further, he takes with him the influence of the moving planets.

Now just picture to yourselves the Zodiac, the representation of the fixed stars. Man is exposed to their influence on descending from the life of soul and spirit into earthly life. If their effects are to be designated in accordance with their actual being we must say that they are cosmic music, they are consonants. And the forming of consonants in the physical body is the echo of what resounds from the single formations of the Zodiac, whereas the formation of vowels within the music of the spheres occurs through the movements of the planets in the cosmos. This is imprinted into the etheric body. Thus, in our physical body we unconsciously bear a reflection of the cosmic consonants, whereas in our etheric body we bear a reflection of the cosmic vowels. This remains, one might say, in the silence of the subconscious. But as the child develops, forces press upwards within the body and strengthen the speech organs; these are forces that, as reflections of the formative forces of the cosmos, build up the speech organs. The more interior speech organs are so formed out of Man's essential being that they can produce vowels, and the organs nearer to the periphery, the palate, the tongue, the lips and everything that contributes to the form of the physical body, are built up in such a way that consonants can be produced. While the child is learning to speak, something takes place in the upper part of his being, as a result of the activity of his lower part, which is a consequence of the formative forces taken up into the physical body, and also into the etheric body. (This is naturally not a material process but has to do with formative activity.) Thus when we speak, we bring to Manifestation what we might call an echo of the experience Man goes through with the cosmos in the life between death and a new birth during his descent out of the divine spiritual world. All the single letters of the alphabet are actually formed as images of what lives in the cosmos.

We can get an approximate idea of the signs of the Zodiac if we relate them to modern speech by setting up B, C, D, F, and so forth, as constellations of the Zodiac. You can follow them by feeling the revolution of the planets in H (ed.: 'H' like in him, her) — H is not actually a letter like the others, H imitates the rotational movement, the circling around. And the single planets in their revolutions are always the individual vowels which are placed in various ways in front of the consonants. If you imagine the vowel A to be placed in here (see diagram) you have the A in harmony with B and C, but in each vowel there is the H. You can trace it in speaking — AH, IH, EH. H is in each vowel. What does it signify that H is in each vowel? It signifies that the vowel is revolving in the cosmos. The vowel is not at rest, it circles around in the cosmos. And the circling, the moving, is expressed in the H hidden in each of the vowels. Consider, therefore, a vowel harmony expressed somewhere in speech: let us say I, O, U, A. (ed.: IH, OH, UH, AH in German) What is expressed by this? Something is expressed that is the cosmic working of four planets. Let us add one of the consonants to something like this — IOSUA — let us add this S in the middle of it, and this would mean that not only the forming of vowels within the planetary spheres is expressed, but also the effect that the planets connected with I, O, U, A, experience in their movement through the connection with the star sign S. Thus if a Man in the days of ancient civilization uttered the name of a God in vowels, a planetary mystery was expressed. The deed of a divine being within the planetary world was expressed in the name. Were a divine name expressed with a consonant in it, the deed of the divine being concerned reached in thought to the representative of the fixed star firmament — the Zodiac.

When there was still an instinctive understanding of these things, in the time of atavistic clairvoyance, clairaudience, and so on, a connection with the cosmos was experienced in human speech. When speaking, Man felt himself within the cosmos. When the child learned to speak it was felt how what was experienced in the divine spiritual world before birth, or before conception, gradually evolved out of the being of the child.

It may be said that if a Man could look through himself inwardly he would have to admit: I am an etheric body, in other words, I am the echo of cosmic vowels; I am a physical body, in other words, the echo of cosmic consonants. Because I stand here on the earth, there sounds through my being an echo of all that is said by the signs of the Zodiac; and the life of this echo is my physical body. An echo is formed of all that is said by the planetary spheres and this echo is my etheric body.

1. Physical body = Echo of the Zodiac
2. Etheric body = Echo of the planetary movements
3. Astral body = Experience of the planetary movements
4. Ego = perception of the echo of the Zodiac

Nothing is said, my dear friends, by repeating that Man consists of physical body and etheric body. Those are no more than vague, indefinite words. If we want to speak in a real language, which can be learned from the mysteries of the cosmos, we would have to say: Man is constituted out of the echo of the heavens, of the fixed stars, of the echo of the planetary movements, of what is experienced of the echo of the planetary movements, and of what knowingly experiences the echo of the fixed star heavens. Then we would have expressed in real cosmic speech what is abstractly expressed by the words: Man is made up of physical body, etheric body, astral body and ego. We remain entirely in the abstract by saying: Man is composed first of physical body, secondly of etheric body, thirdly of astral body, fourthly of ego. But we pass into concrete cosmic speech if we say: Man consists of the echo of the Zodiac, of the echo of the planetary movements, of the experience of the impression of the planetary movements in thinking, feeling and willing, and in the perception of the echo of the Zodiac. The first is abstraction, the second reality. When you say 'I', what is that exactly? Now just imagine someone had planted trees in a beautifully artistic order. Each individual tree can be seen. However at a distance all the trees resolve into a single point. Take all the individual things — all that resounds from the Zodiac in the way of world consonants, then go far enough away: Everything that is formed as inward sound, in the most manifold way, is compressed within you to the single point 'I'.

It is an actual fact that this name which Man gives himself is really only an expression for what we perceive in the measureless spaces of the universe. Everywhere it is necessary to go back to what, as reflection, as echo, appears here upon earth. Thus, when the matter is seen in its reality, before Man's higher and inward experience, everything out of which Man builds himself up as a phenomenon, as pure experience, melts away. If we look upon Man and gradually learn to know his true nature, then his physical body actually ceases to be in the way it normally confronts us and otherwise stands before us, our vision widens and Man grows into the heavens of the fixed stars. The etheric body, too, ceases to be before us. Vision is extended, experience is extended, and we arrive at a perception of planetary life, for this human etheric body is a mere reflection of planetary life.

Man standing before you is nothing but the phenomenon, the appearance, the image, of what goes on in the life of the planets. We think we have an individual human being in

front of us, but this individual is a picture, on a certain spot, of the whole world. What then is the reason for the difference between an Asiatic and an American? The reason is that the starry heavens are portrayed at two different earthly points, just as we have various pictures of one and the same external fact. It is indeed true that when we observe Man the world begins to dawn upon us, and by such observation we are faced by the great mystery of the extent to which Man is an actual pictured microcosm of the reality of the macrocosm.

Now of what does modern life consist? When we look back from these modern times upon mankind's life in primeval times, we still find an experience of Man's connection with the spiritual world in the instinctive consciousness of those ancient days. In the alphabet we can have a concrete experience of this. When, in primeval words, Man had to express the rich store of the divine in all its fullness, he uttered the letters of the alphabet. When he expressed the mystery of his own nature, in the way he learned about it in the Mysteries, then he voiced how he had descended through Saturn or Jupiter in their stellar relation to the Lion or the Virgin, in other words, how he had descended through the A or the I in their relation to the M or the L. He gave utterance to what he had then experienced of the music of the spheres, and that was his cosmic name. And in those ancient days men were instinctively aware that they brought a name down with them from the cosmos to the Earth.

Since then Christian consciousness still preserves this primeval consciousness in an abstract way by consecrating individual days to the memory of saints, who, rightly understood, should give new life to the spiritual cosmos. By being born on a particular day of the year we should receive the name of the saint whose day it is on the calendar. What is meant to be expressed here in a more abstract way, was more concretely expressed in primeval times, when in the Mysteries the cosmic name of a person was found in accordance with what he experienced as he descended to earth, when with his being he created vowels with the planets and added them to the consonants of the Zodiac. The various groups of the human race had many names then, but these names were conceived in such a way that they harmonized with the universal all-embracing name.

Considered from this point of view, what was the alphabet? It was what the heavens revealed through their fixed stars and through the planets moving across them. When the alphabet was spoken out of the original, instinctive, human wisdom it was astronomy that was expressed. What was spoken through the alphabet and what was taught in astronomy in those olden days was one and the same thing. The wisdom in the astronomy of those times was not presented in the same way as the learning contained in any branch of knowledge today, which is built up from single perceptions and concepts. It was conceived as a revelation that made itself felt on the surface of human experience, either in the form of an axiomatic truth or as part of an axiomatic truth. Thus a concrete experience was represented with a part of the primal wisdom. And there was something of quite a dim consciousness connected with the fact that, in the Middle Ages, those who were highly educated still had to learn grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. In this ascent through the various spheres of learning lies a half conscious recognition of something, which in earlier days, existed in instinctive clarity. Today grammar has become very abstract. Going back into times of which history tells us nothing, but which, nevertheless, are still historical times, we find that grammar was not the abstract subject it is today but that men were led through grammar into the mystery of

the individual letters. They learned that the secrets of the cosmos found expression in the letters. The single vowel was brought into connection with its planet, the single consonant with the single sign of the Zodiac; thus, through the letters of the alphabet, Man gained knowledge of the stars.

Passing from grammar to rhetoric entailed the application of what lived in Man as active astronomy. And by rising to dialectics one came in thought to comprehending and working on what lived in Man out of astronomy. Arithmetic was not taught as the abstraction of today, but as the entity expressed in the mystery of numbers. Number itself was looked upon differently from how it is done today. I will give you a trifling instance of this.

How does one picture 1, 2, 3 to oneself today? It is done by thinking of a pea, then of another pea, and this makes two; then another is added and there are three. It is a matter of adding one to another — piling them up. In olden days one did not count in this way. A start was made with a unit. And by splitting the unit into two parts one had 2. Thus 2 was not arrived at by adding one unit to another. It was not a putting together of units, but the two were contained in the one. Three was contained in the one in a different way — four again in a different way. The unit embraced all numbers and was the greatest. Today the unit is the smallest. Everything today is atomistically conceived. The unit is one member and the two is added to it, this is all imagined atomistically. The original idea was organic. There the unit is the greatest and the following numbers always appear as being smaller and are all contained in the unit. Here we come to quite different mysteries in the world of numbers.

These mysteries in the world of numbers give the merest intimation that here we are not concerned with what merely lives in the hollow of Man's head. (I say the hollow of his head because I have often shown it really to be hollow from the spiritual point of view.) In the relations of number we can come to perceive the relations of the objectivity of the world. If we always just add one to one naturally this is something that has nothing to do with the facts. I have a piece of chalk. If beside it I place a second piece of chalk this has nothing to do with the first. The one is not concerned with the other. If, however, I presuppose that everything is a unit and now pass to the numbers contained in this unit, I get a two in a way that is a matter of some consequence. I have to break up the piece. I then get right into reality.

Thus after being borne up in dialectics to grasping the thought of the astronomical, one reached still further into the cosmos with arithmetic and in a similar way with geometry. From geometry one got the feeling that the geometrical, thought concretely, was the music of the spheres. This is the difference between what holds good today and what once existed in the instinctive wisdom of primeval times. Take music today — the mathematical physicist reckons the pitch of a note, for example, reckons which pitch is at work in a melody. Then anyone who is musical is obliged to forget his music and enter the sphere of the abstract if, being a keen musician, he has not already run away from the mathematician. Man is led away from immediate experience into abstraction and this has very little to do with experience.

In itself it is really interesting — if one has a mathematical bent — to press on from the musical into the sphere of acoustics, but one does not gain much in the way of musical experience. That someone today learns geometry and as he proceeds begins to experience forms as musical notes, that is to say, if he rises from the 5th to the 6th grade, and makes

geometry sound musically, all this, as far as I know, does not enter the curriculum. But that was once the meaning of rising to the sixth part of what was to be learned — from geometry to music. And only then did the archetypal, underlying reality become an experience. The astronomy in the subconscious then became something that one consciously mastered as astronomy, as the highest and 7th member of the so-called Trivium and Quadrivium.

The history of Man should be studied in accordance with the development of his consciousness for then we can gain a feeling that consciousness must return to these matters. That is just what is attempted in anthroposophical Spiritual Science. There is no need to marvel that those who are accustomed to accept the recognized science of the day find nothing right in what I have written, for example, in [Occult Science](#). It is necessary, however, that Man should go back, in a fully conscious way, to the true reality which for a time had to recede into the background to enable Man to develop his freedom. Man would have been able ever more strongly to develop the consciousness of how necessary it is for him to stand within a divine cosmic world, had he not been cast out of this cosmos into the merely phenomenal, into pure appearance, so strongly indeed that the whole manifold splendor and majesty of the starry sky was condensed into the abstract ego.

This was a necessary step in the struggle for freedom. For Man could develop his freedom only by pressing together quite indistinguishably into the single point of the ego something that, filled out by the whole of cosmic space, streamed through all time. But he would lose his being, he would no longer know or possess himself, no longer be active and act on his own initiative, were he not to reconquer the whole world from this single point of his ego, were he not to rise again from the abstract to the concrete. It is indeed important to understand how, in passing from the Greek to the Latin culture, abstraction took hold of European culture and thus resulted in the loss of the primeval word. It must be remembered that the Latin language was for a long time the language of the cultural elite. What persisted however, was a kind of desperate holding on to what this Latin language had actually already discarded. And what had been spoken in the Greek world then remained behind only in thought. Of the logos there remained logic — abstract thought. In the longing that a Man such as [Goethe](#) had for knowledge of the Greek culture, there lies something that may be expressed as follows: he longed for liberation from the abstraction of modern times, from the dry prose of Romanism. He wanted to reach the other daughter of the primeval wisdom of the world, what remained of all that stood for Greece. — We too must experience something of this kind if we wish to understand Goethe's intense yearning for the South. In modern school biographies we find nothing of all this. Only when in every individual thing there echoes a consciousness of Man being an expression of the whole cosmos, will the way be cleared for the forces needed for Man's progress, if civilization is not to decline into utter barbarism.