

The Lectures of Rudolf Steiner

Practical Training in Thought

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It may seem strange to some, if an anthroposophist, of all people, feels himself called upon to speak of practical training in thought. For people very often imagine Anthroposophy to be something highly unpractical, having nothing whatever to do with real life. That is because they look at the thing externally and superficially. In reality, what we are concerned with in the anthroposophical movement is intended as a guide for everyday life, for the most matter-of-fact affairs of life. We should be able to transform it at every moment into a sure sense and feeling, enabling us to meet life confidently and find our footing in the world.

People who call themselves practical imagine that their actions are guided by the most practical principles. When you look into the matter closely, you will, however, frequently discover that what they call their practical way of thinking is not thinking at all, but the mere "jogging along" with old opinions and acquired habits of thought. You will often find there is very little that is really practical behind it. What they call practical consists in this: they have learned how their teachers, or their predecessors in business, thought about the matter in hand, and then they simply take the same line. Anyone who thinks along different lines they regard as a very unpractical person. In effect, his thinking does not accord with the habits to which they have been brought up. In cases where something really practical has been invented, you will not generally find that it was done by any of the "practical" people.

Take for instance our present postage stamp. Surely the most obvious thing would be to suppose that it was invented by a practical post-office official. But it was not. At the beginning of last century it was a very long and troublesome business to post a letter. You had to go to the office where letters were posted, and various books had to be referred to; in short, there were all manner of complicated proceedings. It is hardly more than sixty years since the uniform postal rate to which we are now accustomed was introduced. And our postage stamp, which makes this simple arrangement possible, was invented, not by a practical man in the postal service, but by a complete outsider. It was the Englishman, Rowland Hill. When the postage stamp had been invented, the Minister who had to do with the Postal Department said in the English Parliament: In the first place, we can by no means assume that as a result of this simplification postal communication will really increase so enormously as this unpractical man imagines; and secondly, even assuming that it did, the main Post Office in London would not be big enough to hold it.

It never dawned on this very practical man that the Post Office building ought to be adapted to the amount of correspondence, and not the amount of correspondence to the building. Yet in what was, comparatively speaking, the shortest imaginable time, the thing was carried out. One of the unpractical people had to fight for it against a practical man. To-day we take it as a matter of course that letters are sent with a postage stamp.

It was similar in the case of the railways. In the year 1887, when the first German railway was to be constructed between Nuremberg and Fürth, the Bavarian College of Medicine, being consulted, pronounced the following expert opinion. In the first place, they said, it was inadvisable to build railways at all; if, however, it were intended to do so, it would at any rate be necessary to erect a high wall of wooden planks to the left and right of the line, in order that passers-by might not suffer from nerve and brain shock.

When the line from Potsdam to Berlin had to be built, the Postmaster-General Stengler said: I send two mail coaches a day to Potsdam and they are not full up; if these people are bent on wasting their money, they might as well throw it out of the window without more ado.

In effect, the real facts of life leave the "practical" people behind, or rather they leave behind those who so fondly call themselves practical.

We have to distinguish true thinking from the so-called practical thinking, which merely consists in opinions based on the habits of thought in which people have been brought up.

I will tell you a little experience of my own, and make it a starting-point for our considerations to-day.

In my undergraduate days, a young colleague once came to me. He was bubbling over with that intense pleasure which you may observe in people who have just had 'a really brilliant idea. "I am on my way," he said, "to see Professor X. (who at that time occupied the chair in Machine Construction), for I have made a wonderful discovery. I have discovered a machine whereby it will be possible by the use of a very little steam-power to exert an enormous amount of work." That was all he could tell me, for he was in a tremendous hurry to go to see the Professor. However, he did not find him at home, so he came back and set to work to explain the matter to me. Of course, from the very start the whole thing had sounded to me suspiciously like perpetual motion; but, after all, why shouldn't such a thing be possible one fine day? So I listened; and after he had gone through the whole explanation, I had to answer: "Yes, it is certainly very cleverly thought out; but you see, in practice it surely comes to this. It's as though you were to get into a railway truck and push tremendously hard, and imagine that the truck would thereby begin to move. That is the principle of thought in your invention?" And then he saw that it was so, and he did not go to see the Professor again.

That is how it is possible to shut oneself up, as it were, in one's thought. People put themselves in a neat little box with their thought. In rare cases this is perfectly evident; but people are continually doing it in life, and it is not always so clear and striking as in the instance we have taken. One who is able to look into the matter a little more intimately knows that this is the way with a great many human processes of thought. He constantly sees people standing, as it were, in their truck, pushing from the inside, and imagining that it is they who are propelling it.

Much of what happens in life would happen altogether differently if people were not such pushers, standing in their trucks!

True practice of thought requires us in the first place to have the right attitude of mind, the right feeling about thought. How can we gain this? *No one can come to a right feeling about thought who imagines that thought is something which merely takes place within man, inside his head, or in his mind or soul.* Anyone who starts with this idea will have a wrong feeling, and will continually be

diverted from the search for a truly practical way of thought. He will fail to make the necessary demands on his thinking activity. To acquire the right feeling towards thought, he must rather say to himself: *"If I am able to make myself thoughts about the things, if I am able to get at the things through thoughts, then the things must already contain the thoughts within them. The thoughts must be there in the very plan and structure of the things. Only so can I draw the thoughts out of them."*

Man must say to himself that it is the same with the things in the world outside as with a watch. The comparison of the human organism to a watch is frequently used, but people often forget the most important thing. They forget the watchmaker. The cogs and wheels did not run together and join up of their own accord and set the watch in motion, but there was a watchmaker there first, to construct the watch. We must not forget the watchmaker. It is through thoughts that the watch has come into being. The thoughts have, as it were, flowed out into the watch, into the external object. And this is the way in which we must think of all the works of nature of all the natural creation, and of all natural processes. It can easily be illustrated in a thing that is human creation: in the things of nature it is not quite so easy to perceive. And yet they too are works of the spirit; behind them are spiritual beings.

When man thinks about things, he is only thinking after, he is only re-thinking, that which has first been laid into them. We must believe that the world has been created by thought and is still in continual process of creation by thought. This belief, and this alone, can give birth to a really fruitful inner practice of thought.

It is always unbelief in the spiritual content of the world that underlies the greatest impracticality of thought. This is true in the sphere of science itself. For example, some one will say, our planetary system came about as follows: "First there was a primeval nebula. It began to rotate, drew together into one central body from which rings and spheres split off, and by this mechanical process the whole planetary system came into being." People who speak like that are making a grave error in thought. They have a pretty way of teaching it to the children nowadays. There is a neat little experiment which they show in many schools. They float a drop of oil in a glass of water, stick a pin through the middle of the drop and then set it in rotation. Thereupon little drops split off from the big drop in the middle, and you have a minute planetary system. A nice little object lesson, so they think, to show the pupil how such a thing can come about in a purely mechanical way.

Only an unpractical way of thinking can draw this conclusion from the experiment. For the man who transplants the idea to the great cosmic planetary system generally forgets just one thing — which at other times it is perhaps quite good to forget — he forgets himself. He forgets that he himself, after all, set the thing in rotation. If he had not been there and done the whole thing, the drop of oil would never have split off the little drops. If the man would observe that too, and transfer the idea to the planetary system, then, and then only, would his thought be complete.

Such errors in thought play a very great part to-day — and they do so especially in what is now called science. These things are far more important than people generally imagine.

If we would make our thinking practical, we must first know that thoughts can only be drawn from a world in which thoughts already are. Just as you can only draw water from a glass that does really contain water, so you can only draw thoughts from things that already contain thoughts. The world is built up by thoughts, and it is only for that reason that we can gain thoughts from the world. If it were not so, then there could be no such thing as a practice of thought at all. When a man really

feels what has here been said, and feels it to the full, then he will easily transcend the stage of abstract thinking. When a man has full confidence and faith that behind things there are thoughts, that the real facts of life take place according to thoughts — when he has this confidence and feeling, then he will readily be converted to a practice of thought that is founded on reality.

We will now set forth some elements of practice in thought. If you are penetrated by the belief that the world of facts takes its course in thoughts, you will admit how important it is to develop true thinking.

Let us assume that someone says to himself: "I want to strengthen my thought, so that it may find its true bearings at every point in life." He must then take guidance from what will now be said. The indications that will now be given are to be taken as real practical principles — principles such, that if you try again and again and again to guide your thought accordingly, definite results will follow. Your thinking will become practical, even though it may not appear so at first sight. Indeed, if you carry out these principles, you will have altogether fresh experiences in your life of thought.

Let us assume that someone makes the following experiment. On a certain day he carefully observes some process in the world which is accessible to him, which he can observe quite accurately — say, for example, the appearance of the sky. He observes the cloud formations in the evening, the way in which the sun went down. And now he makes a distinct and accurate mental image of what he has observed.

He tries to hold it fast for a time in all its details. He holds fast as much of it as he can, and tries to keep it till the following day. On the morrow, about the same time, or even at another time of day, he again observes the appearance of the sky and the weather, and he tries once more to form an exact mental image of it.

If in this way he forms clear mental images of successive conditions, he will soon perceive with extraordinary distinctness that he is enriching his thought and making it inwardly intense. For what makes a man's thought unpractical is the fact that in observing successive processes in the world he is generally too much inclined to leave out the actual details and to retain only a vague and confused picture in his mind. The essential, the valuable thing for strengthening our thought is to form exact pictures above all in the case of successive processes and then to say to ourselves: "Yesterday the thing was so; to-day it is so." And in doing this we must bring before our minds the two pictures which are separated in the real world, as graphically, as vividly as possible.

To begin with, this exercise is simply a particular expression of our belief that the thoughts are there in reality. We are not immediately to draw some conclusion — to conclude from what we observe to-day what the weather and the sky will be like to-morrow. That would only corrupt our thinking. No, we must have faith that outside in the reality of things they have their connection, and that to-morrow's process is somehow connected with to-day's. We are not to speculate about it, but first of all to think, in mental images as clear as possible, the scenes which in the external world are separated in time. We place the two pictures side by side before our minds, and then let the one gradually change into the other.

This is a definite principle which must be followed if we would develop a truly objective way of thinking. It is especially valuable to take this line with things which we do not yet understand, where we have not yet penetrated the inner connection. Particularly with those processes — the sky and the weather, for example — which we do not understand at all, we must have the belief that, as they are connected in the outside world, so will they work their connections within us. And we must do it

simply in mental pictures, refraining from thought. We must say to ourselves: "I do not yet know the connection, but I will let these things grow and evolve within me, and if I refrain from all speculation, I am sure they will be working something within me."

You will not find it difficult to imagine that something may take place in the invisible vehicles of a human being who, refraining from thought in this way, strives to call forth clear mental images of processes and events that succeed one another in time in the outer world. Man has an astral body as the vehicle of his life of thought and ideation. So long as he speculates, this astral body of man is the slave of his Ego. But it is not completely involved in this conscious activity, for it also stands in relation to the whole Universe. Now as we refrain from giving play to our own arbitrary trains of thought, and simply form in ourselves mental images, clear pictures of successive events, in like measure will the inner thoughts of the universe work in us and impress themselves upon our astral body, without our knowing it. As, by observation of the processes in the world, we fit ourselves to enter into the world's course, and as we take its scenes and pictures into our thoughts clearly and faithfully in their reality and let them work in us, so do we become ever wiser and wiser in those vehicles and members of our being that are outside our consciousness.

So it is with processes in nature that are inwardly connected. When we are able to let the one picture change into the other just as the change took place in nature, we shall soon perceive, that our thought is gaining a certain flexibility and strength.

That is how we should proceed with things that we do not yet understand. For things that we do understand — events, for example, that take place around us in our daily life — our attitude should be slightly different.

For instance, someone — your neighbour, perhaps — has done something or other. You consider: Why did he do it? You come to the conclusion: Perhaps he did it in preparation for such and such a thing that he intends to do to-morrow. Very well; do not go on speculating, but try to sketch out a picture of what you think he will do to-morrow. You imagine to yourself: That is what he will do to-morrow; and now you wait and see what he really does. It may be on the following day you will observe that he really does what you imagined. Or it may be that he does something different. You observe what really happens and try to correct your thoughts accordingly.

Thus we select events in the present which we follow out in thought into the future, and we wait and see what actually happens. We can do this with the actions of men, and with many other things. Where we feel that we understand a thing, we try to form a picture of what, in our opinion, will take place. If it does take place as we expected, our thinking was correct; that is good. If what happens is different from what we expected, then we try to think where we made the mistake. Thus we try to correct our wrong thoughts by quiet observation, by examining where the mistake lay, and why it was that it happened as it did.

If, however, we were right, then we must be careful to avoid the danger of mere self-congratulation and boasting of our prophecy: "Oh yes, I knew that was going to happen, yesterday."

Here again you have a method based on the belief that there is an inner necessity lying in the things and events themselves — that there is something in the facts themselves which drives them forward. The forces working in things, working on from one day to the next, are forces of thought. If we dive down into the things, then we become conscious of these thought-forces. By such exercises we make them present to our consciousness. When what we foresaw is fulfilled, we are in attunement with them. Then we are in an inner relationship to the real thought-activity of the thing itself.

Thus we accustom ourselves not to think arbitrarily, but to take our thought from the inner necessity, the inner nature of things.

There is yet another direction in which we can train our practice of thought.

An event that happens to-day is also related to things that happened yesterday. For example, a child has been naughty. What can have caused it? You follow the events back to the previous day, you construct the causes which you do not know. You say to yourself: "I fancy that this thing which has happened to-day was led up to by such and such things yesterday or the day before."

You then make inquiries and find out what really happened, and so discover whether your thought was correct. If you have found the real cause, then it is well; but if you have formed a wrong idea of it, then you must try to see the mistake clearly. You consider how your thought-process developed, and how it took place in reality, and compare the one with the other.

It is very important to carry out such principles and methods. We must find time to observe things in this way — as though with our thinking we were in the things themselves. We must dive down into the things, into their inner thought-activity.

If we do so, we shall gradually perceive how we are entering into the very life of things. We no longer have the feeling that the things are outside, and we are here in our shell, thinking about them; but we begin to feel how our thought is living and moving in the things themselves. To a man who has attained this in a high degree, a new world opens up. Such a man was Goethe. He was a thinker who was always in the things with his thoughts. In 1826 the psychologist Heinroth said in his book, *Anthropology*, that Goethe's was an *objective thinking*. Goethe was delighted with this description. Heinroth meant that Goethe's thought did not separate itself off from the things or objects; it remained in the objects, it lived and moved in the necessity of things. Goethe's thought was at the same time contemplation; his contemplation, his looking at things, was at the same time thought.

Goethe developed this way of thinking to a high degree. More than once it happened, when he was intending to go out for some purpose or other, that he went to the window and said to whoever happened to be by: "In three hours it will rain" — and so it did. From the little segment of the sky which was visible from his window he could tell what would happen in the weather in the next few hours. His true thought, remaining in the things, enabled him to sense the later events that were already preparing in the preceding ones.

Far more can be achieved by practical thinking than is generally imagined. We have described certain principles of thought. A man who makes them his own will discover that his thought is really becoming practical. His vision widens, and he grasps the things of the world quite differently than before. Little by little his attitude to things, and also to other human beings, will become different. A real process takes place in him, one that alters his whole conduct of life. It can be of immense importance for a man to try to grow into the things with his thought in this way. In the fullest sense of the word it is a practical undertaking to train our thinking by such exercises.

There is another exercise which is particularly valuable for people who fail to get the right idea at the right moment.

Such people should try, above all, to think not merely in the way suggested by every passing moment. They should not merely give themselves up to what the ordinary course of things brings with it. When a man has half an hour to lie down and rest, it nearly always happens that he simply gives his thoughts free play. They spin out in a thousand different directions. Or perhaps his life is just occupied by some special worry. Suddenly it flies into his consciousness, and he is completely absorbed in it. If a man lets things happen in this way, he will never arrive at the point where the right thing occurs to him at the right moment. If he wants to succeed in this, he must do as follows. When he has half an hour to lie down and rest, he must say to himself: "Now that I have time, I will think about something which I myself will choose — something which I bring into my consciousness by my own will and choice. For example, I will think about something that I experienced at some earlier date — say on a walk two years ago. I will bring it into my thought and think about it for a certain time — say even only for five minutes. All other things — away with them for these five minutes! I myself will choose what I am going to think about."

The choice need not even be as difficult as the one I have just suggested. The point is, not that you try to work upon your processes of thought by difficult exercises to begin with, but that you tear yourself away from all you are involved in by your ordinary life. You must choose something right outside the web of interests into which you are woven by your everyday existence. And if you suffer from lack of inspiration, if nothing else occurs to you at the moment, then you can have recourse, say, to a book. Open it, and think about whatever you happen to read on the first page which catches your eye. Or, you say to yourself: "Now I will think about what I saw at a certain time this morning just as I was going into the office." Only it must be something to which in the ordinary course you would have paid no further attention. It must be something beside the ordinary run of things, something you would otherwise not have thought about at all.

If you carry on such exercises systematically and repeat them again and again, the result will soon be to cure you of your lack of inspiration. You will get the right idea at the right moment. Your thought will become mobile, which is immensely important for a man in practical life.

Another exercise is especially adapted to work on the memory.

First you try to remember some event — say, an event of yesterday — in the crude way in which one generally remembers things. For, as a rule, people have the greyest of grey recollections of things. As a rule you are satisfied if you only remember the name of someone you met yesterday. But if you want to develop your power of memory you must no longer be satisfied with that. You must set to work systematically and say to yourself: "I will now recall the person I saw yesterday, clearly and distinctly. I will recall the surroundings, the particular corner at which I saw him. I will sketch out the picture in detail; I will have an accurate mental image of what he was wearing — his coat, his waistcoat, and so on." Most people, when they try this exercise, will discover that they are quite unable to do it. They will notice how very much is missing from the picture. They are unable to call up a graphic idea of what they actually experienced on the previous day.

In the vast majority of cases it is so; and this is the condition from which we must start. As a matter of fact, people's observation is generally most inaccurate. An experiment which a University Professor made with his class showed that, of thirty people who were present, only two had observed a thing correctly; the other twenty-eight had it wrong. But *good memory is the child of faithful observation*. To develop our memory, the important thing is that we should observe accurately. By dint of faithful observation we can acquire a good memory. Through certain inner paths of the soul a true memory is born of a good habit of observation.

Now suppose that, to begin with, you find you are unable to call to mind, exactly, something that you experienced on the previous day. What is the next thing to do? Begin by remembering the thing as accurately as possible; and where your memory fails you, try to fill in the gaps by imagining something which is, probably, incorrect. For instance, if you have absolutely forgotten whether a person you met had on a grey coat or a black one, then imagine him in a grey coat, and say to yourself that he had such and such buttons to his waistcoat, and a yellow tie; and then you fill in the surroundings — a yellow wall, a tall man passing on the left, a short man on the right, and so forth.

Whatever you remember, put it in the picture, and then fill it in arbitrarily with the things you do not remember. Only try to have a complete picture before your mind. The picture will, of course, be incorrect, but by the effort to gain a complete picture you will be stimulated to observe more accurately in the future. Continue doing such exercises — and when you have done them fifty times, then the fifty-first time you will know exactly what the person you met looked like and what he had on. You will remember exactly, to the very waistcoat-buttons. You will no longer overlook anything, but every detail will impress itself upon your mind. By this exercise you will first have sharpened your powers of observation, and in addition you will have gained a truer memory, which is the child of accurate observation.

It is especially valuable to pay attention to this. Do not merely content yourself with remembering the names and the main outlines of things, but try to get mental images as graphic as possible, including the real details; and where your memory fails you, fill in the picture and make it whole. You will soon see — though it seems to come in a roundabout way — that your memory is becoming more faithful.

Clear directions can thus be given, whereby a man can make his thought ever more and more practical.

There is another thing of great importance. Man has a certain craving to reach a definite result when he is considering some line of action. He turns it over in his mind, how should he do the thing, and comes to a definite conclusion. We can well understand this impulse; but it does not lead to a practical way of thinking. Every time we hurry our thought on, we are going backward and not forward. Patience is necessary in these things.

For example: there is something you have to do. It is possible to do it in one way or in another; there may be various possibilities. Now have patience; try to imagine exactly what would happen if you did it in this way, and then try to imagine what would happen if you did it in that way.

Of course, there will always be reasons for preferring the one course of action to the other. But now refrain from making up your mind at once. Try, instead, to sketch out the two possibilities, and then say to yourself: "Now that's done — now I will stop thinking about it."

At this point many people will become fidgety, and that is a difficult thing to overcome. But it is no less valuable to overcome it. Say to yourself: "The thing is possible in this way and in that way, and now for a time I will think no more about it." If the circumstances permit, defer your action to the next day, and then once more bring the two possibilities before your mind. You will find that in the meantime the things have changed, and that on the following day you are able to decide quite differently — far more thoroughly, at any rate, than you would have done the day before.

There is an inner necessity in the things themselves, and if we do not act impatiently and arbitrarily, but let this inner necessity work in us — and it will work in us — then it will enrich our thought. And our thought, being thus enriched, will appear again the next day and enable us to form

a more correct decision. That is immensely valuable.

Or to take another example: someone asks your advice about some point that has to be decided. Do not burst in with your decision straight away, but have the patience to lay the various possibilities before your own mind quietly and to form no conclusion on your own account. Let the different possibilities hold sway. An old proverb says: "Sleep on it before deciding" — but sleeping on it is not enough. It is necessary to think over two or even more possibilities (if there are more than two, so much the better). These possibilities work on in us, when we ourselves, so to speak, are not there with our conscious Ego. Later on, we return to the thing. We shall see that by this means we are calling to life inner forces of thought, and that our thinking grows ever more practical and to the point.

Whatever it is that a man is seeking to find, it is there in the world. Whether he stands at the lathe or behind the plough, or whether he belongs to the so-called privileged classes and professions, if he does these exercises, he will become a practical thinker in the most everyday affairs of life. Practising his thought in this way, he begins to look at the things in the world with a new vision. And though these exercises may at first sight appear ever so inward and remote from external life, it is precisely for external life that they are so useful. They entail the greatest imaginable significance for the external world; they have important consequences.

I will give you an example to show how necessary it is to think about things practically. A man climbed a tree and was doing something or other up above; suddenly he fell down and was dead. The thought that lies nearest at hand is that he was killed by the fall. Most probably, people will say: "The fall was the cause, and his death the result." Such is the apparent connection between cause and effect. But this conclusion may involve an utter inversion of the facts. For it may be that he had a fatal heart attack, and fell down as a consequence. Exactly the same thing happened as though he had fallen down alive. He went through the same external processes that might really have been the cause of his death. So it is possible to make a complete inversion of cause and effect.

In this example the fault is very evident, but often it is not so striking. Such mistakes in thought occur very frequently. Indeed, it must be said that in modern Science conclusions of this kind are drawn day by day, with a complete reversal of cause and effect. It is only not perceived because people fail to put before them the possibilities of thought.

One more example may be given, to show you as vividly as possible how such mistakes in thought come about, and how they will no longer happen to a man who has done the kind of exercises which have here been indicated.

A learned scientist says to himself that man, as he is to-day, is descended from an ape. That is to say, what I learn to know in the ape — the forces at work in the ape — evolve to greater perfection and so result in the human being. Now in order to indicate the significance of this as thought, let us make the following supposition. Suppose that by some circumstance the man who will propound this theory be placed on the earth alone. There are no other human beings around him; there are only those apes of which the said theory declares that human beings can originate from them. Let him now make an accurate study of them. Entering into the minutest detail, he forms a conception of what there is in the ape. Albeit he has never seen a man, let him now try to develop the concept of a man out of his concept of an ape. He will see that he cannot. His concept "ape" will never transform into the concept "man."

If he had right habits of thought, he would say to himself: "I see that the concept of an ape will not transform itself within me into the concept of a man. Therefore what I perceive in the ape is also not capable of becoming man, for if it were, the same power of evolution would be latent in the concept. Something more must come in, something that I am unable to perceive." Thus, behind the visible ape, he would have to imagine something invisible and super-sensible — something which he could not perceive, but which alone would make the transformation into man a possible conception.

The impossibility of the whole thing need not here concern us; we only wanted to reveal the faulty thinking which lies behind that theory. If the man's thinking were right, he would be led to the conclusion that he could not think the theory at all without postulating something super-sensible.

If you consider it, you will readily see that in this matter a whole succession of thinkers have committed a grave error. Such errors will no longer be committed by one who trains his thinking in the way here indicated.

A large proportion of modern literature (and particularly of the scientific literature) is positively painful to read, for a man who is able to think rightly. Its crooked, perverted ways of thought are distressing to have to follow. In saying this, we are by no means depreciating the wealth of observation and discovery that has been accumulated by modern Natural Science with its objective methods.

All this has to do with short-sightedness of thought. It is a fact that men seldom know how very little to the point their thinking is, and to what a large extent it is the result of mere habits of thought. And so, one who penetrates the world and life will judge differently from one who lacks this penetration, or who has it only to a very small degree — a materialistic thinker, for example. It is not easy to convince people by grounds and arguments, however good, however genuine. It is often a thankless task to try to convince by grounds and reasoned arguments a man who knows little of life. For he simply does not see the reasons which make this or that statement possible. If, for instance, he has grown used to see nothing but matter in things, he simply adheres to this habit of thought.

As a rule it is not the alleged reasons which lead people to their statements. Beneath and behind the reasons, it is the habits of thought which they have acquired, and which determine their whole way of feeling. While they put forward reasons, they are only masking feelings that are instinctive with thoughts that are habitual. Thus often, not only is the wish father to the thought, but all the feelings and habits and ways of thinking are parents of the thoughts. A man who knows life, knows how little possibility there is of convincing people by logical grounds and arguments. That which decides in the soul is far deeper than the logical reasons.

And so there is good reason for this anthroposophical movement, working on in its different groups and branches. Everyone who works in this movement will presently perceive that he has acquired *a new way of thinking and feeling about things*. For by our work in the groups we are not only finding the logical reasons for this and that; we are acquiring a wider mental outlook, a deeper and more far-reaching way of feeling.

How, for example, did a man scoff a few years ago, when he heard a lecture on Spiritual Science for the first time! And to-day, perhaps, how many things are clear and transparent to him, which a short time ago he would have considered highly absurd! By working in this anthroposophical

movement we not only transform our thoughts; we learn to bring all our life of soul into a wider perspective.

We must understand that the colouring of our thoughts has its origin far deeper than is generally imagined. It is the feelings which frequently impel a man to hold certain opinions. The logical reasons he puts forward are often a mere screen, a mask for his deeper feelings and habits of thought.

To bring ourselves to the point where logical reasons really mean something to us, we must first learn to love the logic in things. Only when we have learned to love what is real and objective, only then will the logical reasons be the decisive thing for us. We gradually learn to think objectively — independently, as it were, of our affections for this thought or that. Then our vision widens and we become practical — not in the sense of those who can only think on along the accustomed lines, but practical in the sense that we learn to draw our thoughts from out of the things themselves.

Practical life is born of objective thinking — that thinking which flows out of the things themselves. It is only by carrying out such exercises that we learn to take our thoughts from the things. And these exercises must be done with sound and healthy things — things that are least perverted by human civilisation — things of Nature.

Practising our thought as here described in connection with the things of Nature, will make us practical thinkers. This is a really practical thing to do. And we shall take hold of the most everyday occupations in a practical way, if once we train this fundamental element in life: our thinking. A practical frame of mind, a practical way of thinking, forms itself, when we exercise the human soul in the way here indicated.

The spiritual-scientific movement must bear fruit: it must place really practical men and women out into the world. It is less important for a man to feel able to accept the truth of this or that teaching. It is more important that he should develop the faculty for seeing things and penetrating things correctly. It is not a matter of theorising away beyond the things visible to the senses, — spinning theories into the spiritual realm. Far more important is the way in which Anthroposophy penetrates our soul, stimulates our activity of soul, widens our vision. It is in this that Anthroposophy is truly practical.

Source: <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/19090118p02.html>



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