

# The Lectures of Rudolf Steiner

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## Our Experiences at Night, Life after Death

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Yesterday we had to speak of the path pursued by man between death and a new birth; and the whole gist of my remarks will have shown you that every night during sleep we must return to the starting-point of our earth-life.

We can indeed gain insight into these significant matters if we realize that on sinking into slumber we do not stand still at the date reached in the course of our earthly existence (as was already explained in the previous lectures), but that we actually go back to our starting-point. Every time,

during sleep, we are carried back to our childhood, and even to the state before our childhood, before our arrival on earth. Hence, while we are asleep, our ego and our astral body return to the spiritual world, to the world of our origin which we left in order to become earth men.

At this point of our discourse, it becomes necessary to let pass before our soul in greater detail what the human being undergoes while asleep; undergoes unconsciously, but, nonetheless, most vividly.

The duration of our sleep does not really matter. Although it is difficult for our ordinary consciousness to conceive of the fact that time and space conditions are utterly different in the spiritual world, we must learn to form conceptions of such a kind.

I have already said that the human being, when suddenly awakened after he has fallen asleep and hence lost consciousness, experiences during that brief moment whatever he would have experienced, had his sleep continued for a long time. In measuring the length of our sleep according to its physical duration, we take into account only our physical body and our etheric body. Utterly different time-conditions prevail for that which is undergone by our ego and astral body. Hence the things that I shall presently explain to you are valid for either a long or a short sleep.

When the human personality enters the realm of sleep with his soul, the first state experienced by him — all this takes place in the unconscious, yet with great vividness — engenders a feeling in him of dwelling, as it were, in a general world ether. (In speaking of feeling, I mean an unconscious feeling. It is impossible to express these matters otherwise than by terms used in ordinary conscious life.) The person feels himself, as it were, disseminated into the whole cosmos. We cease to have the definite perceptions, which formerly connected us with all the things surrounding us in our earthly existence. At first, we take part in the general weaving and surging of the cosmos. And this is accompanied by the feeling that our souls have their being in a bottomless element. Hence the soul, while existing in this bottomless element, has an ardent desire for divine support. Thus we experience every evening, when falling asleep, the religious need of having the whole world permeated by an all-encompassing divine-spiritual element. This is our real experience when falling asleep.

Our whole constitution as human beings enables us to transfer this desire for the divine into our waking life. Day in and day out, we are indebted to our nightly experiences for renewing our religious needs.

Thus only a contemplation of our entire being enables us to gain insight into the various life-experiences undergone by us. Fundamentally, we live very thoughtlessly if we take into account only the conscious life passed between morning and evening; for many night experiences are interwoven with this. The human being does not always realize whence he derives his living religious need. He derives it from the general experiences undergone by him every night just after having fallen asleep — and also, although perhaps less intensively, during an afternoon nap.

Then, in our sleep, another stage sets in — all this, as was said before, being passed through unconsciously, but nonetheless vividly. Now it does not seem to the sleeper that his soul is, as it were, disseminated into the general cosmos, but it seems as if the single parts of his entity were divided. Were our experiences to become conscious, we would feel as though we were being disjointed. And, from the bottom of our soul, an unconscious fear rises up. Every night, while asleep, we experience the fear of being divided up into the whole universe.

Now you might say: What does all this matter, as long as we know nothing about it? Well, it matters a great deal. I should like to explain, by means of a comparison, how much it matters.

Suppose that we become frightened in ordinary daily life. We turn pale. The emotion of fear is consciously felt by the soul. A definite change in our organism makes us turn pale. The blood streams back into the body's interior. This is an objective process. We can describe the emotion of fear in connection with an objective process taking place, in daily conscious life, within the physical body. What we experience in our soul is, as it were, a mirrored image reflecting this streaming away of the blood from the body's surface to its inner parts. Thus an objective process corresponds, in the waking state, to the emotion of fear. When we are asleep, a similar objective process, wholly independent of our consciousness, occurs in our astral body.

Anyone able to form imaginative and inspired conceptions will experience this objective process in the astral body as an emotion of fear. The *objective* element in fear, however, is actually experienced by man every night, because he feels himself being divided into parts inside his soul. And how is he being divided? Every night he is divided among the universe of stars. One part of his soul substance is striving towards Mercury, another part towards Jupiter, and so forth. Yet this process can only be correctly characterized by saying: During ordinary sleep, we do not *actually* penetrate the worlds of stars, as is the case on the path between death and a new birth. What we really undergo every night is not an actual division among the stars, but only among the *counterparts* of the stars which we carry within us during our entire earth life. While asleep, we are divided among the counterparts of Mercury, Venus, Moon, Sun, and so forth. Thus we are concerned here not with the original stars themselves, but with their counterparts in us.

This emotion of fear, experienced by us relatively soon after falling asleep, can be removed only from that human being who feels a genuine kinship to the Christ. At this point, we become aware how much the human being needs this kinship with the Christ. In speaking of this kinship, it is necessary to envisage man's evolution on earth. Mankind's evolution on earth can be comprehended only by someone having real insight into the significant turning point brought to human evolution by the Mystery of Golgotha. It is a fact that the human beings before the Mystery of Golgotha were different with regard to soul and spirit from the human beings after the Mystery of Golgotha had occurred on earth. This must be taken into account, if man's soul is to be viewed in its true light.

When the human beings who lived before the Mystery of Golgotha — and these human beings were actually we ourselves in a former life — fell asleep and experienced the fear of which I have just spoken, then the counterpart of the Christ in the world of stars existed for the human beings of that time as much as did the counterparts of the other heavenly bodies. And as the Christ approached the sleeping human being, He came as a helper to dissipate fear, to destroy fear. People of earlier ages, still gifted with instinctive clairvoyance, remembered after awaking, in a dream-like consciousness, that the Christ had been with them in their sleep. Only they did not call Him the Christ. They called Him the Sun-spirit. Yet these people, who lived before the Mystery of Golgotha, avowed from their innermost depth that the great Sun-spirit was also the great guide and helper of the human being, who approached him every night in sleep and relieved him of the fear of being disseminated into the universe. The Christ appeared as a spirit strengthening mankind and consolidating its inner life.

Who binds together man's forces during his life? asked the followers of ancient religions. It is the great Sun-spirit, who firmly binds together man's single elements and combines them into one personality. And this avowal was uttered by the followers of ancient religions, because their consciousness was pervaded by the memory that the Christ approached man every night.

We do not need to be amazed at these things. In those ancient times when the human being was still capable of instinctive clairvoyance, he could look back at significant moments of his life into the period passed through by him before his soul and spirit descended to earth and was clothed in a physical body. Thus it seemed quite natural to the human being that he could look upward into a pre-earthly existence.

But is it not a fact that — as we explained before — every period of sleep carries us back into pre-earthly existence, into an existence preceding the stage before we became a truly conscious child? This question must be answered in the affirmative. And just as human beings knew that they had been together, in their pre-earthly existence, with the exalted Sun-spirit who had given them the strength to pass through death as immortal beings, so they also consciously remembered after every sleep that the exalted Sun-spirit had stood at their side, helping them to become real human beings, integrated personalities.

The human soul, while acquainting itself with the world of planets, passes through this stage during sleep. It is as if the soul were first dispersed among the counterparts of the planets, and then united and held together by the Christ.

Consider that this whole soul-experience during sleep has changed, with regard to the human being, since the Mystery of Golgotha. For the Mystery of Golgotha has originated the unfolding of a vigorous human ego-consciousness. This ego-consciousness, pervading human culture only gradually after the Mystery of Golgotha, became especially apparent after the first third of the fifteenth century. And the same vigorous ego-consciousness, which enables the human being to place himself as a free, fully self-conscious being into the sense world, this same consciousness — as though trying to maintain equilibrium — also darkens his retrospect into pre-earthly existence; darkens his conscious memory of the helping Christ, Who stood at his side during sleep.

It is remarkable that, since the Mystery of Golgotha, human evolution has taken the following course: On the one hand, man acquired a vigorous ego-consciousness in his waking state; on the other hand, utter darkness gradually overlaid that which had formerly radiated out of sleep-consciousness. Therefore human beings are obliged, since the Mystery of Golgotha, to establish a conscious relationship to Christ Jesus while they are awake. They must acquire, in a conscious way, a comprehension of what the Mystery of Golgotha really signifies: That, by means of the Mystery of Golgotha, the exalted Sun-spirit, Christ, descended to earth, became a human being in the body of Jesus of Nazareth, passed through earth-life and death, and, after death, still taught His disciples who were permitted to behold Him in His etheric body after death.

Those personalities who acquire, in the time following the Mystery of Golgotha, a waking consciousness of their kinship with the Christ, and gain a living conception of what took place through the Mystery of Golgotha: to these the possibility will be given of being helped by the Christ impulse, as it is carried from their waking state into their sleep.

This shows us how differently human sleep was constituted before and after the Mystery of Golgotha. Before the Mystery of Golgotha, the Christ invariably appeared as Helper while the human being slept. Man could remember even after awaking that the Christ had been with him during his sleep. After the Mystery of Golgotha, however, he would be utterly bereft of the Christ's help, if he were not to establish a conscious relation with the Christ during the day while awake and carry its echo, its after-effect, into his sleep. Only in this way can the Christ help him to maintain his personality while asleep.

What the human being had received unconsciously from the wide heavenly reaches before the Mystery of Golgotha: the help of the Christ, the human soul must now acquire gradually by establishing a conscious relation with the Mystery of Golgotha. This inner soul-responsibility has been laid upon the human being since the Mystery of Golgotha. Thus we are unable to study the nature of human sleep, unless we are able to envisage the immense transformation undergone by human sleep since the Mystery of Golgotha.

When we enter the realm of sleep, our whole world becomes different from that experienced in the waking state. How do we live as physical men while awake? We are confined, through our physical body, by natural laws. The laws working outside in nature are also working within us. That which we recognize as moral responsibilities and impulses, as moral world order, stands like an abstract world amidst the laws of nature. And because present-day natural science takes into account only the waking world, it is completely ignorant of the moral world.

Thus natural science tells us — although hypothetically, yet in conformity with its principles — that the Kant-Laplace primeval fog marked the starting-point of world evolution; and that this world evolution will be terminated through a state of heat which will kill all living things and bury them, as it were, in a huge cosmic cemetery. (These conceptions have been modified, but still prevail among natural scientists.) Natural science, in describing the evolution of the cosmos, begins and ends with a physical state. Here the moral world order appears as a stranger. The human being, however, would not be aware of his dignity, would not even experience himself as a human being, unless he experienced himself as a moral being. But what moral impulses could be found in the Kant-Laplace primeval fog? Here were nothing but physical laws. Will there be moral impulses when the earth shall perish from heat? Then, also, nothing but physical laws will prevail. Thus speaks natural science. And out of the natural process germinate all living things, and out of living things the human soul-element. The human being forms certain conceptions: One should act in a certain way; or one should not act in that way. He experiences a moral world order. But this cannot be nurtured by natural law. To the waking human being, the moral world order appears like a merely abstract world amidst the rigid, massive world of natural laws.

It is entirely different when imaginative, inspirative, and intuitive consciousness passes through that which the human being, between falling asleep and awaking, experiences in his ego and astral body. Here the moral world order appears real, whereas the natural order below appears like something abstract, something dream-like. Although it is difficult to conceive of these things, they are nonetheless true. The whole world has been turned upside down. To the sleeper acquiring clairvoyance in his sleep, the moral world order would seem something real, something secure; and the physical world order of natural laws would seem to sink below, not rise above, the moral world order. And if the sleeper possessed consciousness, he would not place the Kant-Laplace theory at the starting-point of world evolution, and the death through heat at its end. At the starting-point, he would recognize the world of spiritual hierarchies — all the spirit and soul beings who lead man into existence. At the end of world evolution, he would again recognize the spirit and soul beings who extend to man who has passed through the course of evolution a welcome to enter their community. And below, as an illusion, the abstract physical world order would have its welling and streaming existence. If you were gifted with clairvoyance in the very midst between falling asleep and awaking, you would view all the natural laws of which you have learned during the day as a mirage of dreams, dreamed by the earth. And it would be the moral world order which would give you a firm ground. And this moral world order could be experienced by us if we worked our way — after having received the help of the Christ — into the peace of the fixed stars in the firmament, seen by us again, during nightly sleep, in the form of their counterparts. Soaring upward to the fixed stars, to their counterparts, we look down into the physical realm of natural law.

This is the wholly divergent form of the experiences undergone by the human being between falling asleep and awaking, and leading his soul every night into the image of the cosmos. And just as the human being is led at a certain moment between death and a new birth, as I explained yesterday, by the moon forces into earthly existence and is beset by a sort of longing for earthly existence, so is he beset by the longing, after experiencing heavenly existence in his sleep, to immerse himself again into his physical body and etheric body.

While we get accustomed to earth-life after our birth, we live in a sort of sleep and dream state. If we, disregarding our dreams, look back in the morning, after being awake for an hour, to the moment of awaking, our consciousness is halted abruptly and we see behind us the darkness of slumber. It is similar when we look back into our childhood. In our fourth or the fifth year, sometimes earlier, sometimes later, our consciousness comes to a stop. Beyond the last stage that we can still remember lies something which is as deeply immersed in the darkness of the sleep and dream life of early childhood as is the life of the human soul immersed every night in the darkness of sleep. Yet the child is not wholly asleep, but is wrapt in a sort of waking dream. During this waking dream occur the three important phases of human life which I indicated yesterday. As they occur in the sequence characterized by me, we can see in them echoes and after-effects of the life between death and a new birth. First the child learns, out of a life wrapt in dream and sleep, what we call simply *learning how to walk*.

Something all-encompassing happens when a child learns how to walk, something which appears as a grandiose and overwhelming process to anyone able to perceive how the subtlest parts of the human body are changed at this time. The child, by adapting himself to the relationships of gravity, learns how to attain equilibrium. The child no longer falls down. By unfolding inner forces, he conforms to spatial directions.

What if we had to do all this *consciously*: overcome the lack of equilibrium that pulled us to the ground, adapt our organism to a firm state of equilibrium with regard to the three spatial directions, and even maintain this state of equilibrium by swinging our legs like pendulums as we learn how to walk? The child, in performing such a grandiose mechanical task, performs it as an echo of what he experienced while dwelling among spirits between death and a new birth. Here we encounter something so comprehensive, so marvelous, that the most eminent engineer, with all his earthly scientific equipment, could not calculate how the child's human forces adapt themselves to the world's spatial connections. What we, as a child, attain unconsciously is the most miraculous unfolding of mathematical-mechanical, physical forces. We call it simply learning how to walk. Yet in this learning how to walk lies an element of utmost grandeur.

Simultaneously, the correct use of arms and hands is attained. And by placing himself, as physical being, within the three spatial directions, the human being receives the foundation for all that is called *learning how to talk*.

The only thing known to physiology about the connection between man's dynamics of walking and standing and the faculty of speech is the fact that the speech-center of right-handed persons lies in the left portion of the brain. The gestures of the right hand, vigorously executed by means of man's willpower, are led, by some mysterious process, into the interior of the brain whence the faculty of speech is brought to the human being.

More, however, exists than this connection between the right hand and the third convolution at the left, the so-called Broca cerebral convolution. The whole mobility of arms and fingers; the human being's whole ability to move and maintain equilibrium reaches up into the brain, becomes part of the

brain, and thence reaches down into the larynx. Language develops out of walking, out of the grasping of objects, out of gestures flowing from the organs of movement.

Anyone viewing these things correctly will know that a child with the tendency to walk on his toes speaks differently from a child walking on his heels; employs different shadings of sound. The organism of speaking develops from the organism of walking and moving. And speech is again a counterpart of that which I described yesterday as the outpouring of revelation upon the human being passing through the stage between death and a new birth. The child, when learning how to speak, does not grasp the words with his thoughts, but alone with his emotions. He lives in the language as if it were an emotional element; and a child of normal development learns conceptual thinking only *after* acquiring the faculty of speech. A child's thoughts actually develop out of the words. Just as walking and the grasping of objects, the gestures of legs and hands, reach up into the speech organism, so all that lives in the speech organism and is gained through adaptation to the language of the surrounding world, reaches up into the thought-organs. In the third stage, the child learns how *to think*.

While encompassed by this dream and sleep state, the child passes through three stages: walking, speaking, and thinking. These are the three terrestrial counterparts of that which we experienced between death and a new birth: living contact with the spiritual world, revelation of the spiritual world, and the gathering of the world ether in order to form our etheric body.

The child's development during these three stages can be correctly estimated only by someone observing the adult human being during his sleep. Here we can observe how we, when sleep puts a stop to our thoughts — for our thoughts are silenced by sleep — let our thought-forces be nurtured, between falling asleep and awaking, by those beings known to us as angels, as Angeloi. These beings, approaching us during sleep, nurture our thought-forces while we cannot do so ourselves.

During sleep, the human being also ceases to talk. Only in abnormal cases, which could be explained, does he talk in his sleep. At present, however, we may disregard these things. The normal human being ceases to talk after going to sleep. Would it not be altogether too dreadful, did people keep on chattering while asleep? Hence speech ceases at that time. And what makes us speak is nurtured during the time between falling asleep and awaking by beings belonging to the hierarchy of the Archangeli.

If we disregard the sleep-walker, who is also in an abnormal condition, human beings are quiet while asleep. They do not walk, they grasp no objects, they do not move. That which pertains to man's waking life as forces which call forth the movements out of his will is nurtured, between going to sleep and awaking, by beings belonging to the hierarchy of the Archai.

By comprehending the manner in which the hierarchical beings above the human kingdom — Angels, Archangels, Archai — approach the ego and astral body, approach the entire human being during sleep, we can also understand how the little child masters the three activities of walking, speaking, and thinking. We recognize how it is the work of the Archai that brings to the little child, as he masters the dynamics of life, as he masters the faculty of walking and handling objects, what the human being has experienced, between death and a new birth, by coming into contact with spirit and soul beings. Now, the counterpart of these experiences comes forth with the learning to walk of the little child. It is the Archai, the primeval powers, who transmit to the child that learns how to walk the counterpart of all the spiritual movements emanating, between death and a new birth, from spirit and soul beings.

And it is the Archangels that transmit what the human being experiences, between death and a new birth, by means of revelation; they are at work when the child masters speech. And the Angels carry down the forces developed by the human being when, out of the whole world ether, he gathered the substance for his etheric body. The angels, bringing down these forces, mold their counterparts within the thought-organs, which are plastically formed in order that the child may learn thinking by means of language.

You must keep in mind that Anthroposophy does more than look at the physical world and say: It is based on something spiritual. This would be much too easy. By such a way of thinking, we could acquire no real conception of the spiritual world. Someone who is determined to repeat in philosophic terms that the physical world rests on a spiritual foundation, would be like a man who when walking across a meadow is told by his companion: Look, this flower is a dandelion, these are daisies, and so forth. The first man, however, might reply: Indeed, I am not interested in these names. Here I see flowers, *just* flowers in the abstract. Such a person would be like a philosopher who recognizes only the pantheistic-spiritual element, but refuses to discuss the concrete facts, the particular formations of the spiritual.

What we are given by Anthroposophy shows us how the divine spiritual dwells everywhere in life's single formations. We look at the way in which the child passes from the clumsy stage of crawling to that of walking. Looking in admiration and reverence at this grandiose world phenomenon, we see in it the work of the Archai, who are active when the experiences we undergo between death and a new birth are transformed into their earthly shape.

We follow the process through which the child produces speech out of his inner self; we follow the activity of the Archangels; and, when the child begins to think, the activity of the Angels. And all this has a deeply significant, practical side. In our materialistic age, many people have ceased to regard words as something genuinely spiritual. More and more, people use words only for the purpose of naming physical objects in the outer world. Think how many people in the world are unable to form the slightest conception of spiritual things; this is because the words have no spiritual significance for them and are used merely in connection with physical objects.

For many people, speech itself has assumed a materialistic character. It can be used only in connection with physical things. Undeniably, we live within a civilization making language, more and more, into an instrument of materialism. And what will be the consequence?

The consequence will become apparent to us if we look, with regard to language, at the connection between the waking and the sleeping state. While we remain awake during the day, we talk with others. We make the air vibrate. The way in which the air vibrates transmits the soul content which we wish to convey. The soul impulses of our words, however, live in our inner being. Every word corresponds to a soul impulse, which is the more powerful, the more our words are imbued with idealism; the more we are conscious of the spiritual significance contained in our words. Anyone aware of these facts will clearly recognize what lies behind them. Think of a person who uses words in a merely materialistic sense. During the day, he will not differ greatly from others whose words contain an idealistic, spiritual element, who know that words must be given wings by the spirit. At night, however, the human being takes the soul and spirit element of language, together with his ego and astral body, into the spiritual world. He returns again to his spiritual origin.

Those possessing only a materialistic speech cannot establish a connection with the world of the Archangels. Those still possessing an idealistic speech are able to establish this connection with the world of the Archangels.



The tragedy inherent in a civilization whose materialism is expressed even by its language has the consequence that the human being, by letting his language become wholly materialistic, may lose the nightly connection with the world of the Archangels. For the genuine spiritual scientist, there lies indeed something heart-breaking in present-day civilization. People who forget more and more to invest their words with a spiritual content lose their rightful connection with the spiritual world; with the Archangels. And this terrifying fact can be perceived only by someone envisaging the true nature of the sleeping state.

It is impossible to become a real anthroposophist without rising above mere theory. We may remain perfectly indifferent while developing theories on June bugs, earth worms, and cells. Such theories shall certainly break nobody's heart. For the way in which June bugs and earthworms grow out of a cell is not apt to break our heart. But if we acquire anthroposophical knowledge in all its fullness, we look into the depths of man's being, of man's evolution, of man's destiny. Thus our heart will ever be interlinked with this knowledge. The sum of this knowledge will be deposited in the life of our feelings, our emotions. Hence we partake of the whole world's feelings, and also of the whole world's volition.

The essence of Anthroposophy consists in the fact that it grasps not only the human intellect but the whole human being. Thereby it illuminates, with the forces of feeling and sentiment, the destinies of culture and civilization, as well as the destinies of single persons.

We cannot take part genuinely in human experiences on earth, unless looking also at the other side, the spiritual side, as it is unveiled to us through our knowledge of the sleeping state that leads us back into the spiritual world. Thus spiritual science can be truly at one with human life, understood in its spiritual and ultimately its social, religious, and ethical significance.

This spiritual science is to become real science which leads to wisdom. Such life giving science is greatly needed by mankind, lest it fall into deeper and deeper decline, instead of making a new beginning.

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