

PNEUMATOSOPHY

Finding and Formulating the Cosmic Word

Through Breathing in and Breathing out

Rudolf Steiner

Translated by Frances E. Dawson

A LECTURE IN DORNACH, APRIL 1, 1922

From *Das Sonnenmysterium und das Mysterium von Tod und Auferstehung.*

Exoterisches und esoterisches Christentum, 12 lectures, Städte (GA 211)

Copyright 2004

Anthroposophic Press, Inc.: New York City

IT IS POSSIBLE TO REPRESENT CERTAIN THINGS only when we try to approach the corresponding reality by means of pictures. With regard to certain things we must refrain from speaking in that abstract, intellectualistic way in which we are accustomed to speak in our time. In this intellectualistic way we should not be able to represent at all the very thing of which I intend to speak to you today. Let this fact, then, be taken quite for granted for the entire manner of the presentation that I wish to give today.

Just imagine, let us say, a certain interior space—I wish to make the matter as simple as possible—let us imagine an interior space, which has a window perhaps here (*a* and *b* in the drawing). Let us suppose that through this window light were to shine into this inner space and were diffused in various ways in it; but this space, let us suppose, is filled with all sorts of transparent partitions, a kind of translucent vaulted arching. We should have then an interior space filled in the most diverse manner with such arches, through which in various ways the light is partly admitted, partly reflected; so that this interior space would be filled with light that is arrested, reflected, in the greatest variety of ways.

Now suppose that from here (“red” in the picture), I cause vapors to pour through this interior space, and then cause them to flow upward. This vapor, however, would be alive; it would be a living, feeling being. It streams upward and would have, in turn, let us say, an outlet, would thus be able to flow away again. In other words, it flows through this light and into this inner space into glistening light—light transformed in various ways by these arches—passing through, reflected, and glittering. Thus the vapor would feel what it should perceive there in the light, and then float away. In other words, this vapor would touch with its feeling sense what was present there in the inner space as glittering light, and it would in this way get an inner picture. It would get a picture in its feeling of what is there in the inner space as glittering light.



Let us suppose now that the vapor, when, after some time, it streams out again, should be able to reproduce what it has experienced in there (violet in first drawing). We might have

a sort of instrument by means of which the vapor somehow -let us say by the sounding of musical tones, or something of the kind-should bring to expression what it has experienced in the glittering, gleaming light there in the enclosure. Place this picture before you.

And now I wish to draw this picture for you in another way. You see, instead of the



vaulted arch, I have drawn for you here the interior of the human head; instead of the window, the eye, by means of which one sees, through which, therefore, the light impressions enter; what I have drawn as arches are the convolutions of the brain, the branching nerves. The light enters there and is diffused. Instead of the vapor, which I have drawn there (in the first drawing), imagine the in-breathed air, which flows upward and touches what is enabled to glitter and gleam in the brain by means of the light. It is then fashioned into thoughts in the brain. The air flows down again through the spinal canal. Instead of an instrument, there is the human larynx, which is able to bring to expression what has been experienced. There you have a picture of what takes place in the human head.

But now suppose we say: We will not make it in that way, but we will just close the window here, and make an entirely dark inner vault (yellow), and again allow the vapor to stream up here (red). Now that light that enters *there* (first drawing) and, in the most various ways, is weakened, reflected, is not perceived, but now the forms that are perceived *as such*. And when the feeling vapor streams up, it will be able to perceive there, in the enclosure, the forms that someone has once made—let us say, forms that an architect has made at some time. This vapor will therefore be able to feel the deeds of this architect. Then, when the vapor streams away, it is able to bring again to expression (red) what has been perceived there as the deeds of the architect.

Now let us imagine that this architect has built in a quite special way. Let us suppose that this architect was a quite extraordinarily universal architect, and that he had made what he built in there into a likeness of the entire universe. In that case the vapor would sense there in the enclosure the mysteries of the whole universe—if it merely closes the window.

Otherwise it perceives what gleams in from outside; but if the window is closed, it perceives what is inwardly a likeness of the entire universe.

Imagine, therefore, that we have here a likeness of the universe (see image). In the human head, in the wonderful convolutions of the brain, we actually have an image of the whole universe. And if we close the senses, and cause the breath of air—that passes, you know, through the spinal canal into the head—to stream through, then there is a possibility of sensing the mysteries of this inner brain space. Only we must not permit the breathed air simply to grope about in a disorganized, chaotic manner—this avails nothing—but it must be done in an orderly way.

You know if we wish, let us say, to determine whether some material is silk, we must sense the fact by feeling it in a certain way. We must approach fairly what we wish to discover through touch. If we are able to do that, however, if we are able to approach with an open mind what we wish to find out by feeling, then we shall be able to find exactly what is there to be felt.

During the time I have spoken to you about these past days—when people wanted to reach the higher knowledge by regulating their breathing process, when the ancient yoga system of the East was truly at its height (and today’s so-called yoga practice is in many ways merely secondary)—there actually existed the consciousness that caused the yoga student to say: When you inhale air—when you send the breath of air into your head—you can comprehend the mysteries of the universe in the likeness of this universe, in the special extension of the nervous system in your head. It is necessary only that you relate in a suitable way to the process of inbreathing.

I am not speaking about what existed in a decadent form later, but the original yoga. And the original yoga was this: The yoga devotee believed: We inhale the air, forming the breath in such a way that we send it up into this inner vault of the head, which is an image of the whole universe. We do this in such a way that we put a sound into the breathed air, a sound between “ah” and “oh,” or between “ah” and “oo”—that is, we introduce “ah-oo” into the breath of air, then we form it in such a way that the sound is adapted to *feel*, through the sense of touch, the cosmic mystery within the head, just as the hand has been adapted to touch external objects. And we get this into the consciousness if we continue this breathing

process so that we cause it to end with a mood of absolute consecration toward what we have felt by our sense of touch.

When, therefore, we have what we attain as we inhale the air, as we send out the breath of air and feel with it in the “a-u” sound—if we then slip into a devotional mood, becoming filled with devotion toward the cosmos, and if we pour out what we have then learned in an absolute devotion, then let the breathing process end in “m”—through such a breathing process, inwardly formed into “AUM,” we have grasped the mystery of the universe—from the “copy,” the nerve copy of the universe within the head. And we have brought to life this mystery that can become conscious in the air breathed out in the sound “m.”

In what I have explained, you have an indication of the origin of yoga. The yoga devotee believed: Within my head is the mystery of the whole universe. I can feel it through the sense of touch as I breathe in the air. By breathing in, the mystery of the universe is disclosed through myself. I grasp this mystery of the universe. But I am unable to retain it unless I then live in complete devotional surrender to the universe—otherwise it remains in the unconscious. Knowledge comes into existence while the breathing process is being fashioned into the Cosmic Word, which works creatively, surging and weaving through the world—as that is grasped and breathed out in absolute devotion to the universe. *Breathing in is revelation of the Cosmic Word; breathing out is inner condensation of the Cosmic Word, the acknowledgment of the Cosmic Word.* Thus, the search for the Cosmic Word through the human being, and the formulation of the Cosmic Word through the human being, are comprehended in the knowledge that breathing in is revelation; breathing out is acknowledgment; and *AUM* is comprehension of revelation and acknowledgment, bringing the cosmic mystery to life within oneself, the acknowledgment of this cosmic mystery within.

For us today in our present epoch, sound has risen to a higher level. Sound is expressed in real, concrete thoughts, not through intellectual thinking. So we may say that breathing in becomes thought, and breathing out becomes the volitional manifestation of thinking. In other words, we resolve what was formerly breathing in as revelation, breathing out as acknowledgment, into *thought training* and *will training*, and in this way we likewise get revelation—in thought, but in thought reached through the practice of meditation; and in training the will, which indeed is carried out on the other side, we have the acknowledgment of what has been revealed.

For modern humanity, the truth is this: What was formerly experienced in the breathing process alone, and what in the process of breathing in was formed into the vowel sound, in the process of breathing out into the consonantal sound—that is experienced more as a soul process in the inwardly contemplated thought, which, however, is permeated by the will in devotional surrender to the universe. Thus the process is the same, but intensified and deepened—a soul process. Even here, the process consists in laying hold of “the inner experience of the universe in its mysteries” and “the acknowledgment to this universe, to the spiritual foundation of this universe.”

We may also place the following additional considerations before us. We can say: The human being is born of light, and the inner human being, the inner part of the head, is a product of light. Indeed, the entire nervous system is the product of light—not merely through the eye, but light is also transmitted through the other senses. The eye is only the chief medium for light. We cannot say that blind people are completely cut off from the light; the light works in them. It is only conscious perception of the light that is lacking. And sound truly lives in the entire organism. Sound lives within us. It is not only in the ear; the ear is merely the organ of perception for sound. When we experience a sound, we experience it with the whole organism. We always experience a symphony with the entire organism. When we listen to a piece of music, the inner process is this: We transpose our whole breathing process into a distinctly definite rhythm, into definite musical processes caused by the composition itself. These configurations of our “air formed” inner being strike the brain’s forms; as they are thrust back, it gives us a musical impression. Within us, there is always a sense of touching light through sound.

Hold fast to the fact that there constantly arises in us a sense of touching light by means of sound. The sound world within us, the sound-creating organism, is really an organ of touch for the light. Light is really always the outer element; sound is the inner.

Thought: *breathing in* *revelation*

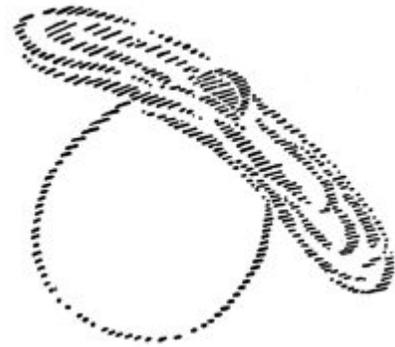
Will: *breathing out* *acknowledgment*

Touching light (the outer) through sound (the inner)

Touching cosmic thought through the human will.

The inner touches the outer. You really comprehend yourself correctly in your essential nature only when you conceive of yourself as a special being, lifted from the cosmic harmony of the spheres. One's being feels around in the light by touch, and in the configuration of the light, sound perceives the nature of the cosmos. It is true only in our time that we actually have a sense of touching cosmic thought through the human will. We sense cosmic thoughts by touching with the will. The will here takes the place of sound. Thought on the other hand takes the place of light. As has been said, it is very difficult to put these things into intellectual, abstract forms. But what I have tried to place before you pictorially will bring you to an understanding of these things, if you will reflect about it a little, if you clearly perceive that the position of human beings in the world is really such that, in the head, you have an image of the entire cosmos. As a human being, you are indeed an image of the whole cosmos with regard to your head.

When the human embryo is formed in the body of the mother, it is fashioned as an image of the cosmos. The primary fact is that, in the body of the mother, the human being is formed as a likeness of the cosmos. Generally speaking, the human being begins as brain, an image of the cosmos. You can study the cosmos by studying the human embryo during its early stages. Only later on is it no longer



an image of the cosmos, but must be described in this way: Here we have the earth (see the drawing), a human being upon it, then—while a part is taken from the embryo—there is added to it that which constitutes the forces that encircle the earth rhythmically, parallel to the surface. The breast organism is formed; in fact, currents that encircle the earth in this way



create it. You still have these currents “imitated,” so to speak, in the form of the ribs. Finally, comes the effect of the earth's organism itself; in this case, the currents are sent upward from below. Indeed, in the two legs you have an exact expression of the way these currents move. So I can represent the human being as: 1) currents that proceed from the earth; 2) as currents that encircle the earth and are connected with the breast organization; and 3) the head above, as the image of the entire universe.

What takes place in the head is actually throughout all of life an image of the entire universe. As human being, in that we have the head organization, we bear within ourselves a likeness of the whole universe; but we must perceive it. We could not perceive it if we were not organized by the earth to that end. Indeed, the earth becomes aware of the universe through the human being; the breast organism is the medium. Breathing in is caused by the cosmos, breathing out by the earth. The cosmos gives us the pure oxygen; the earth causes the permeation of this oxygen by carbon, and thus it becomes the deadly exhaled air. While this “air of death” is being formed, however, concepts take shape.



The formation of concepts in human beings is always connected with what is dying in us. We actually *die* through the act of forming concepts; we live through the cosmos. We would live at a very rapid tempo, however, if we were surrendered only to the cosmos. The cosmos gives us the greatest degree of life while we are still in the embryonic stage; then the environment of the earth gradually begins to work upon us, and later, what flows from the earth. In this way, the life that the cosmos gives to our organism is mediated until the portion of life that the cosmos gives is used up. The cosmos quickens us; the earth kills us as physical organisms, and even as etheric organisms. But it is true that the cosmos participates primarily in our etheric organism; and our earth participates mostly in our physical organism.

Reflect upon all this and think to yourself: At one time a regulated breathing process was used to cultivate higher knowledge, to searching for the mysteries of the universe in the human being. If you do this, you will discover how, during the earliest human striving, human beings inwardly felt a connection with the whole universe; they wanted to experience the Cosmic Word through the process of breathing in, and they wanted to sacrifice to the Cosmic Word through the process of breathing out. You will discover how, through yogic breathing, they wanted to find their place in the cosmic process through consciousness. Otherwise, they are always within that cosmic process simply as a matter of course.

From today's superficial description of this yogic breathing, you cannot get a real sense of what they were actually striving for by means of yoga. You will gain such true knowledge,

however, if you struggle through to it by means of modern anthroposophic spiritual science. At present, there are no documents about the method and original conditions, as they actually existed; and when documents were finally produced about such matters, the original conditions had passed away. We must discover the actual mysteries of human origin on earth without documents; otherwise, we must forget about it. Anyone who wishes, therefore, to discover the facts merely by means of ancient documentation will not discover them at all; the facts will be discovered only by those who can look back at much more ancient conditions than those revealed by ordinary documents. Unless you truly know the connection of the human being with the cosmos through inhalation and exhalation, you cannot discover the mystery of the Eastern AUM prayer—if I may call it that; I could just as easily say “AUM formula for knowledge,” since it contained both. If you know that the air (which does not otherwise produce definite sounds at all) is formed into definite sounds as soon as chords are pitched differently—if you know likewise that the indrawn breath, sent through the brain with the AUM sound, expresses inwardly the whole cosmic mystery; if you know that, then you also know the human relation to the universe. Through the sense of touch, you know just how you were created. When human beings, before conception, lived in the soul spiritual world, they were simply in the spirit world. But while descending to earth, they pass through the whole configuration of the cosmos within the ether; they gather the ether to themselves. At this moment, they take up all the mysteries of the universe, and then gradually impress them upon the brain. In fact, very small children continue to gradually impress upon the brain all that their souls have experienced of the mystery of the universe. Later, we rediscover this mystery when we try to reexperience it inwardly. In ancient times, it was experienced in the breath, and today through thinking.

Even the thought force—which is nothing but diluted breath force—if it is really directed through the brain, produces forms. Modern human beings do not do this; we do not actually direct thought force through the brain; rather, we always hear the words that are spoken in our language, in which, in a sense, our thoughts also are embodied—and then we direct through ourselves what we inwardly repeat like parrots, in keeping with our nationality. And in this way, people gain no inner knowledge; at best they write books about the fact that we have only language, and we cannot gain knowledge by means of language. People then write a critique of language, because they have no inkling of what borders upon the power of thought, because they know only what is registered, as it were, in words.

Modern human beings are indeed only sounding boards for words. And when people are clever enough, like Fritz Mauthner, they just write books about how words really contain nothing about the nature of the cosmos.¹

In any case, we learn nothing of the human being in this way, and we learn nothing of the cosmos—especially nothing of our human relationship to the cosmos. We must clearly perceive that it is profoundly true that the human being is truly “human” by virtue of the divine breath, by virtue of the breathed-in air. By this means, through breathed-in air, we discover the whole cosmos in ourselves; we discover that we are microcosms.

If you reflect on what I have said today from all perspectives, you will gradually find yourselves face to face with significant connections. You must in no way think it is a whim that, initially, I merely painted a picture. We must not describe these things with abstract words, but try to approach the fact through pictures.

¹ Fritz Mauthner (1849–1923), born in Horice, Bohemia, was a German author, a theatre critic, and an exponent of philosophical Skepticism derived from a critique of human knowledge.